CHAPTER –III

DYNAMICS OF DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION IN

KAZAKHSTAN AND UZBEKISTAN
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This chapter tries to study the evolution of democracy in the two republics of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The historical background and the conditions that encouraged the people of these nations to adopt democratic institutions are attempted. In this chapter, the relations of these institutions with government, and how the politics of these institutions violate human rights in these two republics are also studied. This study also tries to find out the order in which the policies of the governments hampered human rights in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

Central Asia is known as pivot of Asia (Badan 2001: 21). This is one of the most volatile regions of the world. This is one of the most ancient regions that has witnessed various conquests, wars, establishment and annihilation of empires, religious uprisings, tribal and feudal kingships, and later the ideology based political setups. There has been a steady and constant shift in leadership and governance, which has been responsible for the unstable and undeveloped political mindset of the masses in the region.

Central Asia is known in history by its various names such as Turkestan, Transoxiana, Middle Asia and Inner Asia. The frontiers of this landmass extend from China in the east to Caspian Sea in the west, Western Siberia in the north to Afghanistan and Iran in the south (Mohapatra 2006: 31). Central Asia is a vast landlocked region of Asia. Though various definitions of its exact composition exist, no single definition is universally accepted. The definition of Central Asia is attributed to Alexander Humboldt, and the term is used to describe inner parts of the Asian continent. As the name implies, Central Asia is located in the middle of the Eurasian continent. The presently accepted definition includes the five newly independent Muslim states of the former Soviet Union, although geographically this area includes Afghanistan, northern parts of Iran, and some parts of Siberia. Central Asia expands from the Caspian Sea and Ural Mountains in the west to China in the east and from Siberia in the north to Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan in the south (Roudik 2007: 3).
On historical aspect of Central Asia Phool Badan’s study has given a clear framework espousing the history of Turkistan. He says, “prior to the Russian conquest the cultural and political life of the people of the Central Asia did not differ greatly from the settled and nomadic peoples and other parts of the Muslim world. At that time Central Asia was divided into three Khanates of Kokand, Bukhara, and Khiva. The Khanates were backward feudatories which were ruled by Khans and Amirs and Islam was the main source of political legitimation” (Badan 2001: 22). Central Asia is the land where world civilizations existed since ancient times. It was the crossroad for invaders, a place of historic coexistence of nomads and settled people, and the area of migration movements from the Scythians to the Mongols and Uzbeks (Roudik 2007: 1).

Geographical location is a major factor to decide the destiny of a country. According to Roudik, the geographical location (landscape) has played a major role in the politics, economy and culture of Central Asia. Deserts prevented trade and effective control over nomads; however, they did not provide protection from the Arabs, Mongols and Uzbeks, who invaded the region seeking refuge from even harsher deserts. Because of the deserts and isolation, the nomadic and semi nomadic way of life in Central Asia persisted for a long time. Plundering bands, which disrupted trade and frightened travellers, operated in the desert, and the inhabitants of these deserts were forced to migrate constantly in search of safety. Medieval archives describe these deserts as impassable for horses and even camels because of the scarcity of fodder and especially hot sands in the region. Travellers could find neither good environment nor water in the course of several days’ journey. Before the twentieth century, a two-week journey was required to cross the desert between the two major Central Asian cities of Khorezm and Bokhara (Roudik 2007: 3-4).

Badan further explains on the political life of Central Asian people. As he rightly says, the political power structure of Central Asia was feudal in nature, similar to the one that prevailed in medieval Europe. Traditional ruler has insignificant control, but the provincial beks (government) were politically independent and carried on constant wars against their neighbours and their
sovereign. The government was tyrannical and oppressive in nature and known for cruel punishment to its opponents. This government gets the full support from the institutions like Kazi. The people of Central Asia do not enjoy proper rights to participate in the political process (Phool, Badan 2001: 30-31).

In the second half of the nineteenth century, when other countries already had colonies overseas, Russia advanced into Central Asia. A complicated interconnection of strategic political objectives and economic interests of the Russian Empire in Asia were reasons for the colonization campaign. Before the 1860s, Russian leaders did not consider Central Asia to be of strategic value because the frontiers and access to Asian markets were already secured after the Kazakh steppe was subdued. The military part of the colonization was relatively brief, lasting only 20 years and ending in 1884 with several decisive battles between 1865 and 1868. After the siege of Tashkent in 1865 and the taking of Samarkand in 1868, the Khan of Bokhara submitted to Russian protection; the Khanate of Khiva was conquered in 1873, and the Kokand Khanate was accessed in 1876. The Russian conquest of Central Asia was completed by 1884 with the acquisition of Merv, a fertile oasis and a pre-Islamic historic town located close to Afghanistan’s border and British India (Roudik 2007: 92-93).

With the invasion of the region by Tsarist Russia, Central Asia was included into the Russian empire through various peace treaties. These peace treaties were completed in 1868 with Khan Khudayar Khan of Kokand and Emir Muzaffar-Eddin of Bukhara, whereby they relinquished the lands actually conquered by Russia, confirmed their dependent status, and gave the Russians highly favourable trade terms (Kaushik 1970: 29).

According to Khalfin, Bukhara and Kokand became vassal states of Russian empire (Kaushik 1970: 46). Khiva later was taken over by Tsarist Russia in 1873 and the whole right bank of Amu-Darya went into the hands of the Russians. The treaty with Khiva was a typical colonial treaty resembling those imposed by the Western powers on China. This treaty, as well as those with Kokand and Bukhara
earlier, assured Russia an economic hold over these three Khanates (Kaushik 1970: 25).

According to Davendra Kaushik, the main intention of bringing the Central Asian republics under Tsarist control was to exploit the natural resources that were available in these regions. The Tsarist government did not have the immediate intention of controlling the governmental structure of these regions. For that reason, though being under the suzerainty of the Tsarist rule, these republics enjoyed some sort of autonomy among themselves. Central Asia was converted into a raw material supplying base for the metropolitan industries. According to Lenin, as cited by Kaushik, the Khanates of Bukhara and Khiva, similar to Turkestan, though continued to exist independently, were also “something like colonies” (Kaushik 1970: 66). But having some sort of autonomy in their hands, the governing bodies in these Central Asian republics were being able to maintain their ethnic character, which was either based on the basis of language, religion or geographical territory.

“Tajik appeared as the language of instruction in 1908 when the first ‘reformed school’ was established and by 1914, there were 10 such schools in Bukhara” (Patnaik 2003: 20). ‘Uzbek’ rather was seen as a derogative term as it denoted “a whole category of population belonging to different ethnic groups ‘ignorant malcontents with destructive strength and no affirmative attributes’. As the Uzbek tribes spread and dispersed over a larger area, the term ‘Uzbek’ became a supra-tribal name and not that of one ethnic group” (Patnaik 2003: 18).

The Tsarist government never made the initiative of amalgamating the entire region into one bloc, only due to the strong ethnic lineage that was already present in the region. As Patnaik has noted, Pan-Turkish and Pan-Islamic consciousness never existed among the ordinary people and such ideas were limited to a very few. Ethnic consciousness was more pronounced as was evident from as many as 20 bloody inter-ethnic conflicts in the 19th century in the Kokand Khanate alone and even more in the Khanate of the Khiva (Patnaik 2003: 22). But the Tsar was an “unlimited autocrat” and he certainly did not want different political movements wrecking the empire (Badan 2001: 80).
The administration of the Central Asian regions was entrusted in the hands of the Governor-General of Turkestan, appointed directly by the Tsar. He appointed the nobility and military officers or the oblast and uyezd administrative officers. Military and civil powers, including dispensation of justice were concentrated in their hands. The Tsarist government also introduced a so-called popular elective lower village administration, by creating the post of the volost or the lowest administrative unit consisting of a few villages. Nevertheless, the military governor confirmed the appointments and the elected officials worked totally under them, having practically no freedom of governance. “The elected local officials joined hands with the Russian colonialists against their own toiling people. All sorts of extortions and misuse of authority against them became a matter of daily occurrence” (Kaushik 1970: 71).

The Russian authorities modified the local judicial system that was based on Islamic law. Traditionally, Islamic judges were appointed by local rulers in the region. In 1866, there was a brief attempt to replace single judges with panels of judges appointed by the Russian governor; however, the plan was abandoned. The Provisional Statute of 1867 applied similar rules for the population of settled and nomadic areas and provided that Turkistanis could elect their officials and elders, who would in turn, appoint the judges. While no attempt was made to alter the Islamic law, the jurisdiction of religious judges was limited to minor cases (with punishments of no more than 18 months of imprisonment) and family law; and their decisions were subject to review by local Russian courts. Cases that involved Russians were heard only in Russian courts (Roudik 2007: 87-88).

Though the Central Asian region was turned into a raw material providing unit for the Russian motherland, which led to the construction of railway lines, ending the isolation of the whole Central Asia that it suffered, but there did not grow a considerable number of industrial proletariat, as the Central Asian bourgeoisie was still very weak to establish and own large industries. “There were before the Revolution only 12,702 Uzbek industrial workers” which was quite a considerable amount in reference to the other Central Asian regions, which was considerably
lower (Kaushik 1970: 73). The percentage of literacy among the Central Asian population was dismal too. Gordiyenko has accounted that “The percentage of literacy among the Uzbeks was 2%, Turkmens 0.7%, Tajiks 0.5%, Kirghizs and Kara-Kalpaks 0.2%” (Kaushik 1970: 75).

But the dismal literate population was able to create a local intelligentsia, under the tutelage of people like A.P. Fedchenko, P.P. Semyonov-Tianshansky, and others. Kaushik has pointed out that “contact with representatives of progressive Russian culture stimulated their aspiration for new secular knowledge and there soon arose among them a movement for the pursuit of this” (Kaushik 1970: 77). For that reason, with the ushering of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, there was also a significant effect being made in the Central Asian regions.

During Tsarist colonial rule in Central Asia there were some movements that created minor threats to the authority of the Tsarist regime. Though there had been a tendency for Soviet historians to club all movements and minor rebellions into national struggle from the Tsarist hegemony, but not all such rebellion had popular support and participation in the region. Kaushik has explained these movements in a different manner. According to him, “in the early years of colonial rule many progressive changes took place in the economic and cultural life of the people. After the dark days of the Khan misrule with its despotism and open extortions, the people could not but appreciate the new changes brought about by the Tsarist regime. Hence, when the feudal and religious leaders rose in religious-nationalist movement for the restoration of the Khan under the reactionary slogan of gazavat or holy war, the people did not rally behind them” (Kaushik 1970: 80-81). Even John Anderson has commented that “the revolution of 1905-07 left the local population largely untouched, though it played a role in stimulating the activities of reformist intellectuals” (Anderson 1997b: 16). It was mostly initiated by a small group of workers that remained concentrated within the professional group of miners and railroad workers. For that reason, the strikes that took place during the revolution hit the functioning of the mines and the railways badly.
First such movement was initiated and organized by V.D. Komyushin, “who organized the first social-democratic circle in Tashkent in 1902”. But after the end of 1905, the strength of the social democrats withered away. According to John Anderson, “central to the spread of new ideas were the activities of the Tatar traders and educators, whose inspiration came from the work of Ismail Bey Gaspirali, better known as Gasprinsky. Gasprinsky and his associates promoted the spread of secular education and the creation of a common Turkic language. Such ideas were spread through a series of newspapers, and via the attempts to create so called ‘new method’ (usul’ jadid) schools, from whence came the word jadid to describe these reformers” (Anderson 1997b: 19). This region was also considered to be a place for banishing those who were considered to be unwanted in European Russia. Pierce has rightly pointed out: “Turkestan and the Kazakh Steppe like other outlying parts of the empire were places of exile for ‘political undesirables’ from European Russia. Revolutionary students and industrial workers were sometimes drafted and assigned to military units in Central Asia, ‘undesirable soldiers’ were transferred there from units in other regions, and civilian exiles were domiciled in all of the main towns. Inevitable, these people transmitted their ideas to the land-hungry peasants, disgruntled soldiers and workers, and the frustrated members of the intelligentsia around them. The Russian government’s efforts to neutralize the revolutionary infection by transferring the carriers to remote, more tranquil regions only served to spread it throughout the empire” (Pierce 1960: 235).

Revolutionary changes took other forms outside the Turkistan province. The Turkmens did not have their own political organization and were passive during the revolutionary period. Their political expression had taken the form of war, in which they participated with the Uzbeks and Tajiks until it was suppressed in the late 1920s. In Kazakhstan, the previous organization was not changed in 1917. Although the Tsarist officials gradually disappeared during 1917, the local administrations continued to work. The land question was much more important than political issues for the Kazakhs. The Kazakhs wanted to stop colonization and stabilize the indigenous people on arable lands (Roudik 2007: 94-95).
During this period, there was a somewhat ragtag party that was formed by the unison of various ideology followers into the United Group of Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries. There was also the establishment of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party under the tutelage of Evgenii Kataev. Only after the ‘bloody Sunday’ demonstrations in St. Petersburg, did these clusters of political groups found some sort of strength to fight the Tsarist colonialists. Though there were multiple attempts of subduing the movement, but on October 19, in Tashkent, things went out of hand when Cossacks fired on assembled demonstrators. Agitation went to such an extreme that the Russian Duma had to take the decision of removing the city commandant; removing as well as putting on trial the military governor; removing Cossacks from Tashkent and abolishing military patrols. During this period strikes paralyzed day-to-day life of the region. In 1906 again, there were fresh mutinies and uprisings especially in the Transcaspian region, which spread on to the entire region (Pierce 1960: 234-238).

The impact of the First World War, which began in 1914, became visible with the direct blow on the economies of the region. Taxes were increased and the cost of living skyrocketed. There was multiple small uprising that took place during this period taking advantage of the weakness of the Russian Army due to their preoccupation in the World War. Especially the Labour Draft that was passed by the Imperial court, “drafting non-Russians for labour in the rear of the fighting forces” alienated the local population (Pierce 1960: 271). There were massive rebellions on this issue in the northern part of Syr-Darya oblast, the Semirechie oblast and the Trans Caspian region. Rebellion also spread out into the Kazakh Steppe region. It was greatest in the Turgai oblast region. But the rebellion was suppressed ruthlessly, shooting down the native leaders, taking up extreme punitive measures against those who sided with the rebels and even not sparing the administration of the region, for not being able to control the rebellion. According to Pierce “by the end of December 1916, the native uprisings had run their course... Considering the population and state of the economy of the region, the loss of life and property had been heavy” (Pierce 1960: 292). Kropotkin who was the able military governor of Tashkent, and was responsible for subduing the rebels in the Semirechie oblast region, wrote to the
Tsar on February 1, 1917 saying “that the native resistance was at an end in all oblasts...but... because some of the reasons for the revolt still existed it could be expected to be resumed in the spring, with the appearance of new pasture” (Pierce 1960: 297-98).

On February 27, 1917, the Tsar abdicated, and this news reached Tashkent on the 28th night. The 1905 rebellion spirit revitalized among the people. This time not only the rail workers, miners and mutinied soldiers joined the rebellion but also people from the middle and conservative classes joined the revolution. As Pierce has noted, “there were societies of doctors, lawyers, engineers, and other professional people, officials, and even a ‘Society of Sales Clerks’ and a ‘Society of Employees’ in the Governor-General’s office” (Pierce 1960: 299). After participating in the revolution, a provisional government was formed under the aegis of the Executive Committee of the Provisional Government, who would take the task of governing the region until the Provisional government in Petrograd could send a committee to take over control. After the February Revolution, “various Russian political parties became active, particularly the Constitutional Democrats, the Socialist Revolutionaries, and the Menshevik and the Bolshevik wings of the Social Democrats. The underground members of the Bolshevik party came on the surface and started demanding for a complete revolution that would secure a government not by the ‘bourgeoisie’ but by the ‘toilers’ (Pierce 1960: 300). In the revolutionary years, according to Roudik,

In March 1917, the Kazakh liberation movement named Alash, the ancient war cry of the Kazakhs was formed by a radical and nationally oriented group of Kazakhs in southern Central Asia who called for complete independence of Kazakhstan. In December 1917, during the Kazakh Congress, which proclaimed the autonomy of the Kazakh people, the movement transformed into a political party. The Alash activists clashed with the more cautious Kazakh leaders who supported the provisional government and opted for limited autonomy with the local administration. The conservatives decided to introduce the Kazakh language in schools, courts, and administrations. They saw Kazakh’s future as a federation with Russia and did not entertain the possibility of establishing an independent government, which, according to
them, would require more unification than existed among the semi-nomadic tribes and clans. After the getting autonomy the Alash movement pronounced the establishment of the Alash Horde state. The steppe region populated by the Kazakhs was divided into two administrative zones; each zone had to organize itself and turn to its nearby allies for support (Roudik 2007: 97).

On March 31, 1917, Kropotkin was removed by the decision of the Executive Committee and the Soviets and slowly all the political institutions gave way to the growth of commissars, executive committees, and soviets of the new order. The final triumph has been recorded by Pierce that “the Bolshevik triumph in Tashkent on October 31, 1917, and eventual seizure of control over the Kazakh Steppes and Transcaspia in the course of the Civil War of 1918-1920 merely made formal the end of an era” (Pierce 1960: 301).

According to R. Vaidyanath, “towards the beginning of 1917 when the authority of the imperial regime started crumbling down all over Russia, the situation in central Asia had become highly explosive. In Khiva and Bukhara the discontent against the autocratic rule of the Khan and the Amir was mounting. The situation in these two states were deteriorated that the Khan and Amir in 1916-17 were informed to seek the help of the Russian armies to suppress popular uprising against their regimes. Following the abdication Tsar Nicholas II in Feb 1917 and the formation of provisional Government at St. Petersburg, a system of dual authority came into existence in Turkistan” (Vaidyanath 1967: 69).

Before the October revolution in Central Asia, Bolsheviks were spread all over the Turkistan region. Only towards June 1918, an independent Communist Party of Turkistan was formed (Vaidyanath 1967: 77). In October 1918, the former province was transformed to the Turkistan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), which joined the Russia, known at that time as Russian Soviet Federation of Socialist Republics (RSFSR), to become a constituent component of the Russian Federation as an autonomous soviet socialist republic. During initial stages of the Soviet development, the Bolsheviks were unable to define what status would be given to a particular ethnic group, and the creation of Turkistan ASSR appears to be
a compromise and an expression of a general intention to give autonomy to the Muslim people of Central Asia (Roudik 2007: 101).

As Anderson has noted, in April 1918 the fifth Regional Congress of Soviets had adopted a “statute on the autonomy of the Turkistan ASSR” which proposed considerable restraints on Moscow’s power to intervene in local affairs. The Turkistan ASSR formed in April 1921 adopted a constitution, which left control of foreign military and trade affairs in Moscow’s hand (Anderson 1997b: 26). According to Roudik

On October 14, 1924, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (then the highest state authority) passed a resolution on the creation of national states for the people of Central Asia. Initially, only two major union republics were created. Uzbekistan received the central part of the former Bokhara emirate, the southern part of the old Khiva, and the regions of Samarkand, Fergana, Amu Darya, and Syr Darya. During the Soviet era, researchers thought that the creation of five separate republics in Central Asia reflected a divide-and-rule policy in response to the danger of pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism. Recently, historians recognized that the delimitation was based largely on dogmatic visions of Lenin and Stalin, who believed that all people had to go through a national stage of development before they could reach the socialist stage. The newly created Central Asian states received a certain degree of cultural and linguistic autonomy but were deprived of political and economic independence. The main goal of the state-building process in the region was to replace a unified Central Asia with smaller national republics. After turbulent years of revolutions, in 1925, Central Asia found itself again under the control of the Russian Empire although this time the empire was ideologically driven and its name was the Soviet Union (Roudik 2007: 113).

The delimitation process has started shortly. As Vaidyanath has cited, "Mustafa Chokaev alleged that the plan of division of Turkistan into tribal states was invented by Bolsheviks at Moscow to counter the attempt made by the Mussalman
Communists to secure the unification of all Turkic tribes around the nucleus of Soviet Turkestan” (Vaidyanath 1967: 151).

The work of setting out the boundaries of new states was assigned to various Central Asian agencies during 1922-24 each of which, according to Geoffrey Wheeler, faced the delicate task of appearing sensitive to local demands while carrying out the wishes of Moscow. Significance of the national delimitation was very important, while political map of Central Asian region underwent radical changes as a result of the implementation of this scheme. The changes were not only political but also social, economical and cultural. Vaidyanath has focused some points regarding significant changes after delimitation. Firstly establishment of nationally homogeneous state formation the Uzbeks, Tadjiks, Turkmens and Kirgiz acquired the objective prerequisites not only for preserving their national identity but also consolidating their nations. Secondly, rapid socialist transformation of the region (Vaidyanath 1967: 230-34).

During the Soviet period many policies have been adopted to assimilate the Central Asian people. The term used for this is Russification of Central Asian people. These policies changed not only the politics but also economy and culture of Central Asian people. According to Phool Badan, “the Soviet government attempted to change the native culture of peoples of Central Asia in the name of Modernization because the native culture did not adopt their line; the Russian communists continued the policy of Russification of Central Asian peoples” (Badan 2001: 31).

But while greeting the formation and consolidation of the Soviet republics in Bukhara, Azerbaijan and Armenia while addressing the Eighth All-Russia Congress of Soviets in December 1920, V.I. Lenin said, “These republics are proof and corroboration of the fact that the ideas and principles of Soviet government are understood and immediately applicable, not only in the industrially developed countries, which have a social basis like the proletariat, but also in those which have the peasantry as their basis. The idea of peasant’s Soviet has triumphed. The
peasants’ power has been assured: they own the land and the means of production. The friendly relations between the peasant Soviet Republics and the Russian Socialist Republic have already been consolidated by the practical results of our policy” (Kaushik 1970: 192).

Whatever might be the situation, the ground reality was that there was nominal ideological control of the Soviet government over Central Asia. According to Anderson “party organizations remained weak, most not having setup formally until the early 1920s, and they often lacked people from the indigenous communities or cadres who understood the peculiarities of the region. In Kazakhstan the party had around 26,000 members in 1922 of whom around a third was Kazakhs, but most of the latter were semi-literate and had little idea about Marxist doctrine” (Anderson 1997b: 31-32).

Moscow had a clear approach in dealing with the impending issues that battered the Central Asian provinces of the newly formed nation. The key word that they adopted was korenizatsiya (nativisation). According to Anderson, “at successive party congresses resolutions stressed the need to draw in native cadres and to provide for the use of national languages in education, the courts, media and administration. In 1920, the Central Committee sent a letter to the Turkestan Communist Party ordering the removal of all those members tainted by ‘colonizing fever’ or Great Russian nationalism, and called for the drawing in of the best laboring elements in the region” (Anderson 1997b: 31-32). According to B.T. Olivier “native membership grew slowly in Kazakhstan rising from 8 per cent in 1924 to 38 per cent in 1928, and in Uzbekistan reaching about 40 percent by 1927. In April 1928 the Uzbek Central Committee adopted a resolution on the ‘Uzbekistan’ of the government apparatus, with the objective of making this 100 percent by 1930, but the target achieved was in fact 22.6 per cent” (Anderson 1997b: 32).

Moscow saw only one way through which Central Asia could usher into the Soviet era from the transitional era. It had to be mostly on the “non-capitalist path of development”. Moscow first saw the necessity to go ahead with agrarian reforms, which hinged on two important crucibles: first, the Soviet nationality policy and
secondly, the development of worker’s and peasant’s Soviets (Sharma 1980: 46). Key agrarian policies included major land-water reforms that got initiated during the period of 1925-28. It created a new system of land ownership closely followed by a set of “complementary institutional reforms” in the field of rural cooperation, education, credit, etc. (Sharma 1980: 53). The Soviet regime found it imperative to develop the extremely poor developed Eastern regions of Soviet Russia, as this region was extremely resource rich.

In 1924, a territorial delimitation on the basis of ethnicity and language took place in the region. According to Anita Sengupta, “this rationalization of this division was made on the basis of language with the prediction that each of these nations would now develop themselves and their national cultures and identities within the frontiers determined by these lines” (Sengupta 2002: 58). But these delimitations created more disputes than resolving any. There was a basic amelioration of identities that was kept distinct during the long periods under the regimes of the Khanates. The inclusion of the city of Bukhara into Uzbekistan was an example of such a policy (Sengupta 2002: 69). As Sabol has explained that “the series of compromises that the Bolsheviks agreed with the nationalists in the early years of the Soviet era initially preserved the traditional centres of power in the region, although within redefined political networks” (Sabol 1995: 225-41).

Within this period there was also a significant effort made by indigenous Uzbeks to create a separate sustaining economy of their own region. This attempt was made when the Soviet efforts of “collectivization was on in full swing and centralization was the order of the day” (Anderson 1997b: 34). But this effort was severely crushed by the Soviet regime. Anyone who was even suspected of spreading nationalism in the Central Asia were either arrested or executed. “Even Russian elites in the regions were unsafe, for as early as 1932 Kazakh First Secretary F.I. Goloshchekin had been removed for failures that had ‘fed’ nationalism” (Olcott 1995: 216). “In 1937-39 most of the leading nationalists were arrested and executed, alongside the remaining old Communists” (Anderson 1997b: 34).

As Anderson has further noted, “within a very short period the native elites of the region had been decimated, and a new generation began to take its place, a younger generation with a technical rather than humanitarian education, schooled to
the hard realities of Soviet rule. Nonetheless, to ensure control as well as make well the deficiency caused by the purges and the shortage of educated personnel, Moscow also appointed numerous Russians, whether local or 'parachuted' in, to key positions in the region” (Anderson 1997b: 34).

There was a colonial relationship with that of motherland Soviet Russia and the rest of the countries in Central Asia. There were some hard and fast methods of ensuring that the regions of Central Asia remained under the aegis of Soviet Russia. The Soviet ideology was superimposed on the people of the region that totally suppressed the indigenous history, tradition and culture of Central Asia. As Carley has noted, “Soviet ideology routinely denigrated Central Asian history, tradition, religion, and culture” (Carley 1995: 301). There was a significant attempt of Russification over the entire region. There was an over pervading fear of Islamic or Turkic unity in the region that had to be suppressed. “The alphabets of all the Central Asian languages were changed from the Arabic script used before the Revolution, first to Latin, and then finally to varieties of Cyrillic by 1940” (Carley 1995: 300).

However, it was difficult for Moscow to totally curb the nationalist feelings of the region. The nationalist feeling remained an underlying trend that promoted the growth of groups linking together to form alliances working parallel with the Soviet governmental structure. There were linguistic, religious as well as trade union groups that started aligning with each other. Donald Carlisle has focused on “the ways in which leadership in Uzbek politics may have swung between a Tashkent- Fergana based elite with a more pro-Moscow position, and a group of leaders whose career backgrounds and loyalties lay with the southern periphery and towns such as Samarkand and Bukhara. Under the latter grouping, led from 1959 – 83 by First Secretary Sharaf Rashidov, Uzbekistan moved increasingly outside of Moscow’s control. Leaders promoted relatives, friends and colleagues, and built alliances (often reinforced by marriage), which in turn conspired to cover up economic failings and persistently withheld information from Moscow” (Carlisle 1986: 109-118).

There was an attempt to dismantle the traditional institutions in the regions, remaking it into a secular and liberal society. Though this change had a significant
impact on the lives of the people, the traditional modes of organisations reappeared
time to time in various guises in the Central Asian republics. Preservation of
tradition was the only possible path of resistance in Soviet conditions. As Janice
Baker has noted, "with the very nation under physical threat the preservation of
tradition became central to the survival of any sense of identity" (Baker 1985: 100).

After the 1917 revolution Soviet power was established in Kazakhstan. Kazakhs suffered greatly under Soviet control. Due to the forced collectivization in
the 1930s, hunger caused the death of 1.5 million Kazakhs, which was more than 40
percent of the nation. Hundreds of thousands Kazakhs fled to China and elsewhere.
The brightest and the best of the nation were repressed and often shot dead. The
regime's last gasp was the brutal repression of the Kazakh people on December 17,
1986 as they took to the streets seeking justice. Many consider this the beginning of
the end for the once mighty Soviet Union. "During the post-Stalin years the centre
had been increasingly content to allow Republican Party bosses considerable
freedom of action so long as they ensured political stability and delivered the
planned economic goods" (Anderson 1997: 55). But such step motherly attitude
gave rise to rampant corruption among the political ranks giving air to large-scale
nepotism. There was a gross degeneration of political culture within these nations
during this period. Corruption grew with a distinct identity of its own in the region.
It had two characteristics: the persistence of tribalism or other sources of nepotism in
Central Asian society and the existence of the cotton monoculture in much of the
region's economic life (Carley 1995: 304).

But with the passage of time, the Soviet leadership, especially in "the post
Khrushchev period, had abandoned a euphoric over-optimistic approach to the
nationalities question in favour of a more realistic approach" (Sharma 1985: 200).
The Party Programme that was adopted in 1961 under Khrushchev emphasized on
"unity and rapprochement (sblizheniye) of nations" (Sharma 1985: 204). But with
the incoming of Brezhnev there was a change in attitude of the Soviet leadership.
Brezhnev said: "The further drawing together of the nations and nationalities of our
country is an objective process. The Party is against hastening the process: there is
no need for that, since it is determined by the entire course of our Soviet life. At the
same time, the Party considers it impermissible to attempt in any way to hold it up, to impede it on some pretext, or to give it emphasis to national distinctiveness, because this would go against the general line of development of our society, the internationalist ideals and the ideology of Communists, the interests of Communists construction" (Kaushik 1970: 203). Andropov candidly acknowledged that it "is hardly possible as long as nations exist, as long as there are national distinctions, and these will exist for a long time to come, much longer than class distinctions...nothing can be dismissed as insignificant. Everything counts – the attitude to the language, to monuments of the past, the interpretations of historical events, and the way we transform rural and urban areas and influence living and working conditions” (Kaushik 1970: 204).

However, due to the inbuilt suppression in the governmental machinery, there were very few such incidents in the Central Asian republics that made it able to rise against the Soviet Russification. Rather it was more of the power that got centralized in the hands of the members of the republican parties in the region. But there was a major change that was set about with the policies of Glasnost and Perestroika by Gorbachev and that saw the rise of a decade of a paradigm shift in the politics of the Central Asian nations. The manner in which the regions of Central Asia were was certainly not at all to the liking of the last generation of the Soviet ruling elite. That became clear when Mikhail Gorbachev was extremely critical of the corruption that was associated with the cotton industry as well as the personnel policies, which he said were all too often based on nepotism.

Mikhail Gorbachev came into power in March 1985. One of the most important changes brought by Gorbachev was the reform policy of Perestroika and Glasnost that totally remodelled the Soviet governmental structure not only in Moscow but also throughout the vast expanses of the nation, and the changes created vast ripples. First was the introduction of glasnost. Glasnost had three distinct axes of reforms: the liberalization of the media and of discussion and criticism even outside the media; a purging and modernization of the apparatus in all its branches; greater flexibility in the institutions and mechanisms which directly exercise power.
The criticism voiced would have been catered to by a ‘court of administrative recourse’ that was established in January 1987. Then came one more blow to the Soviet infrastructure in the form of Perestroika. It is a major utilization of market mechanisms in an economy dominated by central planning as opposed to ‘market socialism’ where market regulation is dominant. It also introduced a major reform in the economic structure of the Soviet economic structure.

There was a major shuffle amid the ruling elite in retaliation with Moscow’s anti-corruption drive. They felt that the entire effort was directed towards the Central Asian region. “During the second half of the 1980s, Moscow’s attitude gave the Uzbek population the impression that they were living at a historic time. The atmosphere of tolerance assured by perestroika favoured the emergence of numerous and varied associations and informal groups (including anti-nuclear ones). Publications acted as a stimulus in the growth of Uzbek public opinion” (Capisani 2000: 79).

In 1988, 'Birlik People’s Movement' (Unity Party) was established under Abdurahim Pulatov and 18 other Uzbek intellectuals. “This was a confederation of secular and nationalist movements whose initial policy was based on the ‘protection of Uzbekistan’s natural, material and spiritual riches” (Capisiani 2000: 80). Later in February 1990, Birlik broke up leading to the creation of ‘Erk’ (freedom), led by Muhammad Salih. Erk represented a moderate splinter group that got dissociated with Birlik. Then there was the formation of the Islamic Renaissance Party, which was founded in Astrakhan in Russia in June 1990. This minority faction believes that former Communist traditions and Muslim traditions were politically compatible. The rise of Islamism also saw the birth of the Turkestan Islamic Party, which has Pan-Islamic tendencies and is directed towards all Muslims of Turkestan’s historical region (Capisani 2000: 80).

1989 saw massive ethnic violence in Uzbekistan. Two of such ethnic violence needs special mention: “in June 1989 in the Fergana Valley, the Uzbek and
Meskhetian communities fought, in which around 99 people got killed. A year later, June 1990, further ethnic conflicts erupted in the Fergana Valley over the apportionment of two ever scarce and precious resources: water and fertile soil. The confrontations were between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks who form the majority in the city of Osh” (Capisani 2000: 80).

Moscow after witnessing the rise in ethnic violence started taking effective measures to control the amount of violence that was brewing in the Central Asian republics. The centre halted all attempts to restore ethnic balance and from around “1989 most of the Central Asian party executives, apparatus and republican Council of Ministers came to be dominated by Central Asians... republican elites (also) began to take up some of the grievances that were being brought to the fore in the press, or to encourage their broad discussion... more scope was given to age old customs such as the new year festival of Navruz, with its religious connotations no longer hidden... Islam was treated no longer as an opponent, but rather as a force to be utilized and drawn upon in reforming society and overcoming what was seen as its moral decline” (Anderson 1997b: 69-70).

According to Carley, “The reduction of the prohibitions on overt religious expression was also an impetus, opening for the first time in decades a discussion of religion’s place in society” (Carley 1995: 306). The demand for a reform in the language policy of Soviet Russia was also demanded from this year. There was a demand for new language laws to be formulated and implemented. “At the same time Central Asian leaders sought to pressurize the centre for greater socio-economic help, both through the traditional means of discrete, behind-the-scenes bargaining but also more openly as perestroika created new fora for public discussion” (Carley 1995: 71). But there was a significant difference in the approach that was taken by the Central Asian leadership while dealing with Moscow and dealing with resistance at home. They wanted to gain as much leverage with Moscow but were not at all eager to provide that much independence that they were asking for from the leadership in Moscow. According to Roudik (2007: 143),
Gorbachev called for the creation of popularly elected legislatures and for the loosening of central political control to make such elections possible. For the newly elected legislatures, the future of the Soviet Union became one of the most important issues. During 1990 and 1991, leaders of the Soviet Union and the Central Asian republics discussed and developed major principles for reforming the union; some republics started to change their political systems and elected their own presidents.

On August 20, 1991, nine Soviet republics were supposed to sign a new treaty aimed at preserving the Soviet Union. On the eve of this treaty, however, conservative generals and politicians in Moscow to destroy the creation of a new union entity and cancel freedoms brought by the Gorbachev reforms staged a coup. Instead of preserving the Soviet Union, the coup, which collapsed in a few days, sped up the dissolution of the USSR. Uzbekistan declared their independence and secession from the Soviet Union on August 31, and Kazakhstan on December 16, 1991. National and territorial units that were administratively created by Communist officials in the mid-1920s became independent and sovereign states.

According to Kathleen Collins, as the 1990s drew to a close, the overall storyline in Central Asia had switched from regime divergence to regime convergence. This was especially noticeable in the informal patterns of political behaviour underlying the formal regimes. With little glimmer of hope for democracy, scholars and policy makers have variously described Central Asia as a region plagued by Orientalism, Islam or unreformed communists and stagnant Soviet institutions (Collins 2002: 140).

Kathleen Collins further explains that transition came until late 1991, when the collapse of the Soviet empire forced the Central Asian republics to adopt new regime types. The evidence from Central Asia suggests something quite different. There, pacts have brought regime durability but seem to be a wash when it comes to promoting democracy. Each Central Asian pact preserved a certain balance of power among the clans in a given state and allowed for the imposition of a new regime.
type, but seemed to have no effect upon the question of whether the new regime would be democratic or autocratic (Collins 2002: 145).

Thus, it has to be understood that only after the introduction of *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the Soviet system, the birth of political parties, language, religious and cultural aspirations started taking its shape. And after independence, there were more of chaos and instability than stability and peace. The hands of the leadership were more preoccupied in bringing back peace and stability than think about strengthening democratic roots. It was more of keeping the nations together and was more of attempting to survive in the new political order. When the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, all Central Asian states began the same process of a sudden decolonization, independence, and political transition. Despite the proclaimed goals of adopting market economies and secular, democratic political systems, Central Asia seemed to be the least likely region in the former Soviet Union to become democratic. The high monopolization of power in the hands of party officials inherited from the former USSR was the main reason that, in all five Central Asian states, a strong presidential rule was established. Former Communist leaders automatically became presidents of the newly independent republics, transforming Communist Party apparatuses into presidential administrations, although all these republics formally disavowed communism.

**Emergence of Democratic Institutions**

Democratic institutions are normally made up of political parties, pressure groups which are not included in the process of governance but instigate a considerable influence on the governing bodies, media, which includes the print as well as electronic media and the people’s bodies which act as check valve for the governing bodies. In the democratic societies, these democratic institutions have taken various size and shapes creating distinct patterns of governance. Each institution moulds and remoulds itself according to the polity and the political awareness of the masses. If the example of a political party as a democratic institution is taken, then it will be seen that in the various democratic set up political parties have taken various shapes
as they grow amid the democratic structures. The single system, the bi-party system and the multi-party system, all portrays the various patterns of governance. Within the various party structures, there are forms, which build the character of the political systems. These parties are motivated by strong democratic manifesto, sometimes the charisma or the leadership qualities of a single leader. To understand the democratic nature of a state, one has to keep in mind the various institutions that work at tandem for the success of such democracy. If any one of the institutions becomes more powerful, hindering the free functions of the other democratic institutions, then invariably it gives birth to a lopsided democratic growth of that nation.

One thing that should be kept in mind before analyzing the trends of democratization in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and the emergence and growth of political institutions in the nation, is that the states of Central Asia have a political history far different from that of Western countries, and there is little that could constitute a "democratic tradition". Power at all levels is personalized, often based on tribal or clan connections, and this in turn contributes to corruption and limits prospects for the inclusive development (Kubicek 1998: 30).

According to Bladimir Babak the progress of emergence of democratic institutions was very weak. The period of Soviet rule with its single-party dictatorship contributed little or nothing to the introduction of democratic social structures or to the inculcation of democratic values in the public mind. During the Soviet era, everyday political life conformed not to the hazily formulated, formally democratic constitutions of the USSR and the union republics, but to the political realities of a totalitarian regime. These realities included the dictatorship of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which actually performed the state’s functions, the semi-feudal kolkhoz system, and the punitive apparatus of the security organs and a judicial system that together kept not only the actions of individuals, but also even their intentions, under close observation. In the first stage of democratization, the absence of democratic institutions that would in fact guarantee human rights, including the right of assembly, and the persecution of dissidents hampered the development of political activism and the creation of parties and movements whose activity might challenge the regime’s ideology. Thus, when the
process of forming democratic political movements and parties began in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev, it did so on a very fundamental level, with the creation of discussion clubs, political education circles and other informal organizations (Ro’i 2004: 143).

Martha Brill Olcott has mentioned: “three main groups are...competing for political control everywhere in the region. Representatives of the old Central Asian ‘autocracy’ in most places break into competing groups and struggling to remain in control. They are challenged by the new, so-called democratic groups dominated by intellectuals who generally played only a peripheral role under the old political order. The ‘autocracy’ is also opposed by revivalist Islamic groups composed of fundamentalist-style clerics who were trained outside of the official establishment” (Olcott 1992: 255). The first politicized grass roots organizations stimulated by perestroika and glasnost appeared in the Central Asian republics. Some political organisations or memorial societies emerged which were in Moscow in August 1988. The Memorial Society’s goals were to rehabilitate the victims of the Stalinist repression, to render aid to the survivors and relatives of those who perished, and to fight against the remnants of totalitarianism in Soviet society. The first Memorial groups in Central Asia were created in Kazakhstan in Tselinograd (now Astana) and Alma-Ata in December 1988. The authorities tried to split the organization by creating a parallel formation, Adilet, with the same proclaimed goals. Their aim was to sow discord among the members of Memorial, which now comprised mostly politicized intellectuals of European origin, and those of Adilet, who were mainly representatives of the titular nation (Ro’i 2004: 145).

Democratic Institutions in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is a large country in Central Asia ranked as the ninth largest country in the world as well as the world’s largest landlocked country. On December 16, 1991, the Kazakhstan Soviet Socialist Republic became the independent Republic of Kazakhstan. Just before that date, as the Soviet Union fell apart, two developments set the tone of political life in the new Republic of Kazakhstan. First, in September, President Nursultan Nazarbayev resigned his leadership posts in the Soviet Union’s Communist Party and ordered its branch in Kazakhstan to be dissolved. Even though
many of its top leaders, minus Nazarbayev, reorganized as the Socialist Party of Kazakhstan (SPK), the old Soviet one-party dictatorship was dead in Kazakhstan. Second, barely two months later, on December 1, 1991, 15 days before Kazakhstan declared its independence, Nazarbayev, running unopposed, was re-elected president with 98.8 percent of the vote. To be fair, Nazarbayev was a very popular local leader, and it is hard to imagine that any other local politician could have defeated him in a fair multi-candidate election (Kort 2004: 101).

President Nazarbayev maintains strict control over the country's politics. Several opposition leaders and journalists have been killed in recent years, and Western observers generally do not consider Kazakhstan elections to be free and fair. Kazakhstan is a constitutional republic as mentioned in its constitution. The president is the head of state. The president is also the commander in chief of the armed forces and may veto legislation that has been passed by the Parliament. The prime minister chairs the Cabinet of Ministers and serves as Kazakhstan's head of government. Kazakhstan has a bicameral Parliament, made up of the lower house (the Majilis) and upper house (the Senate). Single mandate districts popularly elect 67 seats in the Majilis; there also are ten members elected by party-list vote rather than by single mandate districts. The Senate has 39 members. Two senators are selected by each of the elected assemblies (Maslikhats) of Kazakhstan's 16 principal administrative divisions (14 regions, or oblasts, plus the cities of Astana and Almaty). The president appoints the remaining seven senators. Majilis deputies and the government both have the right of legislative initiative, though the government proposes most legislation considered by the Parliament.

On 1 December 2007, it was revealed that Kazakhstan has been chosen to chair OSCE for the year 2010. The Senate (upper house of Parliament) is composed of 47 deputies. Of these, 32 are selected through indirect elections by 14 oblast (regional) assemblies, and assemblies from Astana (the capital) and Almaty (the former capital). The May 2007 amendments increased the number of Senate deputies appointed by the president from 7 to 15. Senators serve six-year terms, with half of the elected senators facing elections every three years. After winning the
December 2005 presidential elections, Nazarbayev began a rapid process of bringing major pro-regime political parties under the umbrella of his Nur Otan party. Elections to the Majilis (lower house of Parliament) were held in August 2007, two years ahead of schedule, after the Constitution was amended to allow all seats to be elected by party list on a proportional basis. The ruling party, Nur Otan, captured all 98 seats, as no other party was able to cross the 7 percent electoral threshold. These elections were not deemed free and fair, though it was understood that Kazakhstan’s bid for the OSCE chairmanship depended heavily on it (Nations in Transit 2008).

The first post-Soviet constitution was adopted on January 1993. The first general presidential elections were held in December 1991, in which former Kazakhstan CP First Secretary Nursultan Nazarbayev was the sole candidate and received 99 per cent of vote. As a result of a general referendum held on 29 April 1995, Nazarbayev’s authority as president was extended to 1 December 2000. In accordance with the new constitution adopted on 30 August 1995, following a national referendum, Kazakhstan became a presidential republic. The president of the republic was to be elected for a five-year term; he appointed the prime minister and the Supreme Court and served as commander-in-chief.

In March 1995 the independent-minded Constitutional Court declared the results of the election to the Supreme Kenges invalid. The president dissolved the Supreme Kenges, abolished the Constitutional Court and ruled by decree for nine months. A new parliament was elected. It consisted of two chambers (the 47-member Senate (upper house) and the 67-member Majilis (lower house). In accordance with the 1997 administrative reforms, the number of Oblasts was reduced from 19 to 14, thus decreasing the number of seats in the senate. In October 1998 parliament significantly altered the structure of the legislature, increasing the size of the Majilis from 67 to 77 deputies (Starr 2006: 12).

The president had the right to dissolve parliament and create an advisory body in the case of a national emergency. Constitutional amendment was adopted
establishing a seven-year term of office for the president. On 10 January 1999, President Nazarbayev was re-elected for a seven-year term in accordance with new stipulations. Transition in Kazakhstan, as Luong has described the nature of Kazakhstan’s transition from the end of Soviet rule in 1991 until it established a new set of electoral rules at the end of 1993, can be best termed as “mixed” – that is, neither moving fully toward nor away from broad democratic political reform and the adoption of a market economy. The distinctiveness of Kazakhstan’s transitional context also produced distinct perceptions regarding the degree and direction of change in relative power. The fact that political as well as economic policies were inconsistent sent mixed signals to established and emergent actors alike regarding their status in the present and near future. In particular, it promoted perceptions among both central and regional leaders in the executive branch that their influence was increasing and would continue to increase – both in absolute terms and relative to the other. Moreover, the nature of the transition in Kazakhstan reinforced regional rather than national cleavages, while at the same time enabling divisions between the titular and non-titular nationalities (primarily Kazakhs and Russians) to persist and indeed flourish (Luong 2002: 136-37).

Nursultan Nazarbayev began centralizing power in the executive branch immediately after his election as Kazakhstan’s first president on December 1, 1991. From the beginning of his tenure, it was clear that the Republic of Kazakhstan would adopt a presidential system. Following independence, for example, the president appointed new members to the two main executive organs of power, the Presidential the Ministerial, and placed them under his direct control. Nazarbayev also maintained central control over regional leaders’ appointments and activities, albeit not to the same degree as his counterpart in Uzbekistan. He made a series of new appointments following his election, which included the reshuffling of existing regional leaders (akims) as well as the appointment of new akims whom he could consider “loyal supporters” (Luong 2002: 139-40).

Thus, Nazarbayev insisted on retaining the sole authority to appoint and dismiss akims at all levels. In appointing new regional akims, however, he also continued the Soviet-era practice of promoting leaders from within. Thus, more than
two-thirds of his new appointees in 1992-93 had previously served in some capacity in the same oblast and more than half actually held a prior positions. The process of political centralization in Kazakhstan was distinct from that of Uzbekistan in other ways as well. Most importantly, Nazarbayev strove to concentrate power within the executive branch as a whole, rather than just within the presidential apparatus alone. Increasing the power of the presidency did not amount to the exclusion of regional leaders from directly influencing, and indeed, participating fully in the political process in the regional administration (Luong 2002: 140).

Luong further explains:

...the president’s role in political centralization in Kazakhstan had two crucial consequences for the balance of power. First, it elevated the position of the central and regional executive organs over the legislative branch. Thus, the only established actors who perceived that their power was decreasing relative to other actors were members of the legislative branch at both the central and regional levels. Second, it augmented rather than reduced regional leaders’ influence on policy making and its implementation. As a result, leaders in the executive branch at both the central and regional levels developed the perception that their own political power was increasing relative to the other as the transition proceeded. Central leaders, for example, cited the increasing power of the presidency over the parliament as an indication of their own growing influence in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Indeed, some claimed that the parliament’s dissolution increased the value of their advice to the president. Central leaders in the executive and legislative branches alike also believed that the legislature would never restore itself to its former prominence. Members of the presidential apparatus expressed relief that the executive had essentially “won the battle,” such that the legislature was no longer going to “interfere” in policymaking. Several regional akims (hokims) noted that when the regional and local soviets “spontaneously” dissolved themselves in December 1993, their position improved dramatically. One regional leader in particular described the event as “making it clear” that those
in his position represented "the real locus of power in Kazakhstan."
The newly appointed regional akims also exhibited a strong sense of
security in their positions, particularly those who had held prior
positions in the oblast and thus had the opportunity to build up a
regional power base. In contrast, following this particular event,
regional leaders who had previously served in the legislative branch
insisted that it was no longer considered prestigious to serve in the
regional legislature because this institution had become "senseless"
(Luong 2002: 142).

Kazakhstan's shift toward a president-dominated, mildly authoritarian state
has constrained the evolution of a more democratic political culture. According to
M.B. Olcott Kazakhstan approached a genuinely pluralist polity with a working
legislature and unfettered media in the mid-1990s, only to abandon this course later
in the decade as President Nursultan Nazarbayev exploited the powers of the
presidency, marginalized the parliament, and brought much of the mass media under
the control of his family. Nazarbayev, motivated by a deep-seated fear of centrifugal
forces occasioned by the example of Russia under Boris Yeltsin, consistently sought
to curb grass-roots social forces and limit local autonomy (Olcott 2002: 87-127).

Political Parties in Kazakhstan
The presence of political parties is a core issue for the development of democracy in
a newly independent state. The emergence of political movements has started in the
period of Glassnost and Parestroika. Bladimir Babak has focused on the emergence
of political organisations in Kazakhstan. In December 1989 the Union of Social
Democrats was formed in Kazakhstan among the ranks of the Memorial Society. In
June this Union, a small group of 16 activists in reality, was admitted into the All-
Union Social Democratic Association. The activity of any party or public
organization that failed to register was prohibited by law. In 1995 the Kazakhstan
authorities imposed a new set of restrictions on public organizations. A presidential
decree of 17 March 1995 made punishable not only the creation of, but also
participation in, non-registered public associations, as well as organizations whose
activities had been suspended or banned. An additional article (63-3) was added to
the criminal code, entitled ‘Creation or Participation in Illegal Public Associations and Militias’ (Ro’i 2004: 148).

Several factors have combined to frustrate the emergence of the concept of a loyal opposition and the normal give and take of a fully democratic society in Kazakhstan. First is the obvious influence of President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who consistently promotes unity and stability, and tends to advocate a Soviet-style view of formal political opposition as anathema. Second is the overwhelming dominance in the national Majilis and the regional maslikhats of a single pro-presidential party, Otan (Fatherland). A third factor is the extraordinary performance of the national economy in recent years, and the consequent social and political stability. Most Kazakhs prefer a stable environment in which to improve their material well being, and credit Nazarbayev with their country’s relatively favourable position in Central Asia.

Evolution of political parties of Kazakhstan has its roots at the beginning of the 20th century. At that period Kazakhstan was a part of Russian Empire. The increased Russian influence and colonization policy in Kazakhstan led to the creation of the first political party of Kazakhstan, Alash Orda in 1917. This party was formed by the Kazakh aristocracy against the Tsarist regime. The main goals of the party were “political self-determination, the defense of Kazakh land from further Russian invasion, the creation of new land regulation, the formation and maintenance of Kazakh written language and the promotion of educational programs.” Alash Orda was the first manifestation of the national political consciousness of the Kazakh people. Being a part of the Soviet Empire, Kazakhstan could not avoid the omnipresence of the Communist party. The Bolsheviks tried to suppress nationally oriented movement and in 1928 Alash Orda lost its ruling position to the Communists (Bowyer 2008a: 11).

For seventy years Kazakhstan was under the control of the Communist party. Economic, cultural, and social life of the country was subordinated to the unlimited power of the party. The lack of finances may cause low participation of the parties in
the parliamentary elections, which require significant financial expenditures. The Zheltoksan Public Committee was one such political organization. It was created in 1989 by a group of participants in the December 1986 riots in Alma-Ata, who had subsequently suffered persecution by the authorities. They initially demanded only the rehabilitation of the victims of the riots, including financial compensation and social benefits. Within a short time, the Zheltoksan National Democratic Party, which stood primarily for the protection of the interests of Kazakhs, came into being.

The Azat Civil Movement of Kazakhstan, created in July 1990, was similar in character. At first, its formal demands did not go beyond the usual claims of the Kazakh political elite: recognition of the republic's sovereignty, the adoption of a constitution and other attributes of independence, the restoration of original Kazakh toponyms, and the creation of an independent banking and financial system. Azat's first co-chairmen were Marat Chormanov, a former official of the Alma-Ata City Party Committee (gorkom) and Mikhail Isinaliyev, a former minister of foreign affairs. However, in 1994, when the well-known dissident Hasen Kozha-Ahmet, hitherto leader of Zheltoksan, took over as Azat's leader, the movement became more radical and overtly oppositionist. It blamed the authorities for the difficult situation of the predominantly Kazakh rural population, for the decline of the Kazakh language, and for widespread corruption.

The Republican Party fell into the same category. It assumed a radical stance on inter-ethnic relations. Its leadership believed that the interests of the Kazakhs should take precedence over those of the republic's other nationalities. The social base of these parties was rather narrow, and they never attained a politically meaningful membership. As soon as their main proclaimed goal the attainment of independence was achieved, their activity, to a certain degree, became obsolete and they switched to criticizing the government's social policy. Internal strife, and the ultimate split in Zheltoksan, did not enhance their popularity. The Alash party, established in Kazakhstan in 1990, can also be classified as a radical party of nationalist character. It derived its name from the nationalist Alash party, which existed at the beginning of the twentieth century in the Kazakh and Kyrgyz regions.
of the Russian Empire and championed the interests of the indigenous population of Turkestan and the steppe. In adopting the name Alash, the party leaders sought to emphasize the continuity and relevance of the idea of national revival based on the principles of Islam, reflecting the goals of the radical national element of society. Its slogans were supported primarily by marginal sections of the native population, especially among the youth (Ro’i 2004: 149-50).

Thus, population of Kazakhstan does not know much about political parties and does not seek to be informed about them. In October 1999 parliamentary elections were held in Kazakhstan. According to Bowyer, Kazakhstan’s political party landscape is currently dominated by the ruling Nur-Otan party, which dominates parliament and the public debate. However, numerous other political parties exist. Outside of Nur-Otan, the present-day political parties in Kazakhstan can be grouped into three categories: Pro-presidential, “Soft” Opposition, and “Hard” Opposition. Numbering among the current Pro-presidential political parties are Rukhniyat and the Party of Patriots. Those falling into the category of Soft Opposition are the recently reconstituted party Adilet, Ak-Zhol, Auyl, the Communist Party, and the Communist People’s Party. Those in the category of Hard Opposition, those most opposed to the current leadership, include the All-National Social Democratic Party, Azat (formerly Naghyz Ak-Zhol) and the unregistered political movement Alga. Civil Party of Kazakhstan was created in 1998. To achieve this goal, the leaders stand for the decrease of state influence in economy and development of the private initiatives. There are weak and strong sides of the party. However, this opposition party was the only one, which could propose a serious economic programme for further development of the country, on the lines of mixed economy. In any democratic society, the power is supported by political parties (Bowyer 2008a: 12).

According to Bowyer the opposition parties are Pro-presidential, he categorised them as “Soft” Opposition, and “Hard” Opposition: Pro-Presidential Parties are Rukhniyat: this registered in 2003. It Led by Altyndush Zhaganova, it tends to support the ruling government’s position. The Party of Patriots of
Kazakhstan (PPK) was established in 2000 and led by Gani Kasimov, it maintains a website www.ppk.gl.kz.

"Soft" Opposition: Adilet (Justice): The recently re-constituted Adilet Party, which merged with Ak-Zhol for the 2007 elections, has assumed the status of a pro-presidential party. It maintains www.dp-adilet.kz, and fights for justice and against corruption. It is led by Maksut Narikbayev, and is active in its critique of government. Ak-Zhol (Bright Path): Ak-Zhol is led by Alikhan Baimenov, who ran as the party's candidate for president in the 2005 election. The Kazakh Social Democratic Party Auyl (Village): Auyl was established in 2002 and promotes itself as a party for the defence of rural districts and social justice. Communist Party of Kazakhstan (CPK): The Communist Party of Kazakhstan, the original successor to the Communist Party of the Kazakhstan SSR, was re-formed in October 1991 and registered in February 1994. Communist People's Party: The Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan (CPPK) was registered prior to the 2004 parliamentary elections. "Hard" Opposition: Azat (former Naghyz Ak-Zhol, True Bright Path): The newly renamed Azat party claims to be the most structured and popular democratic opposition party in the country. Its founders, which split with Alikzhan Baimenov's Ak-Zhol party in 2005, They claim their former Ak-Zhol colleagues to be "puppets of the administration," while they alone are true standard-bearers of opposition to the ruling elite. In February 2008 the party called a congress and formally changed its name to "Azat" [Freedom] party. All-National Social Democratic Party (NDSP): Following his unsuccessful presidential bid in 2005, Zharmakhan Tuyakbai established the NSDP in January 2007. Alga ("Forward") People's Party (unregistered): The Alga Party, still unregistered and not a participant in the 2007 elections faced a leadership void in 2007. Alga emerged from the banned, former Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DCK) after that movement weakened in early 2005. The DCK had been among the country's strongest opposition groupings before its demise. Besides the above three groups of political parties, there are other parties and political movements that are active in Kazakhstan these are Republican People's Party (RNPK) Azamat Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DCK), For A Just Kazakhstan. (Bowyer 2008b: 14-36). The political parties have more space in Kazakhstan and they are trying to establish a multiparty system.
Elections in Kazakhstan

A parliamentary election was held in Kazakhstan on 18 August 2007. 107 seats were at stake in the Majilis, an increase of 30, following recently passed constitutional amendments. Under the changes, party lists elected 98 deputies, an increase from just 10 in the last legislature. The remaining nine seats are reserved for the Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan. The President’s party, Nur-Otan, received about 88% of the vote and won all of the available seats. None of the six other parties contesting the election reached the 7% threshold to win seats. The election was described on state television as “a real step towards democracy”, although the opposition Nationwide Social Democratic Party, which received almost 5% of the vote, denounced the election, and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe observers said the election showed some progress, but was also marred by problems, saying that “in over 40 percent of the polling stations visited, [vote counting] was described as bad or very bad”, which was worse than in the last parliamentary and presidential elections. Bias in the state media was also considered a problem.

Proposed Reforms in Kazakhstan

The 2007 amendment to the Constitution of Kazakhstan modified Kazakhstan’s basic law, on May 18, 2007. The changes followed the conclusion of the activities of the ‘State Commission on Democratization’ formed two years earlier. In a speech on May 16 to the Joint Session of the Chambers of Parliament, President Nursultan Nazarbayev summarized the development of Kazakhstan since independence in 1991, and outlined his proposed constitutional changes. The main changes proposed by the President were as follows:

- To reduction of the presidential term from 7-years to 5-years, coming into effect after the next election in 2012.
- To adopt proportional representation for the Majilis, or lower Chamber of deputies to increase the number of senators selected by the President, from 7 to 15.
• To give to the Senate the power of consultation on the appointment of a President of the National Bank.

• To increase the number of Majlis deputies to 107 - 98 deputies elected by proportional representation and 9 deputies representing the Assembly of the Peoples' of Kazakhstan. The total number of the parliamentary deputies will therefore increase by 38 and will amount to 154.

• To strengthen the powers of political parties by depriving members of the Majilis of their mandate in the event that they are expelled from their party.

• To make the government accountable not only to the Head of State, but to the whole Parliament, by giving the Government a vote of no-confidence. It will be sufficient for the Majilis to have a simple majority of deputies' votes compared with the previously required two thirds of votes, in order to dismiss the government.

• To change the procedure for forming the Constitutional Council and the Central Election Commission. This will occur via the introduction of a law whereby two thirds of the Constitutional Council, the Central Election Commission and Auditing Committee will be formed by Parliament to change the procedure of forming the Government, where the Prime Minister is appointed by the President, so that the approval of such appointments, and consequently that of the entire Government, is delegated to the Majilis.

• To introduce a change whereby the composition of the Government shall be formed according to the proposals of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister will also represent the parliamentary majority party.

• To abolish the constitutional prohibition of state funding of NGOs.

• To develop a procedure for the partial funding of political parties from the state budget.

• To abolish the death penalty in Kazakhstan.

In addition to these proposals the Kazakh parliament passed an additional amendment two days later, lifting the term-limit clause on the first President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, in a move that paved the way for him to become de facto President for life.
Kazakh Media

The right to freedom of expression has long been recognized as a crucial human right. It is of fundamental importance to the functioning of democracy, a necessary precondition for the exercise of other rights and, in its own right, it is essential to human dignity. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR), the flagship human rights instrument adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, protects the right to freedom of expression. Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes the right to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Media are relatively free by Central Asian standards. However, despite press freedom being enshrined in Kazakhstan’s constitution, monitors report that privately owned and opposition media are routinely harassed and censored. In 2004 the International Federation of Journalists identified a “growing pattern” of intimidation of the media. *Reporters Without Borders* in its annual report of 2004 said that “such independence remains largely theoretical because most of the media is controlled by associates of President Nursultan Nazarbayev, notably his daughter, Dariga Nazarbayev”.

All media with the exception of websites are required to register with the Ministry of Culture, Information and Sports. In practice, media outlets known to be associated with opposition political parties or movements are frequently refused registration, as OSCE has pointed out in its 2006 report of Memorandum on Kazakhstan’s Law on Mass Media. In November 2001, the political situation was rocked by disagreements among the country’s elite that found their way into the media. Newspapers and TV channels that were owned by the leaders of the newly established movement *Kazakhstan’s Democratic Choice* started putting out numerous stories criticizing the top leadership of the state, their actions and their style of governance. Back then, the head of state had to warn some leading businessmen that if such compromising articles continued to be published against
individuals and government structures that incite public opinion, he will have to, as the head of state, take against these private media “draconian measures and explain to the people why it is being done.” The President also made it clear that he knows what “draconian measures” the oligarchs themselves take against journalists working in their media.

The Ministry of Culture, Information and Public Accord, the Prosecutor and the police look at the media not as equal players on the information market but as potential violators whose views can be brushed aside and that they can be governed through intimidation and restrictions. In practice this leads to attempts to actually introduce censorship. For example, the city newspaper Baykonyr received in May last year a directive from the deputy head of the city (akimat) Alexander Lazarev describing how press releases from local organizations and companies should be published. The directive in detail prescribed the relationship between the newspaper, the city government and the local enterprises: all items set for publication in Baykonyr must be forwarded in written form and signed by respective officials to the city administration every Tuesday from 10 AM to 12 AM. By the end of business, the senior administration official has to prepare a summary to be sent to the newspaper itself, where the editor then discusses its publication (OSCE 2002: 10-13).

As Bhavana Dave has pointed out, Kazakhstan’s media are privately owned but controlled almost entirely by major financial groups affiliated with key members of the regime and the major pro-regime political parties. Further amendments to an already restrictive Law on the Media make it impossible for banned news outlets to re-register or for banned journalists to be absorbed by existing media channels. The government continues to block internet access to opposition websites and imposes limits on the registration of internet domain names. Members of the regime sponsor internet sites that wage disinformation campaigns to discredit the opposition and critics of government and to publish periodic “blacklists” of such individuals. Though amendments to the Law on the Media have further undermined the modicum of independent media that exists in the country, Kazakhstan has been forced to offer a measured response to the widespread international attention and
negative publicity it has received owing to its handling of the satirical film Borat (Nations in Transit 2007: 327).

Bhavana Dave has further explained that leading financial groups and business interests entrenched in the regime own an overwhelming proportion of the country's media channels and newspapers, which offer some criticism of the government but without touching the president, members of his family, or close associates within the regime. Khabar, the state news agency set up in 1996 with Dariga Nazarbaeva (President's daughter) at its head, exerts extensive formal and informal control over the country's media. The state owns 50 percent plus one share in this privatized media holding company, while the remaining shares are in private hands, widely seen as owned by Nazarbaeva, Aliev, and groups connected with them. The couple also holds numerous shares in several privatized newspaper and media channels and owns another subsidiary, Alma Media, which has four television channels, several radio stations, and a number of newspapers. The opposition leader Altynbek Sarsenbaev (who held the position of minister of culture, information, and public accord in 2004 before resigning over differences with the government) had consistently referred to Khabar as a monopoly of Nazarbaeva and her family. Sarsenbaev presented evidence stating how the family had acquired the majority shares, for which he was taken to court and fined 1 million tenge (about US$71,000) in 2005 (Nations in Transit 2007: 337).

**Kazakhstan Television**

*Kazakhstan* is the state television channel of Kazakhstan. Other countrywide television stations are *Khabar* and *Yel Arna*. *Khabar* is owned by the President's daughter and therefore rarely broadcasts criticism of his policy. According to government statistics there are 116 private channels, including *Kanal* and KTK, with varying coverage across the nation. American shows are also popular in Kazakhstan. OSCE has pointed out the situation of media in Kazakhstan in 2002 that Kazakhstan celebrated ten years of independence. President Nursultan Nazarbayev's urge to hear praises regarding the recent economic and democratic changes in the country (a
tradition from the old Soviet past still echoed in the government media) provoked his discontent with the large number, in his opinion, of critical publications in the independent media. Starting in January 2001, he publicly stated on several occasions that such critical publications in the non-government media spoiled Kazakhstan’s image abroad, did not coincide with the country’s national interests and were a threat to its security. The President also uttered this now famous phrase: “The independent media is called independent because nothing depends on it.” Pauline Jones Luong also pointed out that incidents of government repression of the media increased, including shutting down or denying access to the press, sanctions against journalists for harshly criticizing the government and for allegedly misquoting Nazarbayev, and an ever-expanding list of “forbidden topics” (Luong 2002: 143).

He further stresses that Regional Governors (Hokim) are supporting the central government attitude towards media. Some akims responded by shutting down opposition newspapers or discrediting particular journalists, while others used this as an opportunity to promote themselves and their own policies in the local press.

Newspapers in Kazakhstan

A wide range of publications, mostly supportive of the government, are available. The authority operates one of the two national Russian-language newspapers and the only regular national Kazakh language newspaper. According to government statistics, there were 990 privately owned newspapers and 418 privately owned magazines. The newspapers which are supportive of the opposition face harassment and lawsuits.

In May 2005 the Kazakh Information Ministry ordered one of the few opposition newspapers to close. The ministry accused Respublika of inciting ethnic hatred by publishing an interview with a Russian politician who made derogatory remarks about ethnic Kazakhstanis. Its editor, Irina Petrushova, fled to Russia in 2002 after intimidation and the firebombing of the paper’s offices. The paper’s deputy editor Galina Dyrdina called the closure politically-motivated, and vowed to appeal (Nations in Transit 2007).
On 13 June 2005 a court in Almaty ordered former Information Minister Altynbek Sarsenbaev (the opposition leader assassinated in January 2006) to pay 1 million tenges ($7,500) in damages for 'defaming' Khabar news agency. Sarsenbaev was also ordered to publicly retract comments he made in an interview with the opposition newspaper Respublika. He had alleged that Khabar was part of a monopolistic media holding controlled by Dariga Nazarbayev. The case is believed to be in response to his resignation after the 2004 elections. At the time he stated “The election was not fair, honest, or transparent; the authorities showed that from the beginning they didn’t want honest elections” (Nations in Transit 2007).

Judiciary in Kazakhstan

While Kazakhstan’s constitution recognizes the separation of the three branches of power and safeguards the independence of judiciary, in practice both the judiciary and the legislature remain subservient to the executive. The record of the judiciary over the past decade shows that it has consistently protected the interests of the ruling elites, state functionaries, and top business groups rather than those of individuals, minorities, and the weaker strata of society. It has particularly tended to toe the official line when penalizing the political opposition, independent media, and civil society activists who are critical of the government. The constitution provides an elaborate mechanism for appointing members of the Supreme Court. The president proposes nominees from among those recommended by the Supreme Judicial Council, which comprises the chairs of the Constitutional Council and of the Supreme Court, the prosecutor general, the minister of justice, senators, judges, and others appointed by the president. A number of constitutional amendments have reinforced presidential control over judicial appointments. Although Kazakhstan set up a Judicial Academy in 2004 with help from the OSCE/ODIHR, the quality of training remains substandard. The legal profession is perceived to be among the most prestigious ones, and this has led to a disproportionate number of lawyers, but their quality remains uneven. Kazakhstan has a National Human Rights Commission headed by an ombudsman, but he has only limited authority to monitor the government’s observance of human rights and is officially barred from any “interference with the work of either the police or the judicial system.” As a
presidential appointee, the ombudsman lacks an impartial image and the support of civil society and human rights activists (Nations in Transit 2010a: 265-67).

According to the Roger D. Kengas, while a legal regime exists in the country, the personal rule of President Nazarbayev remains paramount, and he has repeatedly used the legal system to undermine his political opposition. The apogee of these attacks came in 2001, when former Prime Minister Akezhan Kazhegeldin was tried in absentia for crimes ranging from corruption to abuse of power. Another individual who was targeted in recent years is the former Akim (Governor) of Pavlodar Oblast, Galymzhan Jakianov. Charged and convicted on corruption charges in 2002, Jakianov had reportedly challenged Nazarbayev on a number of procedural issues, specifically that Akims should be directly elected and not appointed by the President (Burghart and Sabonis-Helf n.d.: 75).

NGOs in Kazakhstan

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Kazakhstan are stronger than those found in other Central Asian countries, although they remain relatively weak and ineffective compared to those in Western democracies. Few truly independent organizations have regular access to the country’s decision-makers; a privileged position is reserved for NGOs connected to or led by elites with kin or friendship ties to government officials. Many in government, at the national and regional levels, display a Soviet-style mindset contemptuous of public opinion. Still, the political context is more favourable to the growth of civil society than in other Central Asian states.

Mostly, NGOs in Kazakhstan are working in the field of environment. Pauline Jones Luong and Erika Weinthal have shed light on the role of NGOs in Kazakhstan. They have pointed out that the environment is an especially appropriate vantage point from which the status of local NGOs since independence owing to its legacy as a ‘safe’, and hence particularly salient, can be investigated. A variety of Western NGOs such as ISAR (Initiative for Social Action and Renewal in Eurasia) have been actively supporting the development of local environmental NGOs in
Kazakhstan since the break-up of the Soviet Union. The development of the Caspian Basin also presents a situation ‘ripe’ for the emergence (or re-emergence) of local NGOs in support of environmental protection in Kazakhstan. They further stress that local NGOs have played an increasingly limited role in environmental policy making since independence, and this is as a result of both domestic and international constraints.

At the domestic level, local NGOs face institutional obstacles in a political system that has become more restrictive since 1994, and lack access to organisational resources owing to the continued decline in economic growth. At the international level, the interests and strategies of the multiple international actors involved –including Western NGOs, international donor organisations, foreign oil companies and foreign governments – often serve to hinder rather than enhance the role of local NGOs in promoting environmental protection in the energy sector. Thus, local environmental NGOs in Kazakhstan have grown though in number thanks to the financial encouragement of Western NGOs, yet their political impact has declined owing to the domestic circumstances in which they must operate. The convergence in goals and strategies among local environmental NGOs and Western NGOs has inadvertently contributed to the arrested development of a civil society in Kazakhstan.

Following the break-up of the Soviet Union, it seemed reasonable to expect environmental movements with strong grass-roots base to persist and indeed to strengthen their activities in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. First of all, the political climate relaxed considerably in the first few years of independence. President Nursultan Nazarbayev took a number of steps toward promoting democracy in Kazakhstan, including competitive Parliamentary elections in March 1994. During that time the country witnessed a proliferation of independent organisations across various issues, including human rights organisations such as the Kazakh-America Bureau on Human Rights, as well as the active mobilization of Soviet-era organisations such as revitalized trade unions under the leadership of Leonid Soloman. Secondly, the environmental situation actually became worse after independence. Not only had earlier environmental problems not yet been effectively addressed, but also new threats to the environment emerged as a result of the Kazakhstan government’s drive...
to develop its vast energy reserves in the Caspian Basin. One indicator is the noticeable decline in sturgeon stocks in the Caspian Sea.

The general goals of local NGOs in Kazakhstan are multi-fold. First, the majority of groups consider that their main objective is to raise environmental awareness among the general population. Variation exists among the local NGOs concerning priority issues. Second, and linked to the first goal, is the desire to mitigate harmful effects on the natural environment in Kazakhstan. Third, a few groups, such as Green Salvation in Almaty, contend that their primary goals are to place environmental issues on the policy agenda and to encourage the government to promulgate environmental protection legislation. Fourth, a universal goal among local NGOs in Kazakhstan is to gain access to Western funding to ensure their survival (Luong and Weinthal 1999: 1268-71).

Some western NGOs are also working and are more influential and popular than the local one. Pauline and Erika have mentioned this fact that like local NGOs, the main goal of Western NGOs with respect to Kazakhstan’s environment is to promote environmental awareness among the public and government officials and in the private sector. Second, Western NGOs seek to encourage environmental protection and local activism, which they consider to be an integral part of their larger goal of sustainable development. Third, Western NGOs strive to foster a viable environmental movement as a way of promoting democratisation in Kazakhstan. They equate the creation of LNGOs (local NGOs) in the short term as a tool to engender the development of a viable civil society in the long term. Finally, the American Legal Consortium in particular has sought to develop a legal sector that would be conducive to the growth and expansion of local NGOs. Western NGOs have spent a considerable amount of time conducting seminars and holding conferences to teach local NGOs in Central Asia how to write grant applications and developing informational networks among them. Both tasks are aimed at helping local NGOs continue to achieve international recognition and to acquire international support. In order to empower local actors and communities to address their own environmental problems, Western NGOs teach local NGOs decision-
making techniques and assist in information collection and dissemination. Many of the grants awarded have been used to buy computers and establish internet access for local NGOs (Luong and Weinthal 1999: 1272-74).

Kazakhstan credits itself with being the most open, prosperous, tolerant, and democratic country in the Central Asian region, but in practice the policies and actions of the government are increasingly similar to those of other Central Asian states. Indeed, the country's rising prosperity, liberal economic climate, and growing engagement with the international community have failed to create a hospitable environment for the development of civil society and democracy. Instead, by hailing the achievement of the OSCE chairmanship as an affirmation of Kazakhstan's democratic commitment, the ruling elite is seeking to legitimate a patronage-based regime that is deeply fearful of and resistant to genuine democratization and civic activism. As with political parties, all NGOs, public associations, and religious bodies are required by law to register with the Ministry of Justice. One of the most basic civil liberties, the right to public assembly, remains severely curtailed in Kazakhstan, as any group of more than 20 people must secure permission from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to assemble (Nations in Transit 2010a: 259).

But government has some restrictions on NGOs. The legal and political constraints placed on local NGOs by Kazakhstan's government limit the range of possible strategies that both local NGOs and Western NGOs can pursue. The most striking example is Kazakhstan's Civil Code, which restricts NGO participation in political activity by defining non-profit organizations as engaged purely in social and philanthropic activities. In this sense, the Civil Code contradicts the Law on the Environment, which declares that citizens have the right to create public organizations and public funds to protect the environment and that they have the right to participate in meetings, movements and demonstrations for the protection of the environment. The current political climate is also unfavourable to the development of an active NGO sector. Overall, NGOs face insurmountable difficulties in Kazakhstan owing to the limited degree of democratization that has taken place in the system as a whole since independence and especially since the end
of 1994. Since the spring of 1995, Nazarbayev embarked on a direct and unimpeded path toward the centralization and concentration of power (Luong and Weinthal 1999: 1274-75).

The International Foundation for Protection of Freedom of Speech “Adil Soz” expresses its deep concern over the recent mass repression against independent media in Kazakhstan. Websites http://www.zonakz.net, http://www.geo.kz, http://www.kompromat.kz and internet radio station http://www.inkar.info remain blocked since 23 October 2007. The website http://www.kub.kz was removed from the Kazakh segment of the internet without justification (see IFEX alert of 30 October 2007). All three newspapers carry out an independent news policy and have sought to cover a recently arisen conflict of interest between the political elites and the former ambassador of Kazakhstan to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the President’s former son-in-law Rakhat Aliyev, in a broad and objective manner, giving a chance to cover both sides of the story.

Adil Soz is calling on the authorities to clarify the situation over the closed websites and other recent cases of intimidation and persecution against independent media outlets. This situation is unacceptable, especially in the wake of the OSCE decision on Kazakhstan’s presidency in 2009. Freedom House condemned Kazakh Government’s blocking of websites, as the censorship is in direct contradiction to OSCE chairmanship bid.

The following websites were blocked for approximately three days during the week of 22 October 2007: kub.kz, zonakz.net, geo.kz and inkar.info, all of which take an opposition or non-regime line. This sort of blocking activity happens on a periodic but regular basis in Kazakhstan, especially with kub.kz sites. The authorities deny being behind the blockages but the shutdown fits the earlier profile of such blocking by government.

All of the websites that were blocked in the current case have recently run stories about apparent official efforts to silence Rakhat Aliev, the now estranged former son-in-law of President Nursultan Nazarbayev. Recently, Aliev accused President Nazarbayev of directly ordering the murder of opposition leader Altynbek
Sarsenbaev in February 2006. “The Kazakh authorities’ censoring of these websites is directly at odds with basic press freedom principles and Kazakhstan’s commitments as a member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe,” said Freedom House executive director Jennifer Windsor.

The OSCE chairman-in office represents the organization and coordinates all OSCE activities. With 56 participating states from Europe, Central Asia and North America, the OSCE forms the largest regional security organization and has on its agenda a wide range of issues, including human rights and democratization. Kazakhstan ranks Not Free in Freedom of the Press, Freedom House’s annual survey of global media independence. Kazakhstan also ranks as Not Free in Freedom in the World. The country received a 6 (on a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 as the lowest) for political rights, and a 5 for civil liberties rankings.

**Democratic Institutions in Uzbekistan**

Following the failure of the coup against the Gorbachev government in Moscow in August 1991, Uzbekistan’s Supreme Soviet declared the independence of the republic, henceforth to be known as the Republic of Uzbekistan. At the same time, the Communist Party of Uzbekistan voted to cut its ties with the CPSU; three months later, it changed its name to the People’s Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (PDPU), but the party leadership, under President Islam Karimov, remained in place. Independence brought a series of institutional changes, but the substance of governance in Uzbekistan changed much less dramatically. Since independence, Islam Karimov has dominated Uzbekistan since the independence. A long-time Communist Party functionary who reinvented himself as an Uzbek nationalist during the Gorbachev era, Karimov consolidated his personal dictatorship as Uzbekistan’s president in the first year after independence. Till this time, Uzbekistan’s system of government could reasonably be called a sultanistic regime or authoritarian regime. Karimov’s dominance of the country was virtually absolute. His portrait stared down at people in schools, hotel lobbies, stores, and almost everywhere else.  

1 Researcher’s observation in fieldwork, while travelling and visiting the institutions in Uzbekistan.
On December 21, 1991, together with the leaders of ten other Soviet republics, Karimov agreed to dissolve the Soviet Union and form the Commonwealth of Independent States, of which Uzbekistan became a charter member according to the Alma-Ata Declaration. Shortly thereafter, Karimov was elected president of independent Uzbekistan in the new country’s first contested election. Karimov drew 86 percent of the vote against opposition candidate Mohammed Salih, whose showing experts praised in view of charges that the election had been rigged. The major opposition party, Birlik, had been refused registration as an official party in time for the election (Kort 2004: 132).

Constitution of a country lays down the basic structure of political system under which its people are to be governed. The constitution of country may also be described as fundamental law which established the main organs of the state, the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. The constitution defines their powers, demarcates their responsibilities and regulates their relationships with each other and the people.

Every constitution represents the vision and values of its founding fathers and is based on the social political and economic ethos and also on faith or aspirations of the people. Uzbekistan adopted the constitution in 8 December 1992. It guarantees a democratic multi-party system, freedom of expression and the observance of Human Rights. This constitution emphasizes on secularism. There was particular concern that the constitution appeared to place the president above the constitution. As Leonid Levitin has commented on the constitution, there were no debates on constitution in Uzbekistan. The constitution was completed and enacted as quickly as possible (Levitin 2001: 174).

In Uzbekistan constitution, the highest organ of power is the legislature. However in practice the actual functioning of government is better described as a unitary, presidential system. The Constitution also provides numerous and rights guarantees including freedom of speech, assembly and religion, gender and ethnic equality, and property rights. However, these rights are frequently violated in practice. Human rights activists and free journalists are treated as culprits. “The main problem of Uzbek Constitution is how to resolve the conflict between western
Constitutionalism and the traditional life style of Uzbek society with its centuries-old Islamic traditions”. This is the view given by Leonid Levitin.

Uzbek society is a traditional society; one cannot implement the western norms in a country like Uzbekistan. As President Karimov has already explained, they are developing their own model of democracy, which is suitable to their country. Traditions are the cornerstone of the society’s instructions; model of behaviour and values have been passed down to generation to generation. As Leonid Levitin has pointed out about traditional values which are related to democratic process, they have inherited traditional democratic traditions. The Uzbek people have the institution of Mahallah, which is a good example (Levitin 2001: 180).

Democratic institutions must be appropriate to the society for public life, such as shared values, forbidden things, patterns of labour and everyday standards. The Mahallah is an example of a democratic system. In the absence of such institutions the democracy exists only on paper.

The Parliamentary election, the first held under the new Constitution’s guarantee of universal suffrage to all citizens of eighteen years of age or older, excluded all parties except the PDPU and the pro-government Progress of the Fatherland Party, despite earlier promises that all parties would be free to participate. The new 250-seat parliament, called the Oly Majlis or Supreme Soviet, included only sixty-nine candidates running for the PDPU. Moreover, an estimated 120 more deputies were PDPU members technically nominated to represent local councils rather than the PDPU. The result was that Karimov’s solid majority continued after the new Parliament went into office.

For the making the Constitution, “a draft was published in the summer of 1992, subjected to some discussion in the media and then adopted by parliament in mid-December. Uzbekistan opted for what was in effect a presidential system. This document also promised a wide range of civil freedoms although its adoption
coincided with the arrest of many oppositionists and a parliamentary vote to remove the registration of the Birlik (Unity) Popular Front" (Anderson 1997a: 302).

The Constitution which was ratified a year after independence, on 8th December 1992, clearly spell out Uzbekistan’s commitment to the protection of human rights and various individual freedoms, including the right to privacy. Yet reminiscent of the Soviet era Constitution of the republics, these rights are limited if they infringe on the “rights of societies” (Kangas 1994b: 178). Now these rights will be defined by the ruling elite making them extremely powerful. For that reason, in the initial years of the nineties, there seemed to be a healthy democratic growth within the nation. But after independence there is a spurt of the ethnic nationalism that started speeding like wildfire. To control such threats Karimov initiated the process of suppression and repression of those who tired to put any opposition to his policies and decisions. So, the institutional development of the Uzbekistan was done under the ruse of the President Karimov.

In 1993 Karimov’s concern about the spread of Islamic fundamentalism spurred Uzbekistan’s participation in the multinational CIS peacekeeping force sent to quell the civil war in nearby Tajikistan – a force that remained in place for three years because of continuing hostilities. Meanwhile, in 1993 and 1994 continued represssion by the Karimov regime brought strong criticism from international human rights organizations. In March 1995, Karimov took another step in the same direction by securing a 99 percent majority in a referendum on extending his term as president from the prescribed next election in 1997 to 2000. In early 1995, Karimov announced a new policy of toleration for opposition parties and coalitions, apparently in response to the need to improve Uzbekistan’s international commercial position. A few new parties were registered in 1995, although the degree of their opposition to the government is doubtful, and imprisonments of some opposition political leaders are continued.
To further centralize his authority, Karimov signed a 1993 decree formalizing presidential appointment of all regional executive offices and *hokims* (governors) (Kangas 1994a: 276). In addition, Karimov has purged potential rivals from the executive leadership, as evidenced in his treatment of Shukhrullo Mirsaidov (Kangas 1994a: 289). In this way, a strong central leader, who dominates on all democratic and semi-democratic elements and mechanisms of the country have moulded Uzbeki politics. Creation of democratic institutions in Uzbekistan can be divided into two phases. The first phase, between 1991 and 1995, can be called the phase of ‘chaotic or naïve democracy’, the most visible feature of which was the overall strengthening of national representative institution, the parliament. This democratic process had a drawback, however. The increase of the overall political role of the parliament without its parallel professionalization resulted in the intensification of spontaneity in the political processes. The overall decrease of the professional level of governance, as a result of attempts at intervention by parliamentary institutions into the competence areas of the executive branch, pushed the executive power to limit the role of these democratic institutions. This phase came to an end by the middle of the 1990s when it became obvious that the state had lost control over social and economic processes in the republic. In the second (and current) phase, beginning from the middle of the 1990s, the tendency to strengthen presidential power, as a reaction to the perceived loss of control over social and economic development, can be observed. This remains an ongoing process in all the states of Central Asia.

As Erica Marat has pointed out, “The political opposition in Uzbekistan is systematically undermined or forced out of the country. However, with the increasing political and economic involvement of the United States in the region, there are signs that the secular opposition is becoming more assertive, while the government shows initial signs of gradually changing its policies. The convertibility of the Uzbek currency is one example; another is the muted reaction of the Uzbek security structures to Erk’s demonstration and congress. While these events clearly point to changing tactics on the part of Karimov’s government toward the political opposition, it remains to be seen whether it constitutes a move towards the liberalization of the politics or a move to weaken and divide the opposition”. Uzbekistan began its life as an independent state in 1991 with a seemingly stable
economy, an educated population, claims to the Silk Road’s culture, and ambitious post-Soviet plans. But the political situation of Uzbekistan remains insecure. It is difficult for the country to survive without Moscow’s subsidies, its economy is weaker and its polity is more divided than Uzbeks had assumed. The long central Asia’s land bridge between nomadic and settled societies, its fertile crescent – a cotton economy since Soviet times – has nurtured a succession of feudal, Islamic, communist, and nationalist political cultures.

President Islam Karimov, the leader of PDPU, the successor party of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, that ceased to exist after the disintegration of Soviet Russia, is a communist-era veteran, who knows how to keep cities clean and roads paved, believes that order is imposed, not grown. For 19 years, he has kept a tight lid on politics, and his Western interlocutors have wavered between accepting and condemning his political views and repressive habits. Karimov is the in-between autocrat in a region dedicated to constancy in rule rather than the vagaries of self-government. He is neither outwardly free-wheeling like Kyrgyzstan’s Askar Akaev nor protecting a personality cult as Turkmenistan’s Saparmurat Niyazov so avidly does.

Since there is no history of democratic rule in these countries, democracy is perceived there as, at the best an ideal for some distant future, not as a best system to resolve Uzbekistan’s problems today. In general, while traditional values in Uzbekistan tend to emphasize fairness and certain other democratic values, the current situation supports relatively authoritarian system and leaders. Now the question arises what attempts have been taken to establish democracy in Uzbekistan. The establishment of a constitution, the first step towards the democratization forms the beginning of his Presidency. Karimov remains committed in words to instituting democratic reforms. The Constitution adopted in December 1992 divides the entire system in three parts: strong Presidency, the Oly Majlis and the Judiciary.

As commander in chief of the armed forces, the president also may declare a state of emergency or of war. The president is empowered to appoint the prime
minister and full cabinet of ministers and the judges of the three national courts, subject to the approval of the Oly Majlis, and to appoint all members of lower courts. The president also has the power to dissolve the parliament, in effect negating the Oly Majlis' veto power over presidential nominations in a situation of power struggle.

Deputies to the unicameral Oly Majlis, the highest legislative body, are elected to five-year terms. The body may be dismissed by the president with the concurrence of the Constitutional Court, because that court is subject to presidential appointment, and the dismissal clause weights the balance of power heavily toward the executive branch. The legislations constituted by Oly Majlis may be initiated by several authorities like the president, within the Parliament, by the high courts, by the procurator general (highest law enforcement official in the country), or by the government of the Autonomous Province of Karakalpakstan.

As Mirsky has commented, the victory of Karimov in the first Presidential election was more or less easy as being the first former secretary of the Communist Party (Mirsky 1992: 337). PDPU and Karimov has been instrumental in creating a pattern of one party system, which has worked significantly for the betterment of Uzbek polity on economic terms but has been able to curb the other democratic voices within the nation.

Political Parties in Uzbekistan

The emergence of political movements in Uzbekistan has started during the Gorbachev period when he implemented the policies of Glasnost and Perestroika. In Uzbekistan the Birlik national movement, founded in November 1988, had a national democratic orientation. Its programme was based on general democratic principles of social life and slogans of an Uzbek national revival. The movement consisted almost exclusively of ethnic Uzbeks. In the early stages of its activity, Birlik's main demand was that Uzbek be given the status of official language. Birlik’s programme proclaimed the revival of Uzbekistan’s cultural heritage and the
expansion of cultural and other links with ethnic Uzbeks living in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and other countries. It also included demands to adopt a special government programme designed systematically to increase the percentage of Uzbeks in the blue collar sector. The Birlik leadership made wide use of mass demonstrations and pickets, which aggravated the Uzbek authorities. In 1990 there was a split in Birlik, part of its members creating a new national democratic party, Erk. Birlik was permitted to register only in November 1991, but it was banned again just a year later, in December 1992. It tried to reregister in 1993 but permission was denied by the authorities (Ro’i 2004: 152).

After the disintegration of Soviet Union, through the early 1990s, the government’s stated goal of creating a multiparty democracy in Uzbekistan went unrealized. When independence was gained, the Communist Party of Uzbekistan was officially banned, but its successor, the PDPU, assumed the personnel, structure and political domination of its predecessor. Since forcing out a small number of deputies from opposition parties, PDPU members have complete control of the Supreme Soviet, and most members of other government bodies also are PDPU members. The only other legal party in Uzbekistan, the Progress of the Fatherland Party, was created by a key adviser to President Karimov, ostensibly to give the country a semblance of a multiparty system; but it differs little in substance from the PDPU. Similarly is the case of the political parties, such as the Vatan Tarakkieti (Progress of the Fatherland), Fidokorlar (Self Sacrificing), Milli Tiklanish (National Revival) and the Peasant’s Party, which are mostly appendages of PDPU. One exception could have been the Istiklal Yoli, a party founded in 1994, which termed itself to be an active opposition group to the PDPU. The December 1994 election, however, reaffirmed the virtual non-existence of a party system in Uzbekistan. Though Birlik has come back in the political spectrum in a new name of Khalq Birligi (People’s Unity), it is very difficult for the party members to breakthrough the strong suppression that PDPU has kept the nation under (Melvin 2004).

Even Erk has tried to regain back its political base in recent years. Erk held its first congress in 10 years in Tashkent on June 14 2003. Some 30 members of the
party’s central committee participated in the congress, criticizing the authorities and promising to be more active in Uzbek politics. The party’s leader inside Uzbekistan is Atonazar Arifov, as the party founder, Muhammad Salih lives outside Uzbekistan as he is exiled and politically banished by Karimov. They called on party members to be more active in domestic politics.

None of the several legitimate opposition parties that emerged in Uzbekistan before the disintegration of the Soviet Union has been able to meet the official registration requirements that the government created to maintain control and exclude them from the public arena. The first opposition party, Birlik, was created in 1988, primarily by intellectuals and writers under the leadership of the writer Abdurakhim Pulatov. The movement attempted to draw attention to the problems, ranging from environmental and social concerns to economic challenges, and to participate in their solution. The main weakness of Birlik was that it never was able to present a united front to the government. Soon after the party’s establishment, a group of Birlik leaders left to the party and set up a separate political party, Erk (Freedom), under the leadership of Mohammed Salih. The Uzbek government was able to exploit the disunity of the opposition and eventually to undermine their position. Following the establishment of independent Uzbekistan, the Karimov regime was able to suppress both Birlik and Erk. Both parties were banned officially; Erk was reinstated in 1994.

Other parties include the Movement for Democratic Reforms, the Islamic Rebirth Party (banned by the government in 1992), the Humaneness and Charity group, and the Uzbekistan Movement. A former Prime Minister (1990-91) and the former Vice President (1991) of Uzbekistan, Shukrullo Mirsaidov, created a new party, Adolat (Justice) in December 1994. Like Birlik and Erk, the Adolat calls for liberal economic reforms, political pluralism, and a secular society, but experts describe its opposition to the government as quite moderate. Nevertheless, Adolat has not been able to operate freely.
Kubicek has mentioned that opposition parties are technically allowed, but this is done only to create a veneer of democracy. Those parties that are allowed to function such as the *Mother Land Party* or the *Peasants’ Party*, all openly support the PDPU and these parties are in fact little more than extension of ruling party. Recently Karimov has created additional puppet parties. The true opposition parties and groups are hampered by government restrictions. The case of *Erk* and *Birlik* shows that government used its power at any level of government (Kubicek 1998: 32).

As Giampaolo R. Capisani has mentioned, on 18 and 19 January 1993, after the hasty trial in camera of some on the ground that they had unjustly criticized the President, the suspension of *Birlik* activities was total and shortly afterwards *Erk* met with the same fate. In August 1993, six of the *Erk*’s members were sentenced to between five to six years for ‘incitement to subversion’. On 25 October 1994 in Tashkent, the trial took place to prosecute seven clandestine Erk militants including the poetess Diloran Iskhakova, for conspiracy against the state. In March 1995, six dissidents were sentenced to 12 years for ‘conspiracy with intent to seize power’ (Capisani 2000: 82).

The *Islamic Renaissance party* and ‘*Adolat*’ (Justice) have also been denied registration and the reason was given that these parties are the source of Islamic fundamentalism. But in the views of Paul Kubicek, these parties represent an alternative to the existing political system in Uzbekistan (Kubicek 1998: 32).

N.I. Petrov has pointed out that the first repressive measures were in August 1992 under which the Tajik people’s forum (an expression of views on minority in Uzbekistan) was dissolved. During that same summer a political ‘campaign against repression’ organized by *Erk* and *Birlik* increasingly has become the targets of restrictions and this measure was unable to mobilize the population. And the process ended a few months later with the banning of both parties (Vasiliev 2001: 86). The Government of Uzbekistan is determining to totally suppress the threats that were coming from the opposition parties or organized movements.
Judiciary in Uzbekistan

Judiciary is an important pillar of democracy. The judiciary is branch of government that is empowered to decide legal disputes. The central functions of judges are to adjudicate on the meaning of law in the service and to interpret or construct law. The significance of this role is different from state to state and from system to system. It is important in states with codified constitutions where judiciary extends its power to interpretation of the constitution itself and allows judges to arbitrate the disputes between major institutions of government and between state and individual. The judiciary is also responsible for safeguarding the rights of people against encroachment by other individual, institutions, and the state itself.

Courts of law in post-Soviet countries are generally associated with the rights and freedoms of individual citizens. Court of Law is the institution that guarantees freedoms in society. “The construction of Uzbek provides for the equality of all branches of power, legislative, administrative and judicial” (Levitin 2001: 256). According to Roger D. Kangas, the Uzbek judicial system is structurally quite comprehensive. A Constitutional Court oversees the legality of parliamentary laws and executive decrees. In Uzbekistan, Supreme Court is the highest court for criminal and civil cases, and a Supreme Economic Court oversees matters such as privatization law, foreign investment and monetary disputes. The court system exists at multiple levels, with local level courts and appellate equivalents at regional and wiloyat (state) levels.

Leonid Levitin has pointed out that the stated equality before seems to exist only in the constitution and in various laws. “But the real picture is reverse. Court of law in Uzbekistan is largely unprepared to fulfill their new functions as the third branch of government. The courts are just as poor and dependent on the administrative branch of government today as they were in soviet times” (Levitin 2001: 257-59). It seems that after all not only the people but also the professional jurists do not really understand the significance of their new constitutional rights. In
Uzbekistan the power of judiciary has not been established in true spirit. People are not familiar with it. The common man cannot afford to pay money to advocates for his judicial need.

Leonid Levitin explained that the participation of Judges is not effective in Courts of law. In Uzbekistan excellent laws were passed: on 27 December 1996, ‘On advocacy’ and another on 25 December 1998, ‘On the guarantee of advocate’s activities’. But in reality the general social conditions and the poverty of segments of the population create unfair conditions with regard to the access of citizens to legal counsel. He also warned that the infections of courts of law in public life and in relation to government activity seriously damage progressive development in Uzbekistan (Levitin 2001: 258-59).

As N.I. Petrov has pointed out regarding judiciary, although court prosecution is also quite common, according to the official line there are no political cases in Uzbekistan. Human rights activists are tried as criminals on charges such as ‘humiliation of the president’s honor and dignity’ as was the case with Abdurahim Pulatov and Vasila Inoyatova. The most troublesome people such as the co-chairman of Birlik, Pulatov, were brutally beaten by unknown assailants (Vasiliev 2001: 86).

As Bruce Pannier has pointed out, the judiciary in Uzbekistan during 2006 was obviously functioning as a tool to implement President Karimov’s policies. The Ministry of Justice and the tax police worked to find violations by mostly Western-based NGOs working in Uzbekistan, while the court system, particularly Tashkent’s civil court, shut down these organizations. Similarly, courts handed down jail sentences to some of the few remaining opponents of the government, mainly human rights activists. In the case of these activists, appellate courts did on occasion reduce sentences, though verdicts were never overturned. However, the appeal courts did not reverse the decisions that closed down foreign-based NGOs. The guilty verdicts against NGOs, human rights activists, and anyone else who opposed the government or offered ideas contrary to those of the government demonstrated that a main purpose of the courts is to rid the country of groups and individuals the government sees as opponents or obstacles (Nations in Transit 2007: 759).
Thus the picture is clear that judiciary is very ineffective in Uzbekistan and it is unable to play its important role in establishing democracy.

Media in Uzbekistan

In recent era, the media is becoming more powerful to raise the issues of common people. Media is playing a role of fourth pillar of democracy. This is a very strong expression of freedom of speech. Uzbekistan’s media are subject to government control and manipulation, and many sources of information are circumscribed or excluded entirely. Government’s Control over the media continues to be a strong presence in the lives of journalists and reporters.

Although in both the Constitution and in the legislation of Uzbekistan there are no restrictions on freedom of expression, in reality the government has established almost complete control over all media. Since there are no opposition political parties, publishers and journalists are defenceless before a state system that is aimed at stifling dissent. The authorities prohibit any meaningful discussion of domestic problems in the media. State structures, just as during the old Soviet times, continue to use the media as a propaganda tool and as a mechanism to fight “enemies.” The number of issues that cannot be raised in the media is quite vast. In one case in an article titled ‘Exporters of Oil will Have to Move’ (published in the newspaper Toshkentskaya Pravda) all information related to the country’s oil potential had been censored notwithstanding the fact that it was made public by President Karimov during his trip to the United States. The content of the media also depends on the current foreign policy of the government. It has become common to use the media to voice discontent with the policies of other states and their leaders. Since all opposition political parties and leaders had to either go underground or leave the country after 1993, the media practically do not discuss issues related to the secular and Islamic opposition in Uzbekistan.

Any attempts to distribute opposition newspapers may lead to a prison term. Although the Constitution proclaims a diversity of political institutions and
ideologies and says that no ideology should become predominant, in practice there is a monopoly of the state ideology. It is called the "ideology of national independence" and all aspects of public and cultural life including the work of the media are judged on the merits of being in conformity with the "ideology of national independence." Dissenters are branded as "enemies of the people," or as "provocateurs who hate independence." A local TV station in Khorezm ALC was closed down after the authorities accused it, among other things, of "broadcasting programmes that are not in line with the national ideology of independence." The majority of laws adopted by the government actually are in contradiction with the Constitution of the country and nullify the rights and freedoms guaranteed by it (OSCE 2002: 107-09).

The ruling elite also saw to it that there was a covert press censorship in Uzbekistan. The government owned dailies in Uzbekistan mostly abstain from criticizing governmental policies and act mostly as the voice of the government in the masses. It has been evident that even those newspapers, which are directly not owned by the ruling elite, are under severe scrutiny of whatever they publish and distribute. There are strict repressive measures in place against those who think of airing grievance against the government in Uzbekistan. Even in the other democratization agencies like television, radio and news agencies, there has been a significant curtail of the freedom of speech and expression, in a way curtailing the growth of democratic institutions.

As N.I. Petrov has commented on Uzbekistan's media, Izvestiya, published in Moscow, was banned in the republic for a long time because it compromised itself by publishing libel laws materials about Uzbekistan. Some journalists working for Russian newspaper and sent to Uzbekistan were deported. The local media is facing rigid censorship; it can publish only positive and supportive material on the political situation in the republic. Karimov, answering to the censorship on media, claims that the Uzbek people are building their own national democracy and have no need to imitate western patterns. There is no independent press in Uzbekistan. The Moscow papers printed in Tashkent are censored. For example, in 1993, an apparently
innocent cartoon depicting Yeltsin, Karimov and Nazarbayev wearing Asian robes and dirking tea on a carpet featuring an imaging of a Russian 5000 rouble note in the Argumenty weekly, was replaced with an advertisement.

In March 1995 when Kanimov extended his term to year 2000 in a referendum which he won in Soviet style with 98% of vote, Uzbek radio claimed that the entire nation had unanimously voted in favour of the president, before the votes were officially counted (Kubicek 1998: 32). David Lewis has discussed the situation of media and information in Uzbekistan. “The Internet is becoming one of the key tools in countering government censorship, and many Uzbek sites are emerging. The government still blocks opposition sites. Internet access will remain unavailable to much of the population, and there is still a need for much more open media, in print, radio and television. NGOs are working in this area to promote free media but these attempts are not very successful.” (Mekenkamp, van Tongeren, and van de Veen n.d.: 201-02).

Uzbekistan has a severely restrictive political environment for the media. Although the Uzbek government officially eliminated state censorship in May 2002, in practice public criticism of the government remains limited. Under the country’s highly bureaucratic annual deregistration process, all media organizations are regarded to register with the government. In 2003, the government refused to renew the registration of the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), a London based NGO dedicated to the training and protection of journalists. The government explained that the IWPR was engaged in journalism, not training.

The Uzbek government prohibits live television programming; all shows are prepared on tape. The newspaper distribution system is also under government’s control. Thus the picture is clean regarding the functioning of media. Media is highly state controlled, and this is not fair to develop a democracy in a country. These are the symbols of authoritarianism. International Foundation for Protection of Freedom of Speech (Adil Soz) and the Center for Journalism in Extreme
Situations (CJES), along with 12 other IFEX members, have joined in solidarity to protest the ongoing harassment of independent journalists and public activists in Uzbekistan and to campaign for the release of independent journalist Umida Niyazova.

**Elections in Uzbekistan**

First competitive election to the newly established supreme legislative Parliament, established after the enactment of the Constitution in December 1991, took place in December 1994. All political parties got registered till 22 November 1994, when the law on election to the new legislature Oly Majlis was passed, were allowed to contest the elections. But only two political parties got the opportunity to contest the elections which were the Peoples Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (PDPU) and the Vatan Tarakkiyati (Progress of Fatherland Party). Other parties could not fulfil the essential requirements for the presidential elections. In this election 69 deputies were elected from the PDPU, 14 from the Progress of Fatherland Party and 167 deputies were nominated from the local councils. However, 124 members from the "non-affiliated" regional blocs were also members of the PDPU, thus giving the party a higher de-facto majority of 193 seats out of 250 seats in Oly Majlis. Again Karimov was re-elected as President (Levitin 2001: 47-48).

The 2002 Presidential elections (brought in bicameral legislature in the Uzbek Parliament. The people of Uzbekistan exercised their right to elect a Bicameral House of Representatives with upper and lower houses of the Oly Majlis (Parliament). The constitutional changes regarding the distribution of political power between the executive and legislative bodies and between the offices of President and Prime Minister were coupled with a nationwide public awareness campaign to educate the nation about the newly introduced structural reforms, the rights and duties of citizens as well as the role mass media plays in modernizing societies. The government of Uzbekistan appeared for the first time earnest in responding to international apprehensions about political transition by striving for broad-based public participation and improvements toward fair elections (Kazi 2004).
The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and other international organizations concerned with promoting democracy refused Uzbekistan’s offer to monitor the elections on the grounds that the voters clearly were not being allowed to participate in a genuine election. Just short of two years later, in November 2001, more than 90 percent of Uzbekistan’s voters dutifully came to the polls in yet another referendum to approve a constitutional amendment to extend the presidential term to December 2007. This was another example of what Karimov called “democracy, Uzbek style.” A representative of the international organization Human Rights Watch saw it differently, commenting that under the current conditions in Uzbekistan “there is no possibility for any free or fair vote, or for an informed choice to be made at the ballot box” (Kort 2004: 134).

In December 2007, Uzbekistan held a presidential election that saw incumbent Islam Karimov win an unconstitutional third term in office without any official attempt to explain the legal basis for this violation. Uzbekistan held elections to the Oliy Majlis, the lower house of parliament, on December 27, 2009. Though 508 candidates participated, all were from the country’s four registered political parties. Legislation passed in late 2008 excludes candidates from “initiative” groups or individual/independent candidates from running in elections. Mavjuda Ajabova, head of the Senate Committee for Legislation, commented in an Uzbek television programme that there was no longer a need for independent groups of voters since there are political parties and “because the majority of the population has been involved in the parties’ activities.” Uzbekistan’s four registered political parties are Adolat, Milli Tiklanish, People’s Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (PDPU – formerly the Communist Party of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic) and the Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (LDPU). The policies of the four parties and the movement are all pro-presidential. President Karimov himself has criticized the political parties on occasion for being so similar as to be nearly indistinguishable. This lack of true competition has lead to apathy and passivity, certainly on the part of voters (Nations in Transit 2010b: 576).
There is no scope for public involvement in political decision-making through formal, constitutional means. Even traditional community leaderships, such as the mahallah (community) chairmen, have been increasingly taken under the control of the state, and appointed rather than elected by local people. This all-embracing authoritarianism has provoked the growing memberships of groups such as Hizb-e Tahrir, as one of the few channels for the expression of dissatisfaction with the regime” (Mekenkamp et al. n.d.: 194). The lack of openness has also badly affected the efficiency of governance. With no opposition or critical media, there is little incentive for officials to do much except use their positions for self-advancement and self-enrichment.

The above analysis shows the manner in which the ruling elite with the assistance of the President has been active in the degeneration of democratic institutions and has strengthened their position in Uzbekistan’s political setup. The consolidation of power throughout Central Asia in the presidential branch, rather than decentralization through a system of checks and balances, is a worrying trend. Any government relying on one person rather than self-sustaining institutions that ensure the peaceful transfer of power is inherently unstable. In tightening their grip on power, the Central Asian leaders run the danger of inadvertently causing their reins to snap, with consequences hard to predict.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have same historical legacies. After the independence the ruling elite got the opportunity to make government according to their will. These republics are trying to establish democratic norms in government. Due to lack of democratic experience they are facing many problems to establish democracy. The Presidents of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have centralised the power in their hands. Political parties have not proper space for working properly. Opposition political parties have suppressed. Media is state controlled. State has the right to sensor the independent media. Branches of government like judiciary is not working independently because The Judge appointed by the President. Thus, Constitutionally these republics have all the essential elements of democratic government but in practice they are not working properly.