

## FRAGMENTATION OF THE POLITICAL PARTY SYSTEM IN KYRGYZSTAN

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### ABSTRACT

**A** political party system is the nature and relations of the political parties in a given political system. There are four main variables in the classification of party systems: the extent to which parties penetrate society, the ideologies of the parties, the stance of the parties toward the legitimacy of the regime, and the number of parties in the system. The number of parties determines the level of fragmentation of the party system. Kyrgyzstan emerged as an independent country after the collapse of the Soviet Union. After two revolutions, which resulted in the ousting of the presidents, Kyrgyzstan officially changed its political system by announcing the introduction of parliamentary democracy and held its first elections after the regime change in October 2010. Five parties were able to pass the 5% national threshold to gain seats in the parliament. However, no single party gained enough of a majority to form the government on its own. Therefore, they formed coalitions, the latest of which includes three parties—the SDPK, Ar-Namys, and Ata-Meken—

while the other two remained in the opposition: Respublika and Ata-Jurt. I estimated the effective number of parties by votes and seats and the least squares index for the 2010 parliamentary elections using Michael Gallagher's index, which utilizes the Laakso-Taagepera formula. The effective number of parties' index in Kyrgyzstan in terms of seat distribution in the Jogorku Kenesh was 4.90 for the 2010 parliamentary elections. However, the effective number of parties' index in terms of votes received by the parties is much higher: 9.86. On the other hand, the least squares index, which measures the disproportionality of the election results, is 13.75, which indicates the existence of many small parties with no seats. The 5% national threshold played a role in this disproportionality. The thesis of this article is that Kyrgyzstan's political party system is highly fragmented, and both institutional factors, such as constitutional and political party laws and the electoral system, and structural factors, such as social and political cleavages, play a role in this fragmentation.

**KEYWORDS:** *political parties, social cleavages, fragmentation, polarization, Kyrgyzstan.*

## *Introduction*

Political parties are fundamental to modern politics; they are essential not only for democracies, but also for most authoritarian countries through which power is exercised. However, political parties are a recent phenomenon in politics; they did not appear until the nineteenth century. Parties recruit candidates for public office, formulate programs for governmental action, compete for votes, and, if lucky, exercise executive power until removed from office. They are a vital link between the state and society and between the government institutions and interest groups that operate in society.

During the third wave of democratization during the 1990s, we witnessed the proliferation of democracies worldwide. Parallel to this development, political parties also have been established in emerging democracies. However, political parties have constantly been the least respected institutions in these countries because they are either too corrupt or out of touch to earn the respect and support of the public. Moreover, they are regarded as too weak, too personalized, or too constrained by authoritarian governments. Although hard to generalize, twenty years after the demise of the Soviet Union, the post-Soviet countries produced political parties that are either strong but authoritarian, or democratic but weak.

Kyrgyzstan emerged as an independent country after the collapse of the Soviet Union. After two revolutions, which resulted in the ousting of the presidents, Kyrgyzstan officially changed the political system by announcing the introduction of parliamentary democracy and held its first elections after the regime change in October 2010. Five parties were able to pass the 5% national threshold to gain seats in the parliament, but no single party gained enough of a majority to form the government on its own. Therefore, they formed coalitions, the latest of which includes three parties—the SDPK, Ar-Namys, and Ata Meken—while the other two remained in the opposition—Respublika and Ata-Jurt. The thesis of this article is that Kyrgyzstan's political party system is highly fragmented, and both institutional factors, such as constitutional and political party laws and the electoral system, and structural factors, such as social and political cleavages, play role in this fragmentation. The article is organized as follows.

- First, I explain the political party system, fragmentation, and polarization of the party system.
- Second, I analyze both the institutional and the structural causes of political party fragmentation.
- Third, I estimate the level of party fragmentation in Kyrgyzstan.
- And finally, I explore the causes of party fragmentation in Kyrgyzstan.

## **1. The Political Party System and Fragmentation**

A political party system is the nature and relations of the political parties in a given political system. According to Ware, a party system is characterized by three criteria: the effective number of parties, the political and ideological nature of these parties, and how they interact and compete with each other. He states, "Party systems involve both competition and co-operation between the different parties in that system."<sup>1</sup> The study of party systems has become more sophisticated since Giovanni

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<sup>1</sup> A. Ware, *Political Parties and Party Systems*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996, p. 147.

Sartori's classic book *Parties and Party Systems*, which came out in 1976. According to Ware, there are four main variables in the classification of party systems: the extent to which parties penetrate society, the ideologies of the parties, the stance of the parties toward the legitimacy of the regime, and the number of parties in the system.<sup>2</sup> The first criterion, parties' penetration of society, is measured by the ties between voters and parties, such as party identification, party membership, the links between parties and civil society, and the relevance of parties to the lives of citizens. A lack of penetration can lead to greater instability and voter volatility and, therefore, can make it easier for new parties to enter the system. The emergence of Respublika and its gaining 19.17% of the seats in the Jogorku Kenesh is an example of this phenomenon in Kyrgyzstan.

The second criterion, ideology of the party, determines the position of the parties in the political spectrum. According to their ideologies, parties are divided into groups. Klaus von Beyme identifies nine party groups or families: Liberal/Radical; Socialist/Labor; Conservative; Communist; Christian Democratic; Agrarian; Regional/Ethnic; Extreme Right; Environmental.<sup>3</sup> The character of a party system depends on its ideological composition.

The third criterion, the parties' stance toward the regime, shows variation; some parties want to protect and preserve the regime or improve it, others want to change the system. The existence and the size of any anti-system parties in the system is especially problematic and can lead to chaos if they choose to be violent or revolutionary, which anti-system parties sometimes are. Anti-system parties can be extreme left, extreme right, regionalist/separatist, ethnic, or religious.

The second and third criteria determine the party system's polarization. The ideological distance between the parties is called *polarization*. According to Sartori, the further apart the parties are, the more polarized the system.

However, the fourth criterion, the effective number of parties, is the most commonly used to classify party systems. The relevance of a party depends on its government, or coalition, potential: at least sometimes, the party is required, on its own or with others, to form a government. First developed by Douglas Rae,<sup>4</sup> estimation of the effective number of parties has become sophisticated, and although there are other formulas, the Laakso-Taagepera formula is the most commonly used. According to Laakso and Taagepera,<sup>5</sup> the *effective number of parties* is computed by the following formula:

$$N = \frac{1}{\sum_{i=1}^n p_i^2},$$

where  $N$  is the number of parties with at least one vote/seat and

$p_i^2$  is the square of each party's proportion of all votes or seats.

The number of parties determines the level of fragmentation of the party system. The more parties there are, the more fragmented the party system becomes. In other words, fragmentation occurs when there are more than two parties in the system and no one party gains the majority of seats in the legislative branch. Therefore they have to form a coalition. Fragmentation of the party system implies the existence of a multiparty system. Thus it is not possible to talk about fragmentation in totalitarian/authoritarian regimes. Hence we can conclude that fragmentation of the party system in one country is an indicator or sign of a democratic regime, or at least efforts toward democratization in that country. Ultimately fragmentation and polarization are two dimensions that give party systems their char-

<sup>2</sup> See: Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>3</sup> See: K. von Beyme, *Political Parties in Western Democracies*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1985.

<sup>4</sup> See: D. Rae, *The Political Consequences of Electoral Laws*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1967.

<sup>5</sup> See: M. Laakso, R. Taagepera, "Effective Number of Parties: A Measure with Application to West Europe," *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1979.

acter. Party systems can be divided into four groups.<sup>6</sup> First, there is the low fragmentation-low polarization group, which leads to a two-party system, such as in Great Britain. Second, there is the high fragmentation-high polarization group, which is called a polarized multiparty system. Turkey in the 1990s and Chile in the 1970s can be given as examples. Third is the high fragmentation-low polarization group, which is called a segmented multiparty system. Although few clear examples are available, the current party system of Kyrgyzstan might fit into this category. Fourth is the low fragmentation-high polarization group, which is quite unusual. Exceptions are New Zealand pre-1995 and Britain in the 1970s and 1980s. The current U.S. party system might fit into this category as well. So far, I have explained the political party system; in next section I will explain the existence of a specific party system in a country.

## 2. Political Party System Formation and Change

How can we explain the fragmentation of party systems in the developing world over the past 20 years and the variance within that fragmentation? As Hawkins states, one of the easiest answers to this question is cultural: developing-world voters are poor and unsophisticated and have had little opportunity to experience democracy; thus their parties are mostly personalized phenomena that fail to develop partisan identities or regional, occupational, and ideological links. In addition, the culturalist view asserts that party systems in the developing world will always be unstable, and we should expect significant decline in the parties' share of the votes from one election to another.<sup>7</sup>

Although the cultural explanation describes the situation of parties and party systems in the developing world, it does not tell us enough—we also need to know what lies behind the weak party systems of developing countries. Therefore, we must consider other explanations based on the nature and size of the party systems. Broadly, these approaches can be grouped into bottom-up and top-down approaches. Bottom-up approaches maintain that societal forces shape party systems from below, while top-down approaches argue that institutions and the political elite shape party systems from above. The main bottom-up approaches are social cleavage, the spatial model, and economic voting. The top-down approaches include institutionalism and the political elite. In the following subsection, I analyze each approach and discuss its merits.

### 2.1. Bottom-Up Approaches

The three most important bottom-up approaches are the social cleavage approach, the spatial model, and economic voting. The social cleavage approach refers to groups and divisions in society. The spatial model is based on the idea that voters choose the candidate or party closest to their own preferred positions on issues. The economic voting model posits that voters' evaluations of economic performance under incumbent parties cause party fragmentation.

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<sup>6</sup> See: A. Ware, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>7</sup> See: K. Hawkins, "The Breakdown of Traditional Parties in Latin America," *APSA*, No. 10, 2001.

### 2.1.1. The Cleavage Approach and Its Critics

In the debate over the determinants of the nature and size of party systems, an important body of literature emphasizes the role of social cleavages in structuring party systems.<sup>8</sup> In their classical study, Lipset and Rokkan argued that the main differences in Western European party systems reflected different structures in social cleavages. They identified four main cleavages that structure party systems: religion, class, core versus periphery, and urban versus rural. The party systems shaped by these cleavages remained stable or frozen, even though these cleavage structures changed over time. Parties won the loyalties of different social groups, and they retained these loyalties.

Cleavages refer to the lines between organized social and structural units, such as classes, ethnicities, and denominations that have a “set of values and beliefs which provides a sense of identity and which reflects the self-consciousness of the social groups involved.”<sup>9</sup> Political party competition is shaped by issue or political cleavages, as well as by social cleavages. As Moreno argues, “Societies divide not only on the basis of structural differences, such as ethnicity and class, but also on the basis of their views and preferences on political, economic, cultural, and social issues.”<sup>10</sup> In most cases, social and issue cleavages are closely related. Persistent issues in the political arena tend to have a solid social and structural background.

Parties and cleavages mutually influence and shape each other. Social cleavages shape the emergence of parties because political entrepreneurs choose several social groups or factions as their support base. Hawkins describes the relations between cleavages and political party system change as follows: “...change in party systems is prompted by long-term changes in voter demands that take place when new social cleavages emerge that cut across old ones or when new, related sets of fundamental issues are raised that cut across former ideological divides.”<sup>11</sup>

The social cleavage approach has been criticized since its first formulation.

- First, as Stokes argues, the cleavage approach “never accounted satisfactorily for the emergence and persistence of one set of cleavages over another.”<sup>12</sup> There might be some important differences that never became politicized. Assuming that social cleavages are always organized in the political arena ignores the collective action problem.
- Second, institutionalists argue that social groups do not always organize as parties because forging coalitions with other social groups is usually better strategy than organizing as a party alone.<sup>13</sup>
- Third, institutionalists criticize the assumption that social cleavages are reflected in the political arena automatically, thus ignoring agency.

<sup>8</sup> See: *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*, ed. by S.M. Lipset, S. Rokkan, Free Press, New York, 1967; S. Bartolini, P. Mair, *Identity, Competition, and Electoral Availability: The Stabilization of European Electorates, 1885-1985*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 1990; H. Kitschelt, “The Formation of Party Systems in East Central Europe,” *Politics and Society*, Vol. 20, No. 1, March 1992; D.J. Yashar, “Civil War and Social Welfare: The Origins of Costa Rica’s Competitive Party System,” in: *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America*, ed. by S. Mainwaring, T. Scully, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1995.

<sup>9</sup> S. Bartolini, P. Mair, op. cit., p. 215.

<sup>10</sup> A. Moreno, *Political Cleavages: Issues, Parties, and the Consolidation of Democracy*, Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1999, p. 106.

<sup>11</sup> K. Hawkins, op. cit.

<sup>12</sup> S.C. Stokes, “Political Parties and Democracy,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, No. 2, 1999, p. 247.

<sup>13</sup> See: O.A. Neto, G. Cox, “Electoral Institutions, Cleavage Structures, and the Number of Parties,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 41, No. 1, January 1997, p. 150.

According to Sartori, parties define which social cleavages should be politicized: “The old-style sociology took for granted that cleavages are reflected and not produced by the political system itself. As a result, there is very little that we really know about the extent to which conflicts and cleavages may be channeled, deflected, and represented, or, vice versa, activated and reinforced precisely by the operations and operators of the political system.”<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, parties are not only reflections of social cleavages, they are also autonomous institutions that help to shape those cleavages. In other words, politicians can take socially defined groups and combine and recombine them in many ways for political purposes. Fourth, the cleavage approach is sometimes criticized as ignoring the impact of institutions, particularly electoral rules on party systems.

In light of these critiques, some studies conclude that the cleavage approach, in its traditional form, which claims that party systems are reflections of frozen cleavage systems, is no longer a fruitful explanatory device.<sup>15</sup> This does not mean, however, that cleavages have completely disappeared or the cleavage approach has lost its explanatory power entirely. In this article, I argue that cleavages are still important elements in shaping party systems and that they are changing in the face of rapid globalization in the developing countries. I also argue that countries should be analyzed individually to find out which cleavages were exposed and reflected in the party system of that country. By taking a dynamic view of social cleavages, therefore, an explanation of party system change is possible.

## 2.2. Top-Down Approaches

Top-down approaches maintain that party fragmentation is the result of the political elite’s role and broader regime institutions, such as constitutions, electoral rules, other barriers to entry, and the internal organization of parties. Explaining the political elite’s role in shaping party systems reflects the shift away from societal explanations toward political explanations. The institutionalist theory has developed an alternative approach to the cleavage approach of party systems. As Stokes argues, institutionalists are more interested in explaining the number of parties in the system than the type of party.<sup>16</sup>

Duverger initiated the institutionalism model with his writings.<sup>17</sup> He and other scholars<sup>18</sup> emphasize the role of electoral laws in determining the number of parties. According to Duverger’s formulation, *single-member districts* (SMD), in which a simple majority is required to win the seat, tend to constrain the number of significant parties operating in a political system to a much greater extent than multimember *proportional representation* (PR) systems. More precisely, the simple-

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<sup>14</sup> G. Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Ma, 1976, p. 176.

<sup>15</sup> See: *Comparing Party System Change*, ed. by P. Pennings, J.-E. Lane, Routledge, New York, 1998, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> See: S.C. Stokes, op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> See: M. Duverger, *Political Parties*, Wiley, New York, 1951; idem, *Political Parties and Pressure Groups: A Comparative Introduction*, Wiley, New York, 1966.

<sup>18</sup> See: M. Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*, John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1954; D. Rae, *The Political Consequences of Electoral Laws*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1967; G. Sartori, op. cit.; W.H. Riker, “Duverger’s Law Revisited,” in: *Electoral Laws and Their Political Consequences*, ed. by B. Grofman, A. Lijphart, Agathon, New York, 1986; A. Lijphart, *Electoral Systems and Party Systems: A Study of Twenty-Seven Democracies, 1945-1990*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994; R. Taagepera, M.S. Shugart, *Seats and Votes: The Effects and Determinants of Electoral Systems*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1989; G. Cox, *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World’s Electoral Systems*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.



majority single-ballot system favors the two-party system, which is commonly referred to as Duverger's Law,<sup>19</sup> while a simple-majority system with second ballot and proportional representation favor a multiparty system, which is referred to as Duverger's hypothesis.<sup>20</sup> The correlations between both majority systems and two-party systems and between proportional representation systems and multiparty systems seem to be holding for most countries.

Although Duverger's propositions are regarded as sociological law, such important exceptions as Canada, India, and Australia have given rise to discussion among scholars as to whether those relationships were indeed causal. For example, Riker expresses concern about whether Duverger's propositions are deterministic or probabilistic. He further brings in additional variables, such as localized versus national two-party competition to be able to explain counterexamples of Canada and India.<sup>21</sup> Sartori contributes to this debate by claiming that the impact of electoral laws on party systems should be considered as side-effects rather than direct effects, and he further asserts that electoral laws do not create party systems but maintain them.<sup>22</sup> Both Riker and Sartori maintain that Duverger's Law should be accepted after their modifications.

Still skeptical, some adherents of the cleavage approach argue that institutionalists have the direction of causality backwards. Proponents of cleavage approaches argue party systems determine electoral systems, rather than the other way around. For example, incorporating agency into the cleavage approach, Boix argues that electoral systems are the result of the strategic decisions of the ruling parties to minimize risks. As long as the electoral arena stays the same and the current system benefits ruling parties, the electoral system remains unchanged. If new parties enter the system and old parties feel insecure, the old parties support the shift from majority to proportional representation.<sup>23</sup>

A further challenge to Duverger's formulation came during the 1990s when new democracies emerged. The empirical findings of new democracies have not supported Duverger's law as stated above. The experiences of Russia, Ukraine, and Poland have shown that proportional representation and majority elections can produce very fragmented party systems.<sup>24</sup> Moser examines the effect of single-member district elections in five post-communist states to ascertain the effects of electoral systems in a post-communist context. He finds that Poland and Hungary have followed the standard pattern of party consolidation over time in reaction to the incentives of electoral systems, while Russia and Ukraine have not. The mechanical effect of single-member district elections does not hold and has produced fragmented party systems in Russia and Ukraine. Because electoral systems are not decisive in shaping party systems, there must be other variables influencing party systems.

Drawing on Mainwaring's argument, Moser attributes the different effects of electoral systems to the different levels of party institutionalization found in post-communist states.<sup>25</sup> Mainwaring defines institutionalization as a process in which a practice or organization becomes well established and widely known, if not universally accepted. Actors develop expectations, orientations, and behav-

<sup>19</sup> See: M. Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*, 3rd edition, Methuen, London, 1964, p. 217.

<sup>20</sup> See: M. Duverger, *Political Parties*, p. 239.

<sup>21</sup> See: W.H. Riker, op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> See: G. Sartori, "The Influence of Electoral Systems: Faulty Laws or Faulty Method," in: *Electoral Laws and Their Political Consequences*.

<sup>23</sup> See: C. Boix, "Setting the Rules of the Game: The Choice of Electoral Systems in Advanced Democracies," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 93, No. 3, 1999, p. 609.

<sup>24</sup> See: K. Jasiewicz, "From Solidarity to Fragmentation," *Journal of Democracy*, No. 3, April 1992; R.G. Moser, "Electoral Systems and the Number of Parties in Postcommunist States," *World Politics*, Vol. 51, No. 3, 1999.

<sup>25</sup> See: R.G. Moser, op. cit., p. 361.

iors based on the premise that this practice or organization will prevail in the foreseeable future. In politics, institutionalization means that political actors have clear and stable expectations about the behavior of other actors.<sup>26</sup>

Criticizing the social cleavage approach to party systems, which suggests the social status of voters shapes their party preferences, Mainwaring argues that the social cleavage approach has limited applicability to Latin America. He suggests that electoral volatility, the weakness of party roots in society, low party legitimacy, and weak party organizations make a party system weakly organized. While all of these four explanations are valid, they also need to be further explained. More importantly, Mainwaring does not address the collapse of well-institutionalized party systems, as in Peru, Ecuador, Mexico, and Venezuela. For example, Venezuela's formerly institutionalized party system disappeared altogether, which coincided with the economic reforms.

One of the conclusions drawn by Moser relates to a critical point of my argument. He asserts, "Finally, given the low party institutionalization of some post-communist states, this study suggests that proportional representation systems with legal thresholds may provide a greater constraint on the number of parties than single-member district elections."<sup>27</sup>

### 3. Fragmentation and Polarization of the Party System in Kyrgyzstan

As mentioned above, fragmentation means the number of the parties in the system. The more parties there are in the system, the more fragmented it is. The Kyrgyzstan party system can be classified as multiparty system with no dominant or major party. Kyrgyzstan has a total of 184 parties, only ten of which are active in the political process.<sup>28</sup> The Kyrgyz party system is quite fragmented. As shown in the Table, there are five parties in the parliament. Three parties formed a coalition and two of them are in the opposition. These five political parties have different political platforms, ideologies, and leaders with different views on politics and the economy. It is difficult to come to a consensus when there are five parties.

According to the Table, the effective number of parties' index in Kyrgyzstan in terms of seat distribution in the Jogorku Kenesh was 4.90 in the 2010 parliamentary elections. However, the effective number of parties' index in terms of votes received by parties is much higher: 9.86. On the other hand, the least squares index, which measures the disproportionality of the election results, is 13.75, which indicates the existence of many small parties with no seats. The 5% national threshold played a role in this disproportionality. For example, there is a difference of only 27,166 votes between the Ata-Meken Party and Butun Kyrgyzstan; however, Butun Kyrgyzstan received 4.6% eligible votes, which is under the 5% national threshold. (In the table only percentages of the votes cast are listed, whereby it received 8.31%.) There are other parties besides Butun Kyrgyzstan that did not pass the threshold but are influential in politics, such as Ak-Shumkar. In the next section, I will analyze the potential causes of political party fragmentation in Kyrgyzstan: social cleavages and institutions.

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<sup>26</sup> See: S. Mainwaring, *Rethinking Party Systems in the Third Wave of Democratization*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1999, p. 25.

<sup>27</sup> R.G. Moser, op. cit.

<sup>28</sup> See: Official Department of Justice Website [[http://minjust.gov.kg/?page\\_id=6551](http://minjust.gov.kg/?page_id=6551)], 2 May 2013.



Table

**Estimation of Effective Number of Parties  
by Votes and Seats and the Least Squares Index for  
the 2010 Parliamentary Elections**

	Votes <sup>1</sup>	Seats	Votes, %	Seats, %	LSq Index <sup>2</sup>	Eff no Pv <sup>3</sup>	Eff no Ps <sup>4</sup>
Check Indices	0	0	0.00	0.00	13.75	9.86	4.90
Total	1,679,710	120	100	100	378.05	0.10	0.20
Ata-Jurt	257,100	28	15.31	23.33	64.43	0.02	0.05
SDPK	237,634	26	14.15	21.67	56.54	0.02	0.05
Ar-Namys	229,916	25	13.69	20.83	51.06	0.02	0.04
Respublika	210,594	23	12.54	19.17	43.95	0.02	0.04
Ata-Meken	166,714	18	9.93	15.00	25.75	0.01	0.02
Butun Kyrgyzstan	139,548	0	8.31	0.00	69.02	0.01	0.00
Ak-Shumkar	78,673	0	4.68	0.00	21.94	0.00	0.00
Zamandas	55,907	0	3.33	0.00	11.08	0.00	0.00
Party 9 <sup>5</sup>	46,070	0	2.74	0.00	7.52	0.00	0.00

Table (continued)

	Votes <sup>1</sup>	Seats	Votes, %	Seats, %	LSq Index <sup>2</sup>	Eff no Pv <sup>3</sup>	Eff no Ps <sup>4</sup>
Party 10	35,560	0	2.12	0.00	4.48	0.00	0.00
Party 11	32,355	0	1.93	0.00	3.71	0.00	0.00
Party 12	24,431	0	1.45	0.00	2.12	0.00	0.00
Party 13	11,056	0	0.66	0.00	0.43	0.00	0.00
Party 14	10,960	0	0.65	0.00	0.43	0.00	0.00
Party 15	9,338	0	0.56	0.00	0.31	0.00	0.00
Party 16	8,574	0	0.51	0.00	0.26	0.00	0.00
Party 17	7,818	0	0.47	0.00	0.22	0.00	0.00
Party 18	7,487	0	0.45	0.00	0.20	0.00	0.00
Party 19	5,776	0	0.34	0.00	0.12	0.00	0.00
Party 20	5,484	0	0.33	0.00	0.11	0.00	0.00
Party 21	5,311	0	0.32	0.00	0.10	0.00	0.00
Party 22	5,066	0	0.30	0.00	0.09	0.00	0.00
Party 23	4,475	0	0.27	0.00	0.07	0.00	0.00

Table (continued)

	Votes <sup>1</sup>	Seats	Votes, %	Seats, %	LSq Index <sup>2</sup>	Eff no Pv <sup>3</sup>	Eff no Ps <sup>4</sup>
Party 24	3,937	0	0.23	0.00	0.05	0.00	0.00
Party 25	1,935	0	0.12	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00
Party 26	1,802	0	0.11	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00
Party 27	1,784	0	0.11	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00
Party 28	939	0	0.06	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Party 29	671	0	0.04	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Against All	10,839	0	0.65	0.00	0.42	0.00	0.00
Invalid	61,956	0	3.69	0.00	13.60	0.00	0.00

<sup>1</sup> The election data are taken from the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda website [<http://cec.shailoo.gov.kg/i-election.asp?ElectionID=137> accessed], 2 May, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> The least squares index measures disproportionality. It indicates how far the distribution of seats across parties differs from the distribution of votes.

<sup>3</sup> "The effective number" measure indicates how fragmented the votes in parliament are.

<sup>4</sup> "The effective number" measure indicates how fragmented the seats in parliament are.

<sup>5</sup> In this table, I included only the names of the first 8 parties; the rest are represented as numbers.

Source: I made my estimates using Michael Gallagher's index (see: *The Politics of Electoral Systems*, ed. by M. Gallagher and P. Mitchell, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006, available at [[http://www.tcd.ie/Political\\_Science/staff/michael\\_gallagher/EISystems/index.php](http://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/staff/michael_gallagher/EISystems/index.php)], 2 May, 2013).

### **3.1. Institutional Causes of Political Party Fragmentation in Kyrgyzstan**

The legal system of Kyrgyzstan has provisions that prevent both fragmentation and the tyranny of one party. The Constitution has articles concerning parties; according to the Constitution adopted on 27 June, 2010, one party can receive a maximum of 65 of the 120 seats. “As a result of the elections, a political party may not be granted more than 65 deputy mandates in the Parliament.”<sup>29</sup> This was introduced to prevent domination of the president’s party, as happened during the Akaev and Bakiev presidencies. There is no evidence that this provision has any effect on the party system; since no party won more than 28 seats in the parliament, it might have supported the fragmentation of the parties psychologically. Members of parliament are elected for a five-year term through a proportional party list system within a single nation-wide constituency. As discussed in the theoretical section, proportional representation with a single constituency reflects more fair distribution of seats, but causes more fragmentation compared to the winner-takes-all system with multiple constituencies.

There are laws, however, designed to prevent fragmentation of the party system. According to the election law, a party needs to pass the 5% nationwide threshold and receive at least 0.5 percent of the votes in each of Kyrgyzstan’s administrative regions and two key cities—Bishkek and Osh—in order to earn seats in the Jogorku Kenesh. Both national and regional thresholds are calculated against the number of registered voters rather than based on the turnout, although in reality the threshold to gain seats in the parliament is much higher, as shown above. Butun Kyrgyzstan did not gain any seats in the parliament despite receiving 8.31 % of the votes cast. According to the OSCE/ODIHR report, “the double threshold requirement compromises the objectives of a proportional representation system.”<sup>30</sup> The national and regional thresholds are intended to prevent a party from winning representation if it lacks broad nationwide support. Indeed, these provisions worked effectively; only five out of twenty-nine parties surmounted the 5% national threshold to gain seats in the parliament, as seen in the Table.

### **3.2. Social Cleavages and Their Role in Political Party Fragmentation**

As I discussed above, social cleavages shape and influence the party system in the country. There are several social cleavages reflected in the political party system, such as regions (north-south) and tribes. The north-south cleavage is frequently cited in the literature as one of the main divides in Kyrgyzstan. “...Regionalism in Kyrgyzstan comes from the conditional division of the Kyrgyz as a nation into *tunduk* (northerners) and *tushtuk* (southerners); following this line, the four oblasts—Chui, including the capital of Bishkek, Naryn, Talas, and Issyk-Kul—are related to the north, while the other three oblasts—Osh, Jalal-Abad, and Batken—are related to the south.”<sup>31</sup> The

<sup>29</sup> Current Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic adopted on 27 June, 2010, Art 70.2.

<sup>30</sup> *Kyrgyz Republic Parliamentary Elections*, 10 October, 2010, OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Report, Warsaw, 20 December, 2010.

<sup>31</sup> A. Momunova, *Party and Clan Politics in Kyrgyzstan*, M.A. thesis, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary, 2012, p. 27.

north of the country mainly supports the SDPK and Ata Meken, while the southerners mainly favor Ata-Jurt, as well as Butun Kyrgyzstan. Respublika is fairly balanced compared to the Ata-Jurt party.

Running more or less along the north-south divide, the tribal structure of Kyrgyzstan also influences the party system of Kyrgyzstan. The traditional kinship system retains its salience among many Kyrgyz. Major tribe-lineages in Kyrgyzstan include the Saruu and Kutchu (Talas), the Sayaks (Jungal, Susamir), the Solto (Chui), the Bugu (Issyk Kul), the Sari Bagish (Kemin), Kara Bagish (Naryn), and the Ichkilik group of clans (south-western Kyrgyzstan).<sup>32</sup> Although the Soviet system modernized the country and changed many traditional forms of affiliations, it did not eradicate them entirely. The tribal structure reemerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union and has been playing a role in shaping the political arena. This was the case in the government opposition struggle during the Akaev administration in 2002. As Temirkoulov states, “One more indication that the power struggle between the government and opposition is partly the struggle between the northern and southern clans is the fact that many prominent opposition leaders and deputies are aligned with the southern clans.”<sup>33</sup> However, more recent research indicates that the clan effect is exaggerated.<sup>34</sup> Although political parties are not based strictly on tribes, tribal ties play a role in alliances and receiving votes from electorates because the parties are more leader-based than ideology-based. For example, former president Otunbaeva supported Babanov because both are from the Saruu tribe.

Another main social cleavage is built around ethnicity. Because of its Soviet heritage, Kyrgyzstan is not an ethnically homogenous county. According to the National Statistics Committee, the ethnic composition of the country looks as follows: 72.2% Kyrgyz, 14.3% Uzbeks, 6.9% Russians, and 6.6% others.<sup>35</sup> The Constitution openly prohibits the establishment of political parties based on ethnicity: “the creation of political parties on a religious or ethnic basis, as well as pursuit of political goals by religious associations.”<sup>36</sup> However, some parties appeal to certain ethnicities more than the others. For example, Ata-Jurt and Butun Kyrgyzstan want to attract Kyrgyz votes more than the other ethnicities, while Ar-Namys and SDPK attract votes from minorities as well.

## 4. Polarization of the Kyrgyz Political Party System

The number of the parties is important in classifying party systems, but ideology of the parties is also significant. The political arena is divided when respective political parties hold different views, platforms, and agendas, sometimes far from each other, sometimes overlapping. The Kyrgyz party system is relatively new and the parties are not clearly distinguished from each other. All the parties appeal to social benefits and social democratic values, and all of them uphold close relations with Russia. The communists mainly appeal to workers; Ata-Jurt and Butun Kyrgyzstan, with a slight

<sup>32</sup> See: *Kyrgyzstan at Ten: Trouble in the Island of Democracy*, 28 August, 2001, ICG Asia Report No. 22, Osh/Brussels, p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> A. Temirkoulov, *Tribalism, Social Conflict, and State-Building in the Kyrgyz Republic*, Berliner Osteuropa Info, Berlin, 2004.

<sup>34</sup> See: A. Momunova, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>35</sup> See: *National Statistics Committee of Kyrgyz Republic*, available at [<http://stat.kg/images/stories/docs/Yearbook/Demo/demo%209.pdf>], 2 May, 2013.

<sup>36</sup> Current Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Art 4.4.

nationalist rhetoric, try to garner Kyrgyz votes. The SDPK used nationalist rhetoric in the 2010 parliamentary elections, but it became more balanced during the presidential election in 2011 and acts as a catch-all party.

We can consider Kyrgyzstan to be a high-fragmented but low-polarized country. In terms of ideology, there are no clear lines between the parties; they are all catch-all parties. Therefore, coalitions between different parties have been possible. This does not mean that there is no polarization of the party system in Kyrgyzstan. The polarization is mainly between personalities rather than between ideologies. The political parties are only prototypes of their counterparts in advanced democracies; the political parties are not fulfilling their roles of interest aggregation. This is partly because society is constantly changing and “the post-communist society had not yet been stratified into large social groups with shared social interests.”<sup>37</sup>

The country is also divided on political issues and the parties reflect the main political cleavages in Kyrgyzstan. One such issue is whether to adopt a presidential or parliamentary system. The SDPK, Ata-Meken, and Ak-Shumkar were the main parties that led the coup against the Bakiev regime and advocated a parliamentary system. Respublika, which was newly founded from the ranks of the SDPK, also favors the parliamentary system. Both Ata-Jurt and Ar-Namys have opposed the newly founded parliamentary system and want to restore the older system of presidential rule. Another political cleavage is the direction and the orientation of the country’s foreign policy. Although no party is openly anti-Russian, some favor a more balanced foreign policy, such as the SDPK and Respublika, while others are openly pro-Russian, such as Ar-Namys.

## Conclusion

The party system of Kyrgyzstan is fragmented since there are five parties in the parliament without one party holding the majority of seats, despite measures such as the 5% national threshold to gain any seats in parliament. Both the institutional set up and the social and political cleavages play a role in fragmentation. Although the 5% national threshold played a significant role in limiting fragmentation in the parliament to five parties, fragmentation of the votes is quite high: the effective number of parties’ index is 9.86 according to the Laakso-Taagepera formula. However, among the institutional causes, the party-list proportional representation system is the main cause of the fragmentation. The lawmakers certainly prefer stability over representation. The small parties that received less than 5% of the votes in the 2010 elections might converge or make alliances in the upcoming elections.

Among the major social cleavages that cause fragmentation are north-south, clan structure, and ethnic diversity, while political cleavages are disputes about government type and foreign policy. There is no sign that the social and political cleavages will disappear anytime soon, and they will likely shape the party system in Kyrgyzstan for years to come. Since the first parliamentary elections were not held until 2010, holding free and fair elections is a relatively new phenomenon in Kyrgyzstan and the development of a stable and functioning party system will take many years and a great deal of effort.

Fragmentation of the party system implies the existence of a multiparty system, that is, the presence of not one, two, or dominant parties, but more than two parties without any dominant party in the system, as the term fragmentation implies. Thus it is impossible to talk about fragmentation in

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<sup>37</sup> Z. Kurmanov, “Evolution in the Party Structure in Kyrgyzstan,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 5 (29), 2004, p. 7.



totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. Hence we can conclude that the existence of fragmentation of the party system in Kyrgyzstan is an indicator or sign of a democratic regime or at least efforts toward democratization.

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