

# *In the Name of God*

# Assessing political stability and instability in Central Asia and Caucasus; case study, Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan



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**Abstract:**

The potential for instability in and around Central Asia and Caucasus is high. Political stability and instability are affected by many factors such as physical, geographic, economic, social, security, and political factors at the international and regional on the one hand, and national and local levels, on the other. The aim of this thesis is to study how these factors can affect political stability in Central Asia and Caucasus, in particular. Specifically, the thesis aims to study the relationship between political indicators such as rentier state policy, ethnic tension, government stability, and also economic indicator such as oil-rent and economic weakness. The analysis of the impact of economic and political indicators on the political stability provides a mechanism which affect political instability. Investigating two countries of this region(Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan), the study finds that economic and political indicators such as ethnic similarity, oil and gas resources and government stability have positive relationship with political stability, while indicators such as ethnic tension, economic weakness, and government-change affect stability negatively.

**Key words:** Central Asia and Caucasus, political instability, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan.

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# **Chapter One. Introduction**



## **1. Introduction**

The breakup of the Soviet Union led to the emergence of eight new states in the strategically important crossroads located north of the Middle East and the Persian Gulf region, west of China, and south of Russia. Three of them (Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) are situated in the European periphery-the mountainous area between the Greater Caucasus mountain range-defined by geographers as the boundary of Europe-and Turkey and Iran. In the Soviet lexicon, based on a Russo-centric viewpoint, this area was referred to as the Trans-Caucasus. A name for this sub-region that is more neutral in connotation-and one that is preferable in the post-Soviet era-is Caucasus.

The other five states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) are situated in the vast steppes and deserts stretching eastward from the Caspian Sea to the Altai and Pamir mountain ranges of Central Asia. For a variety of reasons, Soviet officials differentiated between Kazakhstan and what were then the other four Soviet republics, referring only to the latter as Central Asia. However, in the post-Soviet era the term has come to denote all five states. The term is geographically accurate, since the area encompasses a good portion of central-western Asia. Although the two areas, Caucasus and Central Asia, are quite distinct from each other in many ways, their common Soviet legacy and similar problems have led the two sub-regions to be lumped together in a geostrategic sense.

Common modern political definitions of Central Asia and Caucasus are limited to the states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in Central Asia and Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in Caucasus. Contemporary Central Asia and Caucasus is a geo-politically and geo-economically important region. The importance of Central Asia and Caucasus region in the geostrategic view is because of the presence of energy reserves (oil and gas) of a size that is significant at the global level, its role for connecting Asia to Europe, and Russia's sensibility about this region. At the same time it is

a rather problematic region, in which the existing and potential foci of instability reveal themselves concurrently in many dimensions, both domestic and foreign.

The new era offered an opportunity for democracy and prosperity to those people who had lived under various forms of undemocratic regimes for about two centuries. It also provided grounds for optimism about peace and political stability in Central Asia and Caucasus, that is, the region consisting of all the countries around and in close proximity to Caspian Sea, connecting Asia to Europe. The disintegration of the Soviet Union initiated a process of transition from a failing Soviet system built on a command economy to a hoped-for democratic one based on a type of free enterprise economy. The transitional process has only increased the political, economic, and social difficulties of the Caucasian and the Central Asian countries and the achievement of the desired new societies.

In the case of post-Soviet Central Asia, it may be tempting overlook state weakness, in part because the region is known for being comparatively weak, poor, and fragile. These five young states have historically maintained close colonial ties to Russia, first under the czars and then under the Soviets, not emerging as independent states until the fall of the USSR in 1991. Colonialism left its mark on this region; since independence these five states have struggled with impoverished and dependent economies, weak civil societies, and dangerously unstable neighbors like Afghanistan. Yet, almost twenty years after independence, some of them are significantly more likely to fail than others. Although a comparatively unpopulated and often forgotten corner of the world, state collapse in Central Asia could have far reaching consequences. It is generally accepted that weak and failed states provide an ideal breeding ground for terrorists and other criminal organizations, away from the prying eyes of an established government trying to enforce the law.

The spite of their differences in term of area, population, and mineral and energy resources and their degree of achievements since independence, there has been a prevailing negative trend in all the Central Asia and Caucasus. It has been evident in their worsening political, economic, and social situations. Their ruling elites have been unable to address their numerous and ever increasing problems, without exception. They have all establishes highly centralized and undemocratic political systems in their respective centuries. The salient characteristic of their authoritarian policy has been a zero-tolerance policy toward any meaningful political dissent. Without any doubt authoritarianism has been a means for ensuring the interests of Central Asian and Caucasian ruling elites concerned about the loss of their preeminent status in the post independence era. Apart from that authoritarianism has been their response to the worsening situation and to the rising political and social dissent in their countries which threatens their national security and stability. It has also been their reaction to emerging instability in parts of their countries or in those of their neighbors while reflecting their concern about destabilizing forces in certain countries in their close proximity namely, China, Russia, and Afghanistan, if the exciting negative trend continues, the entire Central Asia and Caucasus will likely head toward long-term tension and instability.

The first and foremost victims of this undesirable future will obviously be Central Asian and Caucasian people. The deteriorating situation will create a suitable ground for the emergence and growth of political extremism among the peoples of Central Asia and Caucasus, who are mostly dissatisfied with the status quo.

These frustrated and disenchanting peoples will likely find the extremist political ideologies and programs more appealing and more convincing than those of their discredited rulers. The latter's legitimacy is being questioned by a growing number of their nationals for a wide range of reason, including incompetence, rampant corruption, and an antidemocratic style of government.

In response to the rising internal threat, the ruling elites will likely resort to nationalism. Extreme nationalism could and will likely provoke ethnic conflicts within the multiethnic Central Asia and Caucasus. It could therefore lead to civil wars.

Twenty years after independence, transitions from Soviet authoritarianism and planned economies to democracy and market economies have not been successfully completed in any of the states of Central Asia and Caucasus. Although there are variations among them, each of the eight states in question faces serious challenges to peace and growth. The lack of real economic reform or sustainable development, the persistent centralized controls built on the foundation of Soviet bureaucracy, problems in nation-state building process, and the growing problems of corruption and public cynicism all constrain efforts to build effective and popular governance.

This study focuses on the political stability and instability issue in the countries of Central Asia and Caucasus. The number of factors that influence remarkably the stability of foreign and domestic policy of the countries in the region is substantially big. Each of them is significant in its own way, and they all are inextricably entwined. The capacity of state structures and police and military forces to effectively de-escalate or deter conflict remains highly questionable. Conflict could result from any of a wide range of factors present in this part of the world. Potentially explosive ethnic tensions, irredentist border challenges, severe poverty, drug trafficking, organized crimes, terrorism, arm trafficking, competition between Russia and western countries, water management crisis, separatism, and for Central Asia, the Islamic fundamental groups and conflict across the border in Afghanistan could all separately or together lead to fighting within and between states. Political, social, religious, ethnic, and economic structures are such that the risk of conflict spreading from one state to another is significant. Moreover, there are few mechanisms for effective regional cooperation that could mitigate these problems. But warning

signs for serious conflict do not necessarily translate into conflict itself. Considering the twenty years of Conflict in Central Asia and the Caucasus contrary, Central Asia and Caucasus has seen surprisingly little conflict since independence.

The geographical scope of Central Asia and Caucasus after the collapse of the Soviet Union has retained the elements of competition and bargaining between the United States of America, Russia and China. The presence of certain regional (Iran, China, Turkey, Russia) and non regional (United State) powers with long-term interest in the Central Asia and Caucasus will have a certain impact on the development extent, intensity, and duration of wars of various forms. The Caucasus and Central Asia has eight new and weak states, each with serious and unresolved territorial problems that have provided excuses for outside interference. All have sought refuge in external security arrangements, some of them with bilateral links to the U.S, and Turkey and increasingly NATO's Partnership for Peace, and some of them through limited contact with NATO/PFP but an extensive security treaty with Russia.

In one way or another, they could affect the stability of Central Asia and Caucasus as well as that of Asian and European regions in their proximity war and instability in these energy- producing regions bordering regional and global powers with strong conventional military and nuclear capabilities will have long- term political, economic and security implications. As a result, wars in whatever form in those two regions could escalate and affect the stability of the international system and global peace.

The reason for choosing Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan as case study is; Azerbaijan could attain to political stability in the same conditions in Central Asia and Caucasus, while Kyrgyzstan is faced with political difficulties. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to identify the sources of unrest and possible threats to the political stability of Central Asia and Caucasus. It illustrates a number of interrelated and overlapping levels of threat to political instability

and the main factors of stability in the region, emanating from both within and without.

Part one shows the organization of this study, in its twelve sections. Part two includes theoretical framework. The first chapter of part three prepares a historical background of Central Asia and Caucasus and a brief explanation about these countries. The Second chapter of this part is handled the causes of instability in political sector of Central Asian and Caucasian countries.

In fact, after these two background chapters, part four explores the variables of political stability in Azerbaijan, as a case of more political stable country in this region. Azerbaijan among the south Caucasian countries is the largest country in terms of both population and territory, the state is quite homogenous except the Lezgin, Talysh and Kordish minorities. Geographically, Azerbaijan is located near the Caspian Sea with considerable coastline and on its soil possesses extensive oil and mineral resources. On the other hand, these two factors the demography and geography with natural resources creates both advantages and disadvantages in its foreign policy direction.

Part five is dedicated to draw a perspective about roots of political instability in Kyrgyzstan. This country has been facing to uncountable problems, like as; inadequate geographically situation, several revolution, poverty and lack of natural resources, Worries about security threats from neighbors like as Uighur separatist, Drugs and other contraband from Tajikistan, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and so on. These factors have important affect on its political stability and introduce it as the most political unstable country in Central Asia and Caucasus. Part six is the most important part of the study. It considers similarities and differences between these two countries which are cases studies of this thesis. The last Part is conclusion.

### **1-1. The importance of issue**

The reason for choosing Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan as case study is; Azerbaijan could attain to political stability in the same conditions in Central

Asia and Caucasus, while Kyrgyzstan is faced with political difficulties. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to identify the sources of unrest and possible threats to the political stability of Central Asia and Caucasus. It illustrates a number of interrelated and overlapping levels of threat to political instability and the main factors of stability in the region, emanating from both within and without. The importance of assessing political stability and instability in Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan is;

1. Azerbaijan is an important state in regional and international level in the geographic viewpoint: this state is the connecting point for five Central Asian countries and is a bridge between west and east. The most important point is its role in the transporting of energy to west. Stability in Azerbaijan led to stable position for its neighbors, especially Iran and Russia.

2. Kyrgyzstan has huge resources of water and mineral materials. In spite of having civil society, Kyrgyzstan experienced several revolution recently and faces with numerous problems in its internal sector. Kyrgyzstan geographically has been located near the regional powers, China and Russia. Insecurity and instability can weaken its attempts for making stable government, omit its national and natural power, and can wide spread into neighbors.

## **2-1. Key Questions**

1. What are the main roots of political instability in Kyrgyzstan?
2. Which reasons are named as significant causes for Azerbaijan's stability?

## **3-1. Hypotheses**

1. Stable government and economy are main causes of political stability in Azerbaijan.
2. Economic difficulties and unstable government led to political instability in Kyrgyzstan.

#### **4-1. Backgrounds**

There are a few books and articles that consider the stability in different context in Central Asia and Caucasus, not especially in political scene. "Failed transition, bleak future? War and instability in Central Asia and South Caucasus" by Hooman Peimani (Westport, Conn. Praeger, 2002) argues about stability in political, economy, and social affairs. Shirin Akiner's "conflict or stability and development" (London: minority rights group, 1997) includes some information about Central Asia and Caucasus and the potential causes of conflict. Alexander Cooley wrote "Kyrgyzstan on the blink"(current history, vol.109, no.729, October 2010: 301-307), and Vadim Volovoj has an article by name problems and fundamentals of stability in Central Asia.

#### **5-1. Research Objectives**

The purpose of this thesis is to identify the sources of unrest and possible threats to the political stability of Central Asia and Caucasus as an important and historical region. It illustrates a number of interrelated and overlapping levels of threat to political instability and the main factors of stability in this region, emanating from both within and without. The thesis's aim is explaining that how Azerbaijan could attain to political stability in the same region and some to extent same condition in Central Asia and South Caucasus, while Kyrgyzstan is faced with political difficulties.

The objectives of the present study are as follows: (a) to trace political, economic, and social determinative factors of instability and stability in Central Asia and Caucasus; (b) to uncover the core of the instability problem in the region, which essentially is decisive for it.

## **2. Data Gathering**

### **1-2. Data Gathering Method**

Data has been gathered from Secondary data like as books and academic



journals, statistics annuals. We use internet materials; websites, electronic texts, that are consider as source for data gathering.

## **2-2. Description of Methodology**

This study is a descriptive analytical and comparative research. In order to evaluate the above mentioned hypothesis, the historical documents and facts will be studied and analyzed reaching this target. The information will be gathered in each part, to examine hypothesizes.

## **3-2. Methods of Data Analysis**

The methods of this research are explanation of data, figures, and schedules data which are present in different report will be used for data analysis.

## **3. Key Terms**

Central Asia, Caucasus, Political Stability, Political Instability, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan.

**Central Asia:** Central Asia is a core region of the Asian continent which stretches from the Caspian Sea in the west to China in the east, Afghanistan in the south, and Russia in the north. It is also sometimes referred to as Middle Asia and, colloquially, "the stans" (as the five countries generally considered to be within the region all have names ending with that suffix) and is within the scope of the wider Eurasian continent. Various definitions of its exact composition exist, and no one definition is universally accepted. As a result, it has acted as a crossroads for the movement of people, goods, and ideas between Europe, West Asia, South Asia, and East Asia. In modern contexts, all definitions of Central Asia include these five republics of the former Soviet Union: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

**Caucasus:** A region between the Black and Caspian seas that includes southwest Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, and that forms part of the

traditional boundary between Europe and Asia. Inhabited before 2000 B.C., it was the scene of countless invasions over the millennia. Conquered by Russia during the 18th and 19th centuries, the region has vast oil resources, which were a major German objective in World War II. Following the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the region became the site of various secessionist movements.

**Political Instability:** High potential of threat posed to governments by social protest or political violence. This high vulnerability to unrest is mostly caused by economic or political distress and can lead to changes in the political system. Stevenson/ Morrison (1971): "a condition in political systems in which the institutionalized patterns of authority break down and the expected compliance to political authorities is replaced by political violence." Sanders (1981): "the extent to which the occurrence or non-occurrence of changes in and challenges to the government, regime or community deviates from the previous system specific 'normal' pattern". In summation, political instability can best describe as the replacement of institutionalized authority by violence and the deviation of established political patterns by the social threatening forces.

#### **4. Shortcomings and Obstacles of the Subject**

1. Shortcoming and obstacles of access to primary data and information is restricted.
2. the most important problem in this study was the limitation of English sources and lack of Persian sources.

#### **5. Chapter out Line**

Part one of this thesis includes introduction. These parts show organization of thesis and illustrate its different items such as aim, question, hypothesis... Part two explains political instability and rentier state as theoretical framework. Part three has two chapter; chapter one of part three prepare a background of Central Asia and Caucasus history and a brief explanation about these countries. The

second chapter of this part is handled the causes of instability in political sector of Central Asian and Caucasian countries.

In fact, after these three background chapters, fourth part explores the variables of political stability in Azerbaijan, as a case of more political stable country in this region.

Part fifth is dedicated to draw a perspective about roots of political instability in Kyrgyzstan. Part six illustrates the similarity and different dimensions of Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan. Finally, general summery and conclusion tries to present a comprehensive description of thesis.

## **Chapter Two. Theoretical Framework**