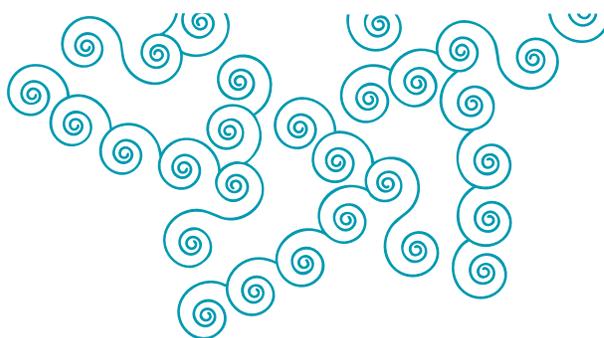


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Explaining Political Order in Uzbekistan

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Key Points

- Uzbekistan is regularly listed among the world's weak states and it is often described as sitting on the threshold of state failure. Yet, Uzbekistan not only continues to defy these predictions of imminent collapse, but it has constructed one of the largest state security apparatuses in post-Soviet Eurasia
- Uzbekistan's law enforcement and security offices enforce highly extractive demands upon local citizens, impose unrivaled coercive controls across the country, and remain the primary institutions for adjudicating disputes in society.
- But critical to this "success" in empowering Uzbekistan's state security apparatus has been a strategy of linking coercion to rent-seeking activities, which has undermined the rule of law, hindered economic growth, and fostered popular discontent.
- Provincial governors are the gatekeepers of rent-seeking opportunities for the local elite.
- Over time the center has become increasingly dependent upon the state's coercive apparatus that was already enmeshed in rent-seeking relationships with local and regional elites.
- Uzbekistan's revenue resides mainly in cotton, gas, oil, and some mineral wealth. Should these commodity markets cease to provide revenue, the government will find itself confronting the consequences of a collapsed system of coercive rent-seeking: eroded state institutions, unruly elites, and a disaffected public.

Uzbekistan is regularly listed among the world's weak states. And, like many in this category, it is often described as sitting on the threshold of state failure. Yet, Uzbekistan not only continues to defy these predictions of imminent collapse, but it has constructed one of the largest state security apparatuses in post-Soviet Eurasia.¹ How has it done this?

I contend that Uzbekistan's state infrastructure is underpinned by a complex intersection of corruption and coercion. Drawing on extensive

This paper explains the cohesion of security institutions as a consequence of resource rents that critically influences how local elites leverage local offices of state security. It examines economies with low capital mobility—where resources cannot be extracted, concealed, or transported to market without state patronage and involvement. In countries defined by immobile capital (such as cotton, coffee, or cocoa producers), local elites commanding farms and factories face a fundamental problem: how to convert their hands-on control over resources into rents. In order to

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fieldwork in Uzbekistan and my earlier study of state politics in Central Asia,² I advance an explanation focused on unlootable resources, rent seeking, and unruly elites. During the 1990s, Uzbekistan's state security apparatus centralized its personnel system, modernized its facilities, and extended its reach into communities through village and neighborhood organizations. Uzbekistan's law enforcement and security offices enforce highly extractive demands upon local citizens, impose unrivaled coercive controls across the country, and remain the primary institutions for adjudicating disputes in society. Its security and law enforcement agencies, moreover, have been entrusted with broad responsibilities in maintaining social order and promoting economic development. But critical to this "success" in empowering Uzbekistan's state security apparatus has been a strategy of linking coercion to rent-seeking activities, which has undermined the rule of law, hindered economic growth, and fostered popular discontent. Uzbekistan has certainly preserved its monopoly on violence (i.e., avoided intra-state conflict), but over time it has led to the long-term erosion of its state institutions. As the experience of Uzbekistan suggests, state security cohesion built on the shaky foundations of rent-seeking elites can avert state failure in the short term, but it may be unsustainable in the long run.

generate a worthwhile profit, bales of cotton or loads of grain are simply too large and too heavy to extract, transport, and sell outside state surveillance. Local elites, working under constraints that prevent them from independently exploiting the resources under them, are therefore forced to seek out political patrons.

This embeds rent-seeking within state politics, raising age-old questions of corruption, favoritism, and political protection.³ To explain how cash crop rents paradoxically reinforce state cohesion, I explore the consequences of rent-seeking opportunities available to local elites. I argue that open rent-seeking opportunities—which promote the cooptation of local elites to the regime—lead elites to differentially mobilize security institutions in their locality. In localities with densely concentrated resources and easy access to patrons, available rent-seeking opportunities promote the cooptation of local elites to the regime, encouraging them to use local law enforcement and security bodies as tools of extraction to exploit those lucrative rent-seeking avenues. This leads to cohesive state security institutions, since local elites and security officials collude to exploit resources in the locality. When promoted across localities, as in Uzbekistan, these activities produce the macro-political outcome of a coercive rent-seeking

state, whose security institutions continue to apply coercion to extract resources as long as it receives a steady inflow of rents. But how did this work in Uzbekistan?

The Emergence of Coercive Rent-Seeking

By the mid-1990s, the repercussions of Uzbekistan's weakened state infrastructure

Instead, these state building initiatives unintentionally reinforced the pursuit of rents by territorial elites in three ways. First, economic and fiscal reforms centralized control over economic activity in many areas, reducing the amount of rents available to elites outside the purview of provincial governors. Second, a policy of appointing more provincial governors from the center or other regions to direct anti-corruption "clean-up" campaigns reinforced efforts by local and regional elites to resist an intrusive central government and reassert their influence

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began to be felt at the national level, and the central leadership increasingly took steps to prevent its further loss of control over the regions. In 1994, President Karimov summoned all district, city, and provincial governors to Tashkent to foster greater allegiance and provide them with a sense that they too had a stake in Uzbekistan's political and economic development.⁴ By 1995, Karimov was organizing commissions and dispatching his closest advisors to conduct inquiries into the disappointing economic performance of collective farms. The reports from these inquiries would provide support for his dismissal of several provincial governors in the second half of the 1990s. In 1997, the central leadership initiated a concerted effort to strengthen state capabilities at local and regional levels. An array of measures were applied—including economic, political, and coercive controls—in Uzbekistan's first experiment in post-independence state building. At the core of this effort was a broader mandate granted to law enforcement organs that focused their surveillance and control functions on the very agents that had acquired influence over them—local elites and their patronage ties to regional politicians. Though comprehensive in scope, this experiment has failed to achieve its goal of constructing a more effective state infrastructure.

over local rent-seeking activities in the wake of these campaigns. Third, institutional reforms developing more robust coercive powers of the state inadvertently put a stronger coercive apparatus in the hands of regional politicians—providing territorial elites with a new instrument of resource extraction and rent-seeking. Together, these reform initiatives interlocked the coercive power of the state with processes of rent-seeking, institutionalizing them within the state apparatus. I address each in turn.

After several years of loosened economic controls as a strategy of opening rent-seeking opportunities to local elites, the central leadership instituted economic policy changes in the late 1990s that included retrenching economic reforms, closing off the country's borders, and tightening state controls in the economy. By 1997, import controls were applied through the newly-created Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations (established in 1994), countering earlier concessions that granted *de facto* control over cross-border trade to provincial governments. At the same time, bank offices in Tashkent took over regional branches' roles in the state's new credit scheme as a means of regulating the distribution of credit to local agricultural enterprises,⁵ and credit to small and medium-sized enterprises through Uzbekistan's

Biznes-Fond—averaging 130 projects per region and totaling an annual of 4.68 billion so'm (\$5 million) by 2003—was also centralized through central offices.⁶ Finally, the center's control over state monopolized cotton and grain exports was enforced more systematically.

The center also reduced regions' autonomous fiscal bases. In 1997, Tashkent cut subsidies to regional budgets to half of what they were in 1996, though losses varied across regions. A number of regions lost subsidies altogether in

Minister and head of the country's Agro-Industrial Complex, Ismail Jorabekov, to create and chair a commission to investigate the shortcomings in agricultural production in the regions.⁸ The commission's findings led to two waves of dismissals of provincial governors between late 1995 and 2003 for mismanagement and corruption.⁹ While poor weather conditions contributed to low crop yields, the dismissals constituted the center's first attempts to assert authority in the regions. From the perspective of local elites, however, these appointees' anti-corruption programs were

In the personal opinion of a senior staff member within the president's apparatus, district and regional governors constituted the foremost problem for the central leadership in the country

1997 and only regained them incrementally in subsequent years. Calculated as a percentage of each region's expenditure, the mean went from 26.6 percent in 1996 to 13 percent in 1997 and 1998. This abrupt drop in subsidies from the center was an attempt to weaken regional patronage bases by starving regions of funds. It had the effect of making rents scarce, giving territorial elites an incentive to seek out alternative strategies of rent-seeking. District and regional governor office staff later confirmed that the loss of fiscal support from the center reflected broader trends in resource distribution and many viewed the late 1990s as a period of difficulty.⁷ By the end of the 1990s, access to easy rents under provincial administrators was far more limited, cutting into local elites' ability to convert their resources into rents. While useful in reining in local elites, these policies essentially concentrated rent-seeking under provincial governors. Tightened economic controls in the name of reform effectively ensured that provincial governors would be the gatekeepers of rent-seeking opportunities for the local elite.

The second change was a more aggressive approach to the selection of regional governors. In response to continued losses of state resources in procurement, financing, and export, President Karimov directed First Deputy Prime

a familiar challenge by the center to be resisted and waited out. A well-worn method of political control during the Soviet period, cadre reforms in post-independence Uzbekistan did not last and merely left behind displaced elites who redoubled their efforts to recover lost positions of influence—setting in motion a scramble for rents after the center's appointees were removed.

In the wake of these appointees, a scramble for political influence and rents ensued, either to recover lost rents under the previous provincial administration or to protect against future shakeups by building a support base. After anti-corruption campaigns in Samarkand Province and Ferghana Province, for instance, each region's communal services debts to the center tripled, from 2 to 6.5 billion so'm in the former and 2.5 to 7.1 billion so'm in the latter.¹⁰ As part of its broader state building initiative, the central leadership employed fiscal and cadre controls to reassert state power in the regions. However, these measures were by no means sufficient on their own to strengthen the state's infrastructure and enhance its capacity to enforce rules at regional and local levels. To supplement them, the center naturally turned to one of its most prominent resources of political control—the successor agencies of the Soviet-era coercive apparatus.

Despite its mixed record of institutional performance during the Soviet period, the government of Uzbekistan viewed its prosecutorial and police apparatus to be a potential instrument of state building.¹¹ Over the 1990s, these offices were refashioned to serve as an internal check on concentrations of power within the executive branch, particularly against provincial and district *hokims*. In what follows, I focus on the role of *prokurators* as an example of broader trends occurring across Uzbekistan's coercive apparatus.

them with “extremely wide functions of a repressive nature,” including the “the right to supervise the implementation of laws, to launch criminal proceedings, to conduct investigations, issue an arrest warrant, arrange prosecution on behalf of the state at trials, and has the right to protest if the prokurator finds the verdict unsubstantiated or too lenient...”.¹⁵ With their expanded powers and a broad mandate to monitor local economies, coercive institutions quickly became instruments of extraction and rent-seeking used by provincial administrators so that local law enforcement bod-

The long-term consequences of coercive rent-seeking carry potential pitfalls. It played a central role in the 2005 Andijon Uprising

Reforms began in the late 1990s, when orders were issued within the *Prokuratura* and resolutions were passed by Parliament attempting to strengthen the institution internally. In May 1997 and November 1998, the Prokurator General issued orders specifying the role of the Department of General Control in the defending of property rights and strengthening the controls that provincial prokurators could exercise over their subordinates at the district level. In October 1998 and June 2001, Parliament established the Department of Tax and Customs Crimes and the Department on Economic Crimes and Corruption within the *Prokuratura*.¹² Similar changes were encoded in a 2001 revision to the law “On the *Prokuratura*,” which also emphasized new functions of prokurator surveillance in protecting the rights of small and medium entrepreneurs, independent farmers, and private businesses.¹³ Invested with state authority and given an expanded scope of responsibilities, the *Prokuratura* has become, in informal terms, one of the most powerful offices within Uzbekistan's state apparatus.

Yet, rather than promote effective and transparent bureaucratic practice within local infrastructures, reforms to the *Prokuratura* have deepened forms of predation and corruption at the local level—often in ways that run counter to the central government's interests.¹⁴ As one journalist wrote in 2002, prokurators' considerable influence over various stages of the judicial process had provided

ies were often serving the very offices they were supposed to monitor. This infused a high degree of coercion into local rent-seeking operations.

The Consequences of Coercive Rent-Seeking

Over time the center became increasingly dependent upon the state's coercive apparatus—ultimately fusing coercion and rent-seeking by empowering state security organs that were already enmeshed in rent-seeking relationships with local and regional elites. One political commentator went so far as to state that “Uzbekistan's political system is best described as feudal ... The center only rarely, very rarely, countermands regional elites.”¹⁶ Within the central leadership itself, there are indications of a concern about the “growing power of governors” and frustration over the failures of the center to undermine that power.¹⁷ In the personal opinion of a senior staff member within the president's apparatus, district and regional governors constituted the foremost problem for the central leadership in the country.¹⁸ It was the rural poor in particular who bore the brunt of coercive rent-seeking, especially populations of women and children who are transformed into mobilized labor forces during the late summer and fall when the crops are harvested.¹⁹

While coercion and rent-seeking had come to predominate within the state apparatus, it varied in important ways across provinces. Thus, while Uzbekistan's agricultural sector remains part of a largely untransformed command economy in which cotton and grain are part of a state monopoly, methods employed in rent-seeking at the regional and local levels differ in important and substantive ways. In Uzbekistan, prokurators in some localities engage in rent-seeking, in which only a portion of income is extracted from the population so that residents retain sufficient financial resources to reinvest in the local economy and generate more revenue that will be taxable in the future. In other localities, rent-seeking resembles a model, in which the population is taxed to the fullest extent possible, leaving little capital and little incentive for residents to produce or accumulate anything of value.

Moreover, the long-term consequences of coercive rent-seeking carry potential pitfalls. For example, coercive rent-seeking played a central role in the 2005 Andijon Uprising. Rent-seeking was prevalent in Andijon Province, where the regional leadership under Governor Kobiljon Obidov remained unchanged for 11 years—the longest tenure of any governor in Uzbekistan at the time of his dismissal in 2004. Obidov's longevity in office allowed him to construct a long-term, sustainable system of coercion, extraction, and rent-seeking that was unrivaled in any region. As a result, Obidov and his supporters were able to operate without much interference from the center for over a decade. Having allowed Obidov to stay in office—largely because he maintained social order and generated consistently high cotton yields—the center had enabled his patronage base to become too extensive.

While the regime dismissed Obidov without incident, it faced a series of small but well-organized protests when it attempted to remove the region's well-entrenched elites. Protests that followed the arrest and trial of some of the elite's most prominent members suddenly opened the way for mass demonstrations that harnessed the discontent among the population. Because coercive rent-seeking created cohorts of powerful and predatory regional elites in Andijon, it cre-

ated conditions for local elites to drift outside the center's control while simultaneously fostering economic inequalities and social injustices that provided fuel for mass protest. As long as these conditions are perpetuated in other regions of Uzbekistan, this mix of coercion and rent-seeking will continue to generate challenges to the regime in the future.

Conclusion

This paper has investigated how Uzbekistan's state building initiatives in the 1990s have led to interlocking coercion and rent-seeking within its territorial apparatus. Across the country, rent-seeking opportunities were opened to local and provincial elites. While these avenues enabled local elites to convert their resources into rents, it also made them dependent on the regime, opening them to cooptation and enabling Uzbekistan to avoid the processes of fragmentation within its local security services (such as those that were at the center of Tajikistan's state failure). Alongside the expansion of its rent-seeking opportunities to local elites, however, the regime developed its coercive capacity, investing heavily in its law enforcement and security services and granting them broad responsibilities over administrative, political, and economic affairs.

While promising in the short term, these initiatives had long-term detrimental consequences: they enabled provincial patrons and local elites to draw state security bodies into resource extraction and rent-seeking activities. This has produced a highly coercive state apparatus, but one that is held together at the local level by mutually beneficial resource exploitation and rent-seeking. The cohesion present in Uzbekistan's state apparatus is in fact rooted in the provision of rent-seeking opportunities to local elites. So far, this has made the regime highly resilient against mass protests and international pressure to initiate political and economic reform. The weak spot within this formula for stability, however, is the government's deep dependence on using rents to rein in local elites. Uzbekistan's revenue resides mainly in cotton, gas, oil, and some mineral wealth. Should these commodity markets cease to provide rev-

enue, the government will find itself confronting the consequences of a collapsed system of coercive rent-seeking: eroded state institutions, unruly elites, and a disaffected public.

Endnotes

1. By 2003, the number of police per population in Uzbekistan exceeded that of all other Central Asian republics, Russia, as well as states such as Sri Lanka and Jordan. Author's interview with TACIS Team Leader, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, April 2003; See also Alexander Cooley, *Logics of Hierarchy: The Organization of Empires, States, and Military Occupations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).
2. Much of this paper contains condensed sections of my book, *State Erosion: Unlootable Resources and Unruly Elites in Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).
3. Rent-seeking is defined here as any attempt to maximize income from a resource in excess of the market value. Robert D. Tollison, "Rent seeking: A survey," *Kyklos* 25 (1982), 30.
4. "Otvetsvennost' rukovoditel'ia," *Kashkadarinskaia pravda*, March 31, 1994, 1.
5. Arthur Andersen, "Specialized joint stock commercial bank 'Pakhta bank,'" *Financial Sector Development Agency Long Form Audit Report* (December 31, 1999); Interview, Deputy District Governor, Tashkent City, August, 2003.
6. Data obtained from Biznes-Fond.
7. Interviews, Samarkand and Ferghana Provinces, April-July 2003.
8. "Uzbekistan," *Central Asia Monitor* 2 (1996), 11-12. For more on Jorabekov, including his position as the "Gray Cardinal" within the republican political elite, see Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Change in Central Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
9. Those dismissed in the first wave included Polat Abdurahmonov (Samarkand Province); Temur Hidirov (Kashkadarya Province); Abduhalik Aydayqulov (Navoiy Province); Marks Jumaniyozov (Khorezm); Burgutali Rapighaliev (Namangan) – elites who had ushered Uzbekistan through the turbulent Soviet collapse and first years of independence. See "Uzbekistan," *Central Asia Monitor* vol. 2 (1996), 11; Author's database.
10. S. Husainov, "Muammo yechimidan darak yoq," *Zarafshon*, December 10, 2002, 2; "Iqtisodiy islohotlarinii chukurlashtirish bugunning bosh vazifasi," *Zarafshon*, May 9, 2001, 2; "Chorak yakunlari qanday bo'ladi?" *Ferghana haqiqati*, May 17, 2003, 3.
11. For a discussion of issues on reforming the procuracy in the post-communist context, see Stephen Holmes, "The Procuracy and its Problems," *East European Constitutional Review* 8, nos. 1-2 (Winter/Spring 1999).
12. Local *prokurator's* manuscript on the history of the *Prokuratura* in Uzbekistan (author's name withheld); E.S. Ibragimov, *Prokuratura suverennogo Uzbekistana* (Taskent: Akademiia Ministerstva vnutrennikh del respubliki Uzbekistan, 2000), 70.
13. *Pravo* database.
14. For example, prokurators' protests in defense of small entrepreneurs and private farmers rose only slightly after the introduction of the 2001 law "On the prokurator"—from 193 protests (1.8 percent of total protests) in 2000 to 256 protests (2.4 percent) in 2001 to 593 protests (5 percent) in 2002. Office of the Prokurator General of the Republic of Uzbekistan, "Mahlumotnoma. O'zbekiston Respublikasi prokuratura organlari tomondan tadbirdorlar huquqlarini himoya qilish borasida kiritilgan protestlar tahlili yuzasidan," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan Diplomatic Note No. 20/13024 to U.S. Embassy in Uzbekistan*, August 30, 2003 (facsimile).
15. Sergei Yezhkov, "Faktor ustrasheniia," *Pravda Vostoka*, October 2, 2002, 2. Before 2008, police could detain individuals up to three days without reason, up to six days if declared a "suspect," and it was only through an order from a prokurator that an arrest warrant can be issued (American Bar Association and Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative 2003: 14). Consequently, prokurators are in a position to use an arrest warrant as an instrument of extortion once someone has been detained. Interview, Journalist, Tashkent, March 2003. Although Uzbekistan adopted *habeas*

corpus in 2008, it is rarely properly implemented. Human Rights Watch, “No One Left to Witness: Torture, the Failure of Habeas Corpus, and the Silencing of Lawyers in Uzbekistan,” 2011, <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/uzbekistan1211-webwcover.pdf>.

16. Interview, Sergei Yezhkov, Tashkent, March 2003.
17. Interview, Head, Political and Economic Section, U.S. Embassy, Tashkent, August 2003.
18. Interview, Department Head, Apparatus of the President, Tashkent city, May 2003.
19. For an overview of the social impacts of Uzbekistan’s (and Tajikistan’s) labor-repressive system, see *What has changed? Progress in eliminating the use of forced child labour in the cotton harvests of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan* (London: The School of Oriental and African Studies, 2010); Deniz Kandiyoti, “Rural livelihoods and social networks in Uzbekistan: Perspectives from Andijan,” *Central Asian Survey* 17, no. 4 (1998), 561–578.