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7. The Civic Realm in Kyrgyzstan

SOVIET ECONOMIC LEGACIES AND ACTIVISTS' EXPECTATIONS

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When one asks civic leaders in the Kyrgyz Republic (Kyrgyzstan) to characterize the state's relationship to their charity, union, or club, one nearly always hears "*ne meshaet, ne pomogaet*" or "does not bother, does not help."[1] In other words, the government neither interferes with their activities nor provides support for them. The phrase offers a window into the state's behavior, and it also reveals the expectations of societal actors. Namely, government authorities have the means to hamper civic activities, but instead they should be actively supporting them. In fact, civic leaders in Kyrgyzstan desire assistance from the state, even though financial dependence on the government could potentially compromise their missions. A civic group that relies on state resources may choose to adapt its activities to please government officials, or authorities may threaten to revoke assistance if the organization does not comply with their demands. Although civic leaders in Kyrgyzstan desire government help, they do not fear dependence on the state. Why do these attitudes toward the state

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1. Russian is commonly spoken in Kyrgyzstan among elites and nonelites as a result of Soviet language policies.

exist and how do they influence the political and economic development of Kyrgyzstan? Together with the other findings in this book, answers to these questions will help us unravel state-society relations in Central Asia.

Since the demise of the Soviet Union, scholars have suggested that Central Asian "traditions," including deference to authority, respect for elders, kinship-based allegiances, and Islam, would hinder the emergence of a rich civic realm in post-Soviet Central Asia. More recently, scholars, journalists, and policy makers have claimed that nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Kyrgyzstan exist only at the initiative and expense of Western groups. Yet, the evidence in this chapter challenges these generalizations. Civic groups in Kyrgyzstan have developed beyond inactive commercial fronts, government-organized groups, quasi NGOs, and "associations" of one person, and many have formed and function without Western advice and funds. Moreover, neither Central Asian traditions nor Western influences but Soviet economic legacies, coupled with economic underdevelopment, have most immediately defined the civic sphere.

The Soviet legacies of party-state ownership of municipal buildings and the minimal production of consumer goods, such as automobiles, force civic activists in Kyrgyzstan to seek office space, facilities, free utilities, and transportation from local authorities. This phenomenon is not unique to Kyrgyzstan but also exists in other post-Communist countries depending on the degree to which formerly state-controlled resources have changed hands and additional resources have been created. Kyrgyzstan's economic underdevelopment has hampered the creation of alternative resources, enabling the state to have a near monopoly on these goods. As a result, even leaders of political organizations in Kyrgyzstan are likely to desire state aid.

Whereas in recent years scholars have emphasized the weakness of post-Soviet states, this chapter highlights a sphere of society in which the state is strong. Although most post-Soviet governments do not manage public life to the extent that the Communist regime did, states continue to shape the expectations of civic activists because governments possess a relative wealth of resources. This observation suggests that we should employ a paradigm of the "strong-weak state," not simply that of the "weak state."

Civic leaders' desire for state assistance largely bodes well for Kyrgyzstan because cooperation between NGOs and governments has been shown to foster political and economic development in Central Asia and other regions of the world. NGOs can promote development by serving as links between people and their government. In Kyrgyzstan, NGOs have reached out to average citizens for development purposes and

many citizens are supportive of their work. However, government officials have generally not been receptive to the advances of civic groups. Moreover, the potential for NGOs to become financially dependent on the state means that an unequal partnership may develop, and civic groups may lose their autonomy and, thus, their comparative advantage. A greater diversification of resources for civic activism would enable NGOs to demonstrate their effectiveness to government officials and the general population, facilitating state-society partnerships and protecting NGO autonomy.

The remainder of the chapter introduces the civic groups that form the basis for these conclusions, asks why civic groups desire assistance from the state, considers the impact of this desire on Kyrgyzstan's political and economic development, and explores the relevance of these findings to our understanding of state-building, civil society, and contemporary Central Asia. Throughout the chapter the reader will find similarities to Marianne Kamp's argument (chap. 1) about the Soviet welfare state shaping contemporary expectations and to Pauline Jones Luong's argument (chap. 6) about the importance of resources being shifted and created since the late Soviet era. Some of the chapter's conclusions differ from Erika Weinthal's (chap. 8) because she focuses on one type of NGO — environmental organizations — instead of a variety of groups.

The Civic Groups: Activities and Expectations

The findings in this chapter are based on 252 interviews I conducted with civic groups as well as societal actors,[2] government officials, and representatives of international organizations in the capital cities and provinces of Kyrgyzstan and Russia. Seventeen civic groups in two *oblasts* (regions or provinces) of Kyrgyzstan serve as the centerpiece of the study. One set of sources of information about these groups is their leaders, members, and publications. For corroborating or disconfirming information about these groups, I rely on my interviews with representatives of local governments and international organizations and on printed materials from these institutions. I also gathered socioeconomic statistics and had conversations with "average" citizens while living for extended periods in each location. All the data were collected in 1997 and 1998.

Whereas some scholars exclude political organizations from civil society, I include political parties in my conceptualization of civil society because their impact is often similar (Stepan 1988, 128–36). Even formally

2. Other societal actors included members of the media and candidates for political office.

"nonpolitical" NGOs like charities can have an influence on politics through lobbying and assistance in provision of government services. Consequently, the distinction between "political society" and "civil society" is an unnecessary one for my purposes. I do, however, note in the text where the attitudes and behaviors of "political" and "nonpolitical" NGO representatives differ.

In the Kyrgyzstani oblasts, Osh in the south and Naryn in the center, I interviewed all political groups and randomly selected an additional set of nonpolitical groups of various types until I reached a total of approximately twelve groups in each province.[3] I found civic groups by using lists from government registration specialists, the records of NGO support centers, telephone directories, and my own knowledge of the NGO sector based on living in each region. For a group to be nongovernmental according to my definition, its leadership could not receive salaries from the local, regional, or national authorities, and its funding could not come from any government budget. I initially conducted interviews with twenty-three civic groups, but excluded six associations from the original sample. Five could not be considered NGOs because they were actually government organizations, and one interview was incomplete,[4] thus reaching a total of seventeen.

The in-depth information about seventeen groups of various types enabled me to understand the expectations and activities of civic associations. The additional data corroborate the activists' accounts and provide a picture of how NGOs interact with the state and the rest of society. The focus on activism in the provinces reveals the "typical" civic realm in developing countries where organizers do not have the benefit of the wealth or international access of the capital city. Finally, by comparing civic life in Kyrgyzstan and Russia, we can explore the impact of Central Asian culture and Soviet legacies on activism.

My approach differs from other studies of Central Asian NGOs and offers advantages in generalizing about state-society relationships in Kyrgyzstan and, more broadly, Central Asia. Most studies focus on only one type of NGO, such as environmental organizations (*Capacity Assessment of the NGO Sector in Kyrgyzstan*, 2001; Ikramova and McConnell 1999; Jones Luong and Weinthal 1999; Watters 1999). This limits conclusions about the civic realm as a whole because findings about one type of group do not necessarily apply to another category of NGO. Other investigations provide only incomplete or indirect accounts of the civic realm because they do not gather information from local NGOs themselves or they interview only those local NGOs that are involved with foreign groups (Abramson 1999a; Abramson 1999b). For example, a study of foreign democracy assistance in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan draws conclusions about local NGOs but almost exclusively uses information from foreign NGOs and foreign NGO support organizations (Adamson 2000, 38–39). Thus, we receive a picture of the local civic realm seen through the eyes of foreign actors, who interact with only a segment of the local NGO population and who have their own biases. In other cases, we hear only from local NGOs tied to the foreign community — groups unlikely to be representative of the entire civic sphere. Another work describes the broad political, economic, regulatory, informational, and cultural environment within which local NGOs operate, but it relies primarily on newspaper articles (J. Anderson 2000, 91–93). Studies of Central Asian NGOs understandably limit their investigations to NGOs in the five Central Asian countries; however, this reduces their ability to reveal whether characteristics of these NGOs are specific to Central Asia or common in other post-Communist regions.

My use of multiple sources to analyze a variety of civic groups in both Kyrgyzstan and Russia enables me to test the conventional wisdom about civic life in Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, with this approach, I can draw some plausible conclusions about state-society relations in Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia, and the entire post-Communist sphere. A larger sample of civic groups from all of Kyrgyzstan would strengthen my findings,[5] but doing in-depth interviews with both a medium-sized sample of NGOs and a broad range of other actors allows me to reveal how civic groups interact with the state and other societal forces.

Activities

There is the perception among local and foreign scholars, journalists, and policy makers that NGOs in Kyrgyzstan and other post-Communist countries are merely fronts for receiving income from naïve international

3. The same selection procedure was used for civic groups in Russia, which are examined later in the chapter for comparative purposes.

4. The interview was incomplete because the head of a related organization misrepresented himself as the leader, instead of just a member, of the NGO in question. He was not able to answer all the questions about the NGO.

5. The study could also benefit from a purely random sample of groups. The current sample includes the universe of political groups in the regions and a random sample of nonpolitical groups, meaning that political groups are overrepresented. This overrepresentation of political groups makes the finding that organizations desire state assistance all the more surprising, as we would expect political groups to be more wary of financial dependence on the state. The sample was designed this way for the purpose of a different project on variations in democracy within countries that have undergone democratic transition (McMann 2000).

donors. For example, based on interviews with NGO support organizations, one study concludes that "the majority of local NGOs are inactive or have been set up as a means to acquire Western grant money (so-called BONGOs [business-oriented NGOS])" (Adamson 2000, 17). Of the groups I interviewed, a couple that had registered only months prior to our conversation were still focused on organizational tasks, such as applying for grants and attending foreign-funded training seminars. But, most organizations, both old and new, were engaged in one of six types of small-scale activities: credit lending, consultations with citizens on various topics, resolution of personal and civil problems, charitable giving, cultural promotion, and electoral work, as described below. Government officials, representatives of foreign NGO support organizations, and local citizens confirmed that these groups performed these functions. Certain resources could facilitate these activities, and, as the next subsection demonstrates, civic leaders desire these resources from the state.

Of the six different types of activities, organizing and running credit groups is one of the most popular among local NGOs: it addresses the mission of reducing poverty, outside grants are available for it, and I found that it is one of the more successful means of economic development in present-day Kyrgyzstan. Using a grant from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), a charitable organization in Naryn has provided credit to a group that grows wheat and potatoes and to another group that creates handcrafts. With a grant from the Swiss association Helvetas, the organization also provided capital to eight women, each of whom either runs a cafeteria, operates a farm, or makes handcrafts.[6]

Assistance from local NGOs comes not only in the form of credit but also advice. The leader of a farmers' union in Naryn explained, "All we do is so farmers can go farther . . . stand on their feet."[7] Specifically, the union provides farmers with information about agricultural credit, farming techniques, processing, and marketing. Among its approaches for sharing information, the union holds ten to fifteen seminars each year on such topics as how to grow wheat and potatoes, how to create a business plan, and how and where to get credit.[8] To assist in marketing, the union facilitates contracts between farmers and customers in different countries and disseminates data about price variation across regions of Kyrgyzstan.

6. Author's interview with the president of a charity (Organization 11), 10 July 1997, Naryn Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

7. Author's interviews with the chair of a union (Organization 13), 7 and 11 July 1997, Naryn Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

8. Ibid.

Some NGOs play a more active role in people's lives than merely providing credit or advice: they attempt to resolve specific problems for individuals. An organization in Naryn tackles employment and family issues. For example, a woman had not received alimony for nine months from her former husband, who worked as a police detective. The NGO leader talked to the man's boss and arranged for alimony to be paid.[9]

A final form of direct assistance to individuals is material aid, most often in the form of donations of money, food, and clothing. A veterans' organization in Osh focuses much of its energy on charity, providing coal and money to veterans and the families of deceased veterans. The organization makes a special effort to give money to the families of deceased veterans on important dates, such as February 15, which marks the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. The organization's construction brigade also builds and repairs homes for the families of deceased veterans as well as for invalid veterans.[10]

Instead of targeting needy individuals, cultural activities concentrate on an entire group of people, such as representatives of a particular ethnicity. An Uzbek cultural organization in Osh holds events in schools and *mahallas* (neighborhoods or communities) for holidays, such as Nooruz (New Year's), and helped found an Uzbek-language newspaper.[11]

During elections political parties are active, even though they are mostly dormant at other times, particularly outside Bishkek, the national capital. As an editor in Osh explained, "Parties mostly exist on paper and that paper is in Bishkek."[12] Nonetheless, parties in Osh have engaged in electoral activities, such as nominating candidates, distributing party literature to citizens, serving on electoral commissions, and working as *dovernnye litsa* (campaign managers) for contenders.[13]

The activities of these groups are not unusual, as the most popular types of NGOs in these Kyrgyzstani provinces are charitable and social-development organizations and professional associations and unions, as the data in table 7.1 indicate.

9. Although part of a national human rights group, this regional organization focuses only on social services for the time being. Author's interview with the coordinator of a human rights organization (Organization 15), 15 July 1997, Naryn Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

10. Author's interview with the chair of a veterans' organization (Organization 2), 28 May 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

11. Author's interview with the chair of an ethnic organization (Organization 1), 11 May 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

12. Author's interview with an editor, 6 May 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

13. Author's interviews with the chair of a political party (Organization 7), 30 April 1998 and 4 May 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan. Author's interview with the chair of a political party (Organization 9), 7 May 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

TABLE 7.1. *Field of Activity of NGOs in Osh and Naryn*[a]

Activity	Number	Percentage
Charity and social development	97	23
Consumer rights	2	<1
Culture and history	12	3
Ecology	14	3
Education	9	2
Ethnic	12	3
Health and illness	32	7
Politics	16	4
Professions and unions	134	31
Religion and spiritual matters	14	3
Science, art and research	2	<1
Soldiers and veterans	15	3
Sports, games and hobbies	19	4
Women	19	4
Youth	11	3
Unclear	19	4
Total	430	

[a]Data in the table are from 1997 and are taken from state registration lists and lists from NGO-support centers and, in some cases, telephone directories. Organizations often fell under more than one category. However, by using the decision rules below, I counted each organization only once. The sign > should be read "takes priority over."

Sports, games, and hobbies > Youth
Politics > Women
Soldiers and veterans, Youth > Charity
Ecology > Culture and history, Politics

"Religion and spiritual matters" does not include places of worship for Osh and Naryn. The category includes only religious organizations.

The numbers in the table reflect the relative popularity of different fields, but not the exact number of active NGOs. I compiled the data from state registration lists, lists from NGO support centers, and telephone directories, and these sources do not necessarily remove defunct groups from their lists. This highlights the importance of not relying only on numbers and secondhand accounts when analyzing the civic realm in post-Communist countries.

TABLE 7.2. *NGO Expectations of the State*[a]

Expectations	
Requested assistance or expressed desire for assistance	76%
Fear dependence on the state	12%

[a]n = 17.

In sum, the activities of the interviewed groups indicate that, contrary to popular perception, NGOs are not merely inactive fronts for receiving money. In fact, as the evidence in the chapter later shows, foreign assistance is neither ubiquitous nor the leading source of support, as many observers of NGOs have assumed.

Expectations of the State

To facilitate their activities, civic leaders desire assistance from the state, meaning from local and regional administrations and legislatures, with which civic groups tend to have the greatest contact. Nearly all NGO leaders I interviewed hoped for aid from the state, yet almost none feared that assistance from the state would compromise their autonomy. Surprisingly, those few groups that were concerned about losing their independence from the state sought government assistance nonetheless.

"If I do not have the strength, [the oblast government] can help," claimed the head of a charitable organization in Naryn.[14] Her counterparts throughout Naryn Oblast and in Osh Oblast tend to agree. Seventy-six percent of the civic leaders interviewed had requested help from government authorities in the past or expressed a desire for state assistance in the course of our conversations. The director of another charity in Naryn explained, "If I need a car or workers, I ask the oblast administration . . . for simple things."[15]

It is "simple things" that activists desire from the state, most often free office space, meeting places for events, utilities, and transportation. For example, the leader of a charity in Naryn planned to ask the oblast administration for an office if the organization secured a grant to open a computer center.[16] Even some of the groups that consider themselves

14. Author's interview with the chair of a charity (Organization 12), 7 July 1997, Naryn Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

15. Author's interview with the president of a charity (Organization 11), 10 July 1997, Naryn Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

16. Author's interview with the chair of a charity (Organization 10), 11 July 1997, Naryn Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

adversaries of the local government desire help. Overall, 29 percent of the groups view themselves as opponents of local authorities, and more than half of the 29 percent have received state aid or hope for it.

Civic activists do not consider state assistance a threat to their autonomy, even though it could potentially encourage or force them to compromise their missions. Only 12 percent of the NGO leaders mentioned the risk of dependence on the state, but these activists also sought government help. For example, the head of a human rights organization in Osh explained that his group would not ask the oblast administration for money because it did not want to lose its independence and be controlled; however, he added that there was no harm in asking for assistance with office space. Similarly, a leader of a charity in Naryn claimed, "We do not want credit from the government. We would be dependent. . . . No one wants to help NGOs. The governor does not want to help . . . but we don't want help . . . [we] would be a government organization." She later revealed that she planned to ask the oblast government for an office, but she ended by reiterating that the oblast government "will help and will interfere. That is the kind of help we would get from it."[17]

Roots of the Relationship: Soviet Economic Legacies

The fact that most of the interviewed civic leaders desire state assistance and do not fear dependency on the state is surprising from a global perspective. We think of NGOs as entities that are separate from the state and that are interested in protecting their autonomy from the government, in part, by maintaining financial independence. In fact, the attitudes and behaviors of NGOs in similar regions of the world meet these expectations. Particularly in poor, nondemocratic, or quasi-democratic countries, government officials may be jealous of NGOs for the funds they have obtained, skeptical of their ability to implement projects, and even fearful that they may pose security threats because of their ties to foreign institutions and local populations (Bratton 1989, 576–78).[18] Consequently, authorities often react by harassing groups, sabotaging their projects, or co-opting the organizations (Azarya 1988; Bratton 1989, 573, 578–79). NGOs respond by avoiding government officials and maintaining a "low profile." For example, some development NGOs in African countries have

17. Ibid.

18. In developed democracies, governments are one of the standard sources of funding, particularly for NGOs that provide welfare services (Salamon, 1995). The wealth of nonstate funding alternatives and the strength of democratic values and institutions enable NGOs in developed democracies to maintain their autonomy.

chosen not to work with their governments for fear of compromising their missions (Bratton 1989, 581–82).

We could expect that civic leaders in Kyrgyzstan would share similar attitudes and behaviors because Kyrgyzstan is also a poor, quasi-democratic country. Moreover, we could posit that Soviet-era memories of government interference in public life would further deter activists in Kyrgyzstan from seeking state assistance. Why then are NGOs in Kyrgyzstan willing to accept risks to their autonomy and interact with the government, and why do they not fear dependence on the state? Accounts of the civic sphere in Kyrgyzstan suggest that Central Asian traditions and Western organizations have the greatest influence, so below I examine the extent to which these factors can account for activists' attitudes toward the state. Finding neither explanation adequate, I suggest that Soviet economic legacies have had a greater impact on activists' attitudes and, in general, the state-society relationship.

Central Asian Traditions

Observers of Kyrgyzstan, and more broadly Central Asia, suggest that the civic sphere has been shaped, and even hampered, by Central Asian "traditions." The chairman of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, Abdummanob Polat, argues that civil society can only successfully be built in Central Asia if traditions, such as respect for authority, are taken into account (Polat 1999, 153). Writing about Kyrgyzstan, Eugene Huskey notes that "amid the strains of the transition from communism, civic traditions have shown little evidence of taking root in a society dominated by a mixture of family, clan, regional, and ethnic loyalties" (Huskey 1997, 267).

Of the characteristics typically labeled Central Asian traditions — including deference to authority, respect for elders, kin-based allegiances, and Islam — deference to authority could most logically explain civic leaders' desire for government assistance and their tendency not to fear dependence on the state. NGO leaders may see themselves as subordinate to government, needing its guidance and help. If this were true, then we would expect that the attitudes of NGO leaders in Russia would be different from Kyrgyzstani activists' outlooks because in Russia these traditions are nonexistent or considerably weaker. Yet, we find that the desire for government help is just as common among leaders of Russian nonpolitical NGOs as it is among leaders of Kyrgyzstani nonpolitical groups.[19]

19. I interviewed twenty-three NGO representatives in Samara Oblast and Ul'ianovsk Oblast, two provinces along the Volga River in European Russia. The selection process was the same as that for the Kyrgyzstani groups, described earlier.

TABLE 7.3. *NGOs Desiring State Assistance*

NGO types	Russia[a]	Kyrgyzstan[b]
Nonpolitical	75%	73%
Political	21%	83%

[a]n = 4 for nonpolitical and 19 for political.
[b]n = 11 for nonpolitical and 6 for political.

(See table 7.3.) In sum, Central Asian traditions cannot explain the tendency of nonpolitical groups in Kyrgyzstan to desire state assistance.

However, among heads of political groups the desire for state assistance is much weaker in Russia than in Kyrgyzstan. This divergence may be attributable to different cultural traditions in the two countries, or it may be the result of economic necessity. The state monopoly of resources in Kyrgyzstan may force even political groups in Kyrgyzstan to seek government aid.

Foreign Influences

Civic development in Kyrgyzstan, as well as in much of the former Eastern bloc, has been attributed to Western organizations (Adamson 2000; McCrann 2001; Mendelson and Glenn 2000; Sperling 1999). "Local groups proliferated in Poland, Hungary, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan often around issues that Western donors found important, but rarely around issues that locals confronted on a daily basis," according to Sarah Mendelson and John Glenn in their report on the impact of Western democracy assistance. They continue, "All the reports [in the study] note the quandary of aid recipients who become so dependent on international assistance that they become 'ghettoized,' more responsive to international donors than to the local concerns of the groups they claim to represent" (Mendelson and Glenn 2000, 10, 46). If Western NGO support groups have such an influence on the finances and missions of local NGOs, conceivably these Western actors also shape the attitudes of domestic civic groups.

Yet, were these foreign groups to have had an impact on the attitudes of civic leaders we would expect the opposite effect: local activists would not desire state assistance and would fear dependence on the government. Although many Western groups have encouraged local activists to collaborate with government officials on projects, these foreign organizations advocate an autonomous civil society, which would dissuade civic leaders from seeking state assistance. In fact, contact with Western organizations

has not discouraged civic groups from hoping for state assistance, although it may account for the few groups that fear dependence on the government. Let us first consider the role Western organizations play in civic development and then their impact on local activists' attitudes.

Some Western organizations assist directly in NGO development, whereas others promote civic activism indirectly.[20] For example, Counterpart International, a U.S.–based NGO committed to civil society development (*Civil Society Programs* 2001) opened an office in Naryn in January 1997 in order to provide support for local NGOs. Counterpart provides training, holds roundtables for NGO leaders, helps NGOs develop connections, and makes a fax machine, telephone, computer, and copy machine available.[21] Seminar topics at Counterpart have included the definition of an NGO, creating a mission, dealing with citizens and the government, and proposal writing.[22] It has assisted approximately twenty NGOS.[23] In contrast, the Poverty Alleviation Project run by the UNDP in Osh has promoted civic development indirectly by working with ten local NGOs to establish credit programs in agricultural areas. The local NGOs review proposals for credit and monitor the work of the borrowers. By 1998, twenty-five groups of ten to twenty people had received credit to grow crops, raise animals, or sew household goods, for example. A portion of the interest — 6 percent of the 40 percent of the interest on loans in 1997 — goes to NGO development.[24]

Contact between local civic groups and Western organizations such as Counterpart and the UNDP has not been as ubiquitous as some observers of Kyrgyzstan have suggested. Based on evidence primarily from Western NGO support organizations, Adamson argues that "local NGOs receive almost 100 percent of their funds from international actors, and can easily become almost 100 percent donor-driven" (Adamson 2000, 19). Yet, only

20. Counterpart International, TACIS, the UN Development Programme/UN Volunteer Program (UNDP/UNV), and the U.S. Peace Corps have assisted directly in NGO development, whereas the work of organizations such as Mercy Corps, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Soros Foundation, and the UNDP's Poverty Alleviation Project promotes civic activism indirectly.

21. Author's interview with an assistant at Counterpart's NGO Support Center, 18 and 19 June 1997, Naryn Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

22. Author's interview with the chair of a charity (Organization 12), 7 July 1997, Naryn Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

23. Author's interview with an assistant at Counterpart's NGO Support Center, 18 and 19 June 1997, Naryn Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

24. Author's interview with a UNDP Poverty Alleviation Project volunteer, 15 May 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

TABLE 7.4. *Expectations of NGOs: Western Influence and Relationship with the State*[a]

Expectations	All	Influence	No Influence
Desire assistance from state	76%	86%	70%
Fear dependence on state	12%	29%	0%

[a]n = 17.

59 percent of the NGOs I interviewed in Kyrgyzstan have had any interaction with Western organizations, and only 41 percent have had any substantial contact. Substantial interaction includes participating in NGO development programs run by Western organizations and, in a few cases, being founded at the initiative of Westerners. Other contact included receiving a grant from a Western group, in some instances through the national branch of the domestic NGO.

Even substantial interaction with Western organizations has had little impact on civic groups' attitudes toward the state. Those local NGOs with which they have had substantial contact are just as likely as other groups to desire state assistance. (See table 7.4.) Western influence cannot account for civic groups' attitudes toward assistance from the state. However, it may explain why a small percentage of groups fear losing their autonomy. Of the local activists who fear losing their autonomy, all have interacted with Western organizations. This suggests that either interaction with Western organizations encourages this fear or that Western organizations draw civic groups that already fear dependence.

Soviet Economic Legacies

A more convincing explanation than the influence of Central Asian traditions or Western organizations is the impact of Soviet economic legacies, which in Kyrgyzstan are exacerbated by economic underdevelopment. The need for resources, such as office space, meeting places, utilities, and transportation, forces civic groups in Kyrgyzstan to seek state assistance and overlook possibilities of dependency. State control of these resources is largely a result of Soviet economic legacies of party-state ownership of buildings and the minimal production of consumer goods. The relatively greater poverty and economic underdevelopment in Kyrgyzstan means that alternative sources of these goods have not developed as they have in some other post-Communist countries, such as Russia. As a result, the state in Kyrgyzstan has a de-facto monopoly on certain goods. The limited

TABLE 7.5. *Sources of Material Support for NGOs*[a]

Support	
Leadership's resources	41%
Foreign funds	41%
Local donors	41%
Membership dues	24%
Business ventures	12%

[a]n = 17.

sources of goods leads even those civic groups that see themselves as state adversaries and those groups that fear dependence on the state to seek government assistance.

From whom do civic groups secure resources, and how have Soviet economic legacies and economic conditions in Kyrgyzstan forced them to seek aid from the government? The NGOs I interviewed are mostly funded through their leaderships' personal resources, foreign grants, and local donations. Less common sources of support are membership dues and profits from business ventures. (See table 7.5.) Organizational leaders tend to use their own money to register their groups, because a nascent NGO has little chance of winning a grant or attracting a sponsor. Yet, even after registration, nearly a third of the NGOs rely on the personal resources of their leadership and most dedicated members, in some cases, because they are still relatively new. For example, without the benefit of external funding, members of one charitable organization pool their own used clothes and extra produce and animal products and distribute them to the needy.[25] The use of personal funds for NGO activities indicates that leaders do not seek assistance from the state and other sources for self-enrichment. Instead, they are interested in fulfilling their groups' missions.

Foreign funds come primarily from Western nonprofit groups, such as Counterpart, the UNDP, the European Union's Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS), and the Soros Foundation–Kyrgyzstan, part of the nonprofit Soros Foundations Network created by American financier George Soros. Interestingly, despite expectations of funding from Islamic groups in the Middle East, the only non-Western institution with which any of these groups have had contact was

25. Author's interview with the president of a charity (Organization 11), 10 July 1997, Naryn Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

the Russia Duma. The Duma finances the work of Russian diaspora groups. Funds from the Western organizations are used as seed money for local NGOs and also for specific projects, such as credit-lending programs. For example, a farmers' union in Naryn received a grant from the UNDP and distributed credit to four farms and four livestock operations. The borrowers used the money to buy seed and animals in the spring, and then they sold the products in the fall and winter. They returned the loans to the union in January.[26]

This evidence about civic groups' sources of support challenges the perceptions that "almost 100% of their funds are from international actors" (Adamson 2000, 19) and that they cease operations when they cannot get outside funding (Ikramova 1999, 199). Foreign monies are neither ubiquitous nor particularly easy to obtain, nor are they the only source of funding that groups seek. Nearly 60 percent of the groups interviewed had received no foreign money, and many had little prospects of securing any. As the head of a legal organization in Osh complained, foreign donors are typically represented only in Bishkek, and it is difficult to get information about them and maintain contact. Most of the donor money goes to the capital, he lamented.[27] Moreover, half of the organizations that had received foreign funds also relied on another source of support in order to operate.

In regions such as Osh where private commerce is relatively well developed, some local businesspeople, whether members or simply supporters of an organization, provide donations. Businesspeople may serve as long-term sponsors or merely provide periodic donations. A legal organization in Osh found a businessperson to sponsor its consultations with the public and to provide office equipment when the organization began.[28]

Donations from members in the form of dues have been less successful. The population of Kyrgyzstan is so impoverished that little money can be collected. The national affiliate of one party in Osh decided to establish membership dues of one *som*, but the oblast party decided it was not worth collecting the money.[29]

The least common source of funding among the NGOs in Kyrgyzstan is business activities, perhaps because many of the NGO leaders interviewed

26. Author's interviews with the chair of a union (Organization 13), 7 and 11 July 1997, Naryn Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

27. Author's interview with the president of a legal organization (Organization 6), 7 May 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

28. Author's interview with the head of a legal organization (Organization 4), 27 May 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

29. Author's interview with the chair of a political party (Organization 9), 7 May 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

wrongly claimed that they could not legally engage in business — a right granted by the law on associations.[30] A veterans' organization in Osh does engage in business by cooperating with a Russian union of Afghanistan veterans. The veterans' organizations sell cotton and produce from Osh in Russia and buy metal in Russia. The Osh NGO acts as a middleman, selling the products to other companies.[31]

Considering that NGO leaders can use their personal resources and obtain financial support from foreign organizations and local businesspeople and, in some cases, through membership dues and business ventures, why do they desire state assistance? The problem is that these sources cannot or will not provide all types of goods that NGOs require. Personal resources are too meager to cover the costs of facilities, utilities, and vehicles, and local donations are too sporadic to pay for office rent and utilities and too limited to purchase a vehicle. Whereas foreign NGO support organizations have the means to pay for these goods, they choose not to cover overhead costs such as office space and utilities.[32] They are also less likely to pay for vehicles, which tend to be needed only periodically.

Whereas these other financial sources are either unable or unwilling to cover the costs of facilities, utilities, and transport, the state owns these goods and can conceivably easily provide them for free. Offices and other buildings that are needed for NGO activities, such as conferences or concerts, tend to be owned by local authorities. Not surprisingly, government office buildings and schools are controlled by local officials, but so are cultural institutions and even some apartment complexes. Soviet communism meant that theaters, *doma kultury* (cultural centers), museums, and sta-

30. National affiliates can also be helpful in providing financial support (Skocpol et al. 2000). However, only six of the seventeen groups had national affiliates and of these only two received monetary assistance from them. Typically parties and human rights groups are part of a larger republican organization. None of the parties received funds from Bishkek. A human rights organization in each province received limited funds from the republican level, for the leader's salary, for example; however, the local groups still had to seek additional funds elsewhere. Author's interview with the coordinator of a human rights organization (Organization 15), 15 July 1997, Naryn Oblast, Kyrgyzstan. Author's interview with the chair of a human rights organization (Organization 5), 29 April 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

31. Author's interview with the chair of a veterans' organization (Organization 2), 28 May 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

32. As Adamson found in her interviews with representatives of foreign NGO support organizations, "many of the local NGOs find it difficult to cover their operating costs, since most grant money available is to support start-up costs or specific projects" (Adamson, 2000, 20).

diums were all owned by the party-state, and private alternatives did not exist. In the post-Soviet era, some of these properties were privatized, but, through the phenomenon of *nomenklatura* privatization, they often became the personal property of local authorities. Cultural institutions and residences that were the property of state enterprises often became the responsibility of local authorities. In an impoverished country like Kyrgyzstan, particularly outside the capital, new cultural institutions have not been built by private businesspeople. Whereas activists can work out of their homes, the desire for a central location and a larger staff may necessitate finding an office in a government building, a school, or an apartment complex. Besides maintaining control of government property such as schools, local officials own many of the centrally located private apartments. People had the opportunity to purchase their state-owned homes, and now most state housing has been privatized (*Investment Guide for the Kyrgyz Republic* 1998, 59; Pomfret 1995, 114). However, Soviet-era leaders, many of whom are still in power, received the homes in the best locations and these homes have appreciated in value at a greater rate than more typical apartments (Pomfret 1995, 115). As a result, the optimal office space is often owned by local leaders and prohibitively expensive.

The accounts of local activists in Osh and Naryn support this argument about how space limitations result in reliance on local authorities. For example, an activist with an ethnic organization in Osh complained that his group faces a perennial problem of finding places for their meetings. They have had to resort to holding meetings in a theater and at schools, with the permission of local authorities.[33] In another case, the head of a charitable organization in Naryn who wanted to begin a laundry service explained that she planned to ask the *raion akim* (district leader) for a room in her apartment building because the apartments are under his authority.[34]

Like buildings, utilities also tend to be under state control, and the combination of state ownership and limited funds forces NGOs to seek free utilities from local authorities. Utilities tend to be government owned, or at least highly regulated, as in many countries of the world. However, because of the meager funds available to NGOs in Kyrgyzstan, activists are required to negotiate with local authorities for discounts on utilities. Because utilities are an operational expense, they are usually not eligible for foreign funds. As a reoccurring and, in some cases, significant

33. Author's interview with the chair of an ethnic organization (Organization 1), 11 May 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

34. Author's interview with the president of a charity (Organization 16), 7 May 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

expense utilities are also difficult to cover with personal funds or local donations.

Besides state ownership of property, the Soviet economic legacy of limited consumer-good production has forced civic leaders to seek government assistance. In the Soviet era, it was often impossible for the average citizen to obtain a car or else the purchase required a wait of several years. As a result of this legacy only a small portion of the population of Kyrgyzstan owned cars when the Soviet Union disintegrated. Because of the economic underdevelopment of Kyrgyzstan, few people have been able to buy them in the post-Soviet period, despite citizens' newly acquired access to world markets. In fact, car ownership seems to have declined: from 4.4 percent of the population in 1990 to 3.7 percent of the population in 1997 (*2001 World Development Indicators* 2001). Consequently, when a charitable organization wants to distribute goods to outlying villages, for example, it requests a car from local authorities.[35]

This argument about economic legacies and underdevelopment also helps to explain the divergence we saw earlier between the attitudes of political groups in Kyrgyzstan and Russia. Whereas the nonpolitical NGOs interviewed in each country were just as likely to desire government assistance, political groups in Kyrgyzstan were considerably more likely to want state aid than political groups in Russia. The Soviet economic legacies of party-state ownership of property and limited consumer production exist in both Kyrgyzstan and Russia and thus can account for the attitudes of nonpolitical groups in each country. Although these legacies have structured the state-society relationship in both, Kyrgyzstan's relatively greater poverty and economic underdevelopment has exacerbated them in Kyrgyzstan. (See table 7.6.) Even though nomenklatura privatization has also occurred in Russia, greater economic development has meant that businesspeople have built office buildings and cultural institutions, even outside of Moscow. In general, wealthy businesspeople are considerably more common in Russia than in Kyrgyzstan. Greater personal wealth has meant that more residents of Russia have been able to purchase cars. Old resources have not shifted hands in Russia to a greater extent, but new resources have been created. These economic differences between the countries suggest that groups focused on politics — and thus less willing to be dependent on the state — can find and afford nonstate resources in Russia. By contrast, political groups in Kyrgyzstan are forced to rely on local authorities. The comparison highlights the important role of shifting

35. For most of the NGOs' activities a bus is not necessary and a horse would be ineffective. Author's interview with the president of a charity (Organization 11), 10 July 1997, Naryn Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

TABLE 7.6. *Wealth Indicators for Russia and Kyrgyzstan*

	Russia	Kyrgyzstan[a]
Passenger cars[b] (percentage of population owning, 1997)	12	3
Telephone lines[c] (percentage of population owning, 1997)	19	8
Radios[d] (percentage of population owning, 1997)	42	11
Poverty[e] (percentage of population, 1993–1999)	31	51
Ratio of costs to income[f] (percentage, 1996)	45	100

[a]Comparable data for the two countries are not available in all cases, so I provide a variety of data, the aggregate of which suggests that, on average, people in Kyrgyzstan are poorer than people in Russia.

[b]Calculated and rounded from the 2001 *World Development Indicators*.

[c]A line connecting a customer's phone to the public telephone network. Data originally from the International Telecommunication Union. Calculated and rounded from the 2001 *World Development Indicators*.

[d]A radio receiver used to receive broadcasts by the general public. Calculated and rounded from the 2001 *World Development Indicators*.

[e]The percentage of the population living below the poverty line deemed appropriate for the country by its authorities. Rounded from the 2001 *World Development Indicators*.

[f]The difference between the countries is exaggerated because average monetary income was used for Russia and average salary was used for Kyrgyzstan. Comparable figures are not available (*Average Nominal Salary (Soms)* 2001; McFaul and Petrov 1997; *Minimal Consumer Budget (Soms)* 2001).

and alternative resources in post-Communist politics, as does Pauline Jones Luong in chapter 6.

The accounts of the activists in Kyrgyzstan provide direct evidence about why they seek state assistance, and the statistics on car ownership offer some indirect evidence. However, it would also be useful to have general statistics concerning the availability of office space and facilities not under control of the local authorities. Unfortunately, privatization statistics for specific types of buildings are scant, and when available, they do not indicate whether a piece of property has merely come under the

personal control of a local authority. Likewise, statistics on newly built facilities and their true ownership are difficult to obtain. Nonetheless, from living and working in Kyrgyzstan and Russia, I found that newly constructed buildings exist in the Russian provinces and are almost absent in the Kyrgyzstani regions, meaning that NGO leaders in Russia have more opportunities for financial independence from local authorities.

Soviet economic legacies, coupled with economic development, offer a more complete explanation for civic leaders' desire for state aid and tendency not to fear dependence upon it. However, the cultural, political, and international environments also have an impact on civic attitudes. Central Asian culture may, in fact, make it easier for political groups to seek aid from the government in Kyrgyzstan than in Russia. And, in both countries Soviet cultural habits may encourage activists to seek cooperation with the state — just as Marianne Kamp (chap. 1) found that Soviet welfare culture encourages citizens to expect certain benefits from the Uzbekistani state today. Faced with a new environment, such as one of greater political freedoms, activists often resort to tried-and-true repertoires (Skocpol, Ganz, and Munson 2000; Tarrow 1994). As products of the Soviet system, NGO leaders have turned to the inheritor of the party-state, which used to provide funds to "public" groups. Soviet public groups, under party control, relied on funds from the state budget and on membership stamps the party required citizens to purchase (Kasybekov 1999, 71).[36] Although this Soviet cultural pattern likely reinforces the economic necessity of seeking state assistance, it offers a weaker explanation. Groups that view themselves as adversaries of the state and those that fear dependence on the government would not likely desire state aid were there not a critical economic need.

The general political environment in Kyrgyzstan, as well as in Russia, has made it possible for NGOs to hope for state aid. Governments that have a multiparty system, a positive attitude toward foreign development agencies, and weak administrative capacity are most likely to support the work of civic groups, or, at least, not harass them (Bratton 1989, 575). This description is apt for the national governments of Kyrgyzstan and Russia, particularly during much of the 1990s. The fact that only national opposition groups and local political NGOs that have limited economic autonomy from authorities have been severely harassed likely reduces civic leaders' fears of compromising their missions by seeking state assistance (McMann 2000, 2002). Yet, while the political environment may alleviate

36. Interestingly, groups that developed in the independence period are as likely to seek state assistance as those that formed in the Soviet era. The percentages desiring state assistance are 77 percent and 75 percent, respectively.

qualms about dependency, it does not explain why leaders seek state aid rather than other forms of funding. For this we must examine the impact of Soviet economic legacies and levels of development.

The international environment, particularly the fact that Western NGO support organizations rarely cover operating costs, has also shaped civic attitudes and behaviors in Kyrgyzstan and Russia. However, only about half of local NGOs have contact with Western groups, so donor conditions cannot account for the attitudes of all the groups.

In sum, Soviet economic legacies and economic underdevelopment offer the most convincing explanation of why civic leaders in Kyrgyzstan desire state assistance and do not fear dependence on the state. The legacies of party-state ownership and minimal production of consumer goods have given the government access to certain goods valuable to NGO leaders. The relative impoverishment of the population has meant that alternative means to purchase or use these goods have not emerged, as they have in more economically developed post-Communist countries. Consequently, government authorities in Kyrgyzstan have a near monopoly of resources such as facilities, utilities, and transportation.

The Impact of the Relationship on Development: Promising, but Unrealized

Kyrgyzstani civic leaders' interest in state assistance augurs well for the country because state-society collaboration is essential for political and economic development. Yet, in order for these attitudes to be productive, the government must respond favorably, agreeing to work with NGOs. Moreover, the NGOs must use the resources they acquire to actually help the population. After a review of the prevailing wisdom about NGOs and states in development, I explore activists' actual relations with government officials and average citizens in Kyrgyzstan.

NGOs and Development

Development theorists and practitioners have found that state-society collaboration is essential to a country's economic and political development (Ostrom 1997, 107–8; Sanyal 1994). Government and civic groups are each seen as having unique comparative advantages that, when combined, provide "complementarity" (Evans 1997a; Sanyal 1994). This complementarity facilitates the "coproduction" of services for the population (Ostrom 1997). To the partnership a government can offer a legal regime, legitimacy, long-term funding, market creation, and the ability to increase the scale of projects. NGOs can provide links to society, local knowledge,

particular skills, and volunteers (Evans 1995; Evans 1997a, 182–83; Fox 1997; Ostrom 1997, 102, 108; Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993; Sanyal 1994, 41, 44–47). In terms of political development, scholars emphasize that state-society interactions are not zero sum (Evans 1997b; Flower and Leonard 1996; Migdal, Kohli, and Shue 1994), but "mutually transforming" (Migdal, Kohli, and Shue 1994; Schmitter 1981). Civic groups must have ties to the government so that they can act as watchdogs against state wrongdoings, as counterweights to government, and as mediators between state and society (Buchowski 1996, 82; Cohen and Arato 1992, x, 31; Sanyal 1994, 40–41). In other words, there needs to be "embeddedness" and "connectedness" between the state and societal actors (Bermeo 2000, 244–45; Evans 1995; Evans 1997a, 180, 184, 187).

In advocating state-society interaction, neither the theorists nor the practitioners suggest that civic groups should be incorporated into the state. Instead, civic actors and government institutions should be autonomous so that each can maintain its comparative advantage. This is a particularly important reminder for NGOs in developing, nondemocratic or quasi-democratic countries where financial insecurity or state harassment can undermine groups' missions and activities (Azarya 1988, 5). In a democracy civic groups play the seemingly contradictory role of pressuring states and helping them govern (Buchowski 1996, 82). And, "the institutional arrangement most conducive to democratic development seems to be a combination of civil society's autonomy and its connectedness to other domains of the polity, such as . . . the state . . ." (Kubik 2000, 183).

In addition to theorists and activists in other regions of the world, members of the foreign NGO community in Kyrgyzstan have called for more cooperation between civic groups and the state. These foreign representatives have noted that NGOs in Kyrgyzstan often resolve problems more quickly and less expensively than the government and that civic groups need to engage government officials in order to be more effective (*Capacity Assessment of the NGO Sector in Kyrgyzstan* 2001; Kasybekov 1999, 72; Watters 1999, 100). To what extent has the state-NGO relationship in Kyrgyzstan developed to the point of collaboration?

The Relationship between Civic Leaders and the State in Kyrgyzstan

In saying that the state "does not bother, does not help," the civic groups provide a fairly accurate depiction of state interaction with NGOs on paper and in practice. However, there are two caveats. In some cases, local-government leaders have interfered with the work of civic groups, but only

those engaged in political activities. Local authorities have also provided assistance to nearly half of the groups interviewed. Beyond these exchanges civic groups contact government officials to resolve legal problems, and leaders and members of political NGOs interact with authorities during elections.

The state-society relationship outlined by law fell short of civic leaders' expectations because it required little state support. The Kyrgyzstani law "On Public Associations" adopted February 1, 1991, when the country was still a union republic in the Soviet Union, continued to regulate NGOs through most of the 1990s, including the period when I conducted my fieldwork.[37] Whereas in other countries governments offer NGOs grants and generous tax privileges, civic groups in Kyrgyzstan have received few benefits. Although the law gave NGOs a multitude of rights, including the ability to introduce drafts of national legislation, participate in elections, and engage in business to achieve group goals, it provided only one tax privilege — a waiver of income tax on membership dues and donations (*On Social Associations*, 2001). The tax code established a few other privileges, such as an exemption on the Value Added Tax (VAT) (*Capacity Assessment of the NGO Sector in Kyrgyzstan* 2001; Horton and Kazakina 1999, 52). Instead of providing benefits to NGOs, the legal regime has burdened them with numerous obligations and risks, including mandatory registration with the state, potential monitoring by government agencies, and the threat of suspension, dissolution, and even loss of property for acting outside their charters or violating regulations (Horton and Kazakina 1999, 43, 45; *On Social Associations* 2001).

In practice, formal, legal contact with the state is rare beyond registration. Registration itself requires considerable paperwork, a significant sum of money, and patience, but overall it is relatively simple and fair, according to NGO leaders I interviewed and to an analysis by the director of Counterpart International in Kyrgyzstan (Cooper 1999, 215). Refusals have been rare and have tended to follow the letter of the law. For example, all human rights organizations, with the exception of a Uighur organization that aimed to create a Uighur state in northwestern China in violation of Kyrgyzstani law, are believed to have been able to register, and nonpolitical groups have not encountered problems (Horton

37. According to Chapter 1, Article 1, associations include "political parties, popular movements, trade unions, women's and veterans' organizations, organizations of the disabled, youth and children's organizations, scientific, technical, cultural awareness, sport and other voluntary societies, creative unions, fraternities, foundations, associations, and other citizen groups" but do not include cooperatives, organizations with the objective of making a profit, religious organizations, and others.

and Kazakina 1999, 44). None of the groups I interviewed described any experience with government audits, there were no accounts of the government suspending or dissolving groups, and no activists recounted profiting from privileges in the tax code. The tax code benefits tend to be granted on an "ad hoc basis" and foreign NGOs have been more successful in obtaining them. Local NGOs should receive an exemption on the Value Added Tax (VAT), but merchants are wary of granting them and civic leaders do not seek a refund for fear of invoking an audit (Horton and Kazakina 1999, 52).

Although the formal relationship is weak, informal contact between civic activists and government officials is frequent — rarely in the form of harassment and more often in the form of state assistance or unintimidating interaction. For political groups, though, as opposed to civic ones, government harassment is common. When political activists have little opportunity to earn income independent of local authorities, local officials have taken advantage of this situation and punished leaders and members of political groups through job loss, threats of job loss, and sanctions on their businesses (McMann 2002; McMann 2000). This form of state interference is not reflected in the overall sentiments of civic leaders, because the number of political groups is relatively small.[38] Moreover, activists in some regions, such as Osh, have more opportunities to earn a living independent of local officials, so sanctions on their political activities are less effective and thus less likely to be employed by local authorities (McMann 2000).

Cordial relations are more common between civic leaders and government officials. Approximately 44 percent of the groups have received aid from local authorities. In most cases, assistance is in the form of free, long-term office space and utilities. A few groups received a facility free of charge for an event or the use of a car or bus for an activity. NGOs have also interacted with government officials in order to solve problems for people who have requested their assistance and to take part in the electoral process. For example, to help an orphaned girl who ran away from her legal guardian, the leader of a human rights organization in Naryn contacted the chair of the oblast *kenesh* (legislature), the oblast akim, and officials in the raion administration. Political organizations and groups with electoral activities as part of their charters nominate candidates for local and national offices, serve on electoral commissions, and maintain connections with successful nominees — all activities that involve inter-

38. The members of the one political group in Naryn abandoned the organization for fear of sanctions on their livelihoods, and in Osh only six political groups exist.

action with the government.[39] Although the leader of a veterans' organization in Osh claimed, "Politics is not our business. Politics created the war in Afghanistan and we died," his organization nominated a member for the Zhogorku Kenesh (national parliament), campaigned for him, and contentedly watched him win a seat. The group also nominated and campaigned for five candidates to the city kenesh, all of whom won. The organization plans to nominate candidates for all levels of government in the future "because this is not pure politics, but simply for the resolution of social questions."[40] Other, less frequent contact between activists and officials includes NGOs' lobbying for policies, periodic formal meetings with government officials, and assistance to the government, by distributing state charitable goods, for example.

While Kyrgyzstani NGOs are predisposed to involvement with the state and would like to interact more with government officials, they have not crafted and implemented projects with the authorities, as the development theorists advise. The civic groups are incorporated into the state (Azarya 1988), in the sense that they are engaged with it and are dependent on certain resources from local authorities. Yet, they exhibit low levels of "coproduction," "connectedness," and "embeddedness." The paucity of partnerships results from a lack of enthusiasm on the part of the government.

Local authorities acknowledge that NGOs are beginning to have an effect on life in the oblasts and are also playing a role in government by providing advice to officials or helping with implementation.[41] Nonetheless, government officials have not sought out civic groups because of a lack of understanding of the civic sphere, fear of criticism, and weak capacity. Some oblast officials think that *nepravitel'stvennaia organizatsiia* (nongovernmental organization) means "antigovernment organization," a UNDP official in Naryn explained.[42] The head of a legal organization in Osh said that when the group's lawyers visit the prosecutor's office they

39. Author's interview with the chair of a political party (Organization 9), 7 May 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan. Author's interviews with the chair of a political party (Organization 7), 30 April and 4 May 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan. Author's interview with the chair of a political party (Organization 8), 7 May 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

40. Author's interview with the chair of a veterans' organization (Organization 2), 28 May 1997, Naryn Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

41. Author's interview with Oblast Official 1, 19 May 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan. Author's interview with Oblast Official 2, 26 May 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan. Author's interview with Oblast Official 3, 27 May 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

42. Author's interview with Adil Duroglu, a community participation specialist with the UNDP, 20 July 1997, Naryn Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

are greeted with the question "Why did you come? You were not called."[43] Local authorities also try to avoid criticism. "The oblast government likes to be applauded; it does not like it when we pose questions to it. The government created [a similar organization] in order to be applauded," the head of an Uzbek organization in Osh explained.[44] An additional problem with the government is lack of capacity. Government institutions may simply be too overwhelmed to focus on establishing ties to the civic community.

The Relationship between Civic Leaders and Society in Kyrgyzstan

In order for NGOs to further contribute to Kyrgyzstan's economic and political development they must not only seek support from the state but interact with average citizens, serving as links between state and society. NGOs in Kyrgyzstan have contact with their own members and also engage a larger number of citizens through their involvement in the community. Although their impact on society may not be broad, it is qualitatively significant, according to their own accounts and those of government officials, foreign representatives, and average citizens.

A common perception among observers of Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian countries is that many NGOs have only one member. "Throughout the region it is also generally the case that many of the grandly titled committees, organisations and confederations are little more than a room in an apartment manned by an enthusiastic political entrepreneur," according to one work (Anderson 1997, 93). Yet, in gathering evidence about a variety of groups in Kyrgyzstan, I found no examples of NGOs with only one member. Instead, membership in nonpolitical associations ranged from eleven members in a three-month-old charitable organization in Naryn — all of whom are teachers at one school — to five hundred members of another charitable group in Naryn, many of whom deserted the state Committee for Women because "they did not want to work in the old way."[45] Political parties in Osh each tended to have around three thousand members.[46]

43. Author's interview with the head of a legal organization (Organization 4), 27 May 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

44. Author's interview with the chair of an ethnic organization (Organization 1), 11 May 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

45. Author's interview with the president of a charity (Organization 11), 10 July 1997, Naryn Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

46. NGO leaders use different definitions of membership. Political parties enumerate members based on who currently holds a membership card, whereas human rights

In the larger community, civic groups provide welfare, inform citizens, and participate in political processes. The depth of interaction with citizens varies from long-term, in-depth contact through credit programs, to short-term contact by hosting a concert, to momentary contact while passing out campaign literature. Looking just at the nine groups that have successfully provided credit or assisted people in resolving problems, we can estimate that approximately six hundred people have been helped. This estimate is hampered by the organizations' own record keeping and the difficulty of determining how many people have received assistance multiple times or from multiple organizations. Nonetheless, in these cases, NGOs did provide concrete assistance to average citizens, thus promoting economic development. The impact is not wide, considering that 1.7 million people live in these regions.[47] But, when we take into account that NGOs also provide charitable donations, offer consultations and assistance with problems, host cultural events, and engage society in other short-term, less direct ways, we can conclude that NGOs have a meaningful, but perhaps not broad, role in society.

The greatest hindrance to NGOs' promotion of economic and political development results not from their relationship with citizens but from their relationship to the state. Although civic groups interact with the state, they have not collaborated with officials on projects, which, according to theorists and foreign activists in Kyrgyzstan, would benefit development. Civic groups desire greater cooperation with the state, but government officials have not been receptive. Moreover, NGOs' lack of resources and the state monopoly on goods reduces NGO autonomy, thus threatening their comparative advantage.

To increase government receptivity and financial independence, NGOs could recruit more members, but this is an unlikely solution. Larger memberships may make officials more interested in NGOs, and membership

organizations and nonpolitical groups use varied definitions of membership. An association of doctors in Naryn counts those who have attended a couple meetings as members, and a charitable group in the region considers people who participate in writing grant proposals members. Author's interviews with the chair of a political party (Organization 7), 30 April 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan. Author's interview with the chair of a political party (Organization 8), 7 May 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan. Author's interview with the chair of a political party (Organization 9), 7 May 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan. Author's interview with the president of a charity (Organization 14), 13 July 1997, Naryn Oblast, Kyrgyzstan. Author's interview with the chair of a charity (Organization 10), 11 July 1997, Naryn Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

47. Population data are from the National Statistics Committee and are for the beginning of 1997. Osh Oblast has 1,472,100 people and Naryn Oblast has 263,100 people.

dues could reduce the groups' dependence on the state. However, public attitudes and poverty bode poorly for this approach,[48] and expanding membership is not a priority of civic groups. Only one of the seventeen groups mentioned recruitment as one of its activities.[49] Instead, NGOs are focused on finding business sponsors and winning foreign grants. Continuing to rely on a diversity of financial sources, particularly nonstate sources, will help NGOs guard their autonomy from the state. To increase their influence with officials, parties concentrate on nominating and campaigning for candidates,[50] and nonpolitical organizations emphasize assistance to more people in the community.[51] NGO leaders tend to view their work with the general population as helping the government, and they suggest that officials will someday show their gratitude. "If we help people, [government officials] will listen to us, and deputies will come to us."[52]

The State and Civil Society in Kyrgyzstan and Elsewhere

One of the most common claims about post-Soviet states is that they are weak, meaning that they lack the capacity to achieve their goals (Holmes 1997; Linz and Stepan 1996; Sperling 2000; Stavrakis 1993; Volkov 1999). While this statement applies to Kyrgyzstan, it is clear that the Kyrgyzstani state also exhibits strength. In particular, through its monopoly of resources, the state continues to shape the civic sphere, specifically the expectations of civic leaders. This monopoly is a legacy of the Soviet era and a result of the country's underdevelopment. Across the globe, democratic and nondemocratic governments shape NGOs by restructuring or

48. Public attitudes toward NGOs are mixed. In my interviews and conversations with nonactivists, I found both suspicion of NGOs' activities and praise for their work. Some people are skeptical of NGOs because they believe that the NGO leaders are interested in personal gain, not in helping people. Moreover, some citizens are uncomfortable with NGOs because their members do new and unusual things, including traveling abroad for training seminars and receiving foreign grants. On the other hand, a survey of 1,494 adults throughout Kyrgyzstan in 1996 found that 52 percent of people believe NGOs are necessary and 42 percent would give their "time to work for a non-government organization without receiving any pay" (Olds, 1997, pp. iii, 42–44).

49. Author's interviews with the chair of a political party (Organization 7), 30 April 1998 and 4 May 1998, Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

50. Ibid.

51. Author's interview with the president of a charity (Organization 11), 10 July 1997, Naryn Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

52. Author's interview with the chair of a charity (Organization 10), 11 July 1997, Naryn Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

incorporating groups, creating legal regimes, providing or denying political opportunities, and serving as institutional models (Anderson 1996; Azarya 1988; Bermeo 2000, 243; Fish 1995; Fox 1997; Levy 1999; Migdal 1994; Ostrom 1997, 98; Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993; Schmitter 1981; Seligman 1992, 7; Skocpol, 1992; Skocpol and Fiorina 1999; Skocpol, Ganz, and Munson 2000; Stepan 1978; Tarrow 1994). Whereas the Soviet government created and directed "public" groups, post-Communist governments are more likely to affect the civic sphere through their continued control of resources. Assuming that post-Communist governments exhibit strengths in other spheres as well, it may be more useful for scholars to use a paradigm of the "strong-weak state" rather than simply the "weak state."

The government monopoly of resources and provision of these resources to civic groups raises the question: Is state assistance to NGOs detrimental to civil society? On the one hand, state assistance is advantageous when it promotes complementarity. For example, the state may provide needed office space to an organization, and an NGO may provide expertise about local community problems to the government, thus creating a mutually beneficial exchange. On the other hand, state assistance is harmful when it undermines the autonomy and thus the comparative advantage of civic groups. Aid that represents a large portion of a group's total support and that comes from a government hostile to pluralism and able to harass is most damaging to NGOs' autonomy. Currently, these detrimental conditions are minimized in Kyrgyzstan. Civic groups rely on resources from multiple sources, although some are most easily obtained from the state. More importantly, the national government and many regional leaders have been supportive of, or at least not interfered with, the development of nonpolitical civic groups. Moreover, government officials often lack the capacity to harass NGOs, particularly when these groups have economic autonomy (McMann 2000).

The fact that state assistance or state behavior, in general, has not harmed the civic sphere in Kyrgyzstan is no guarantee that it will not in the future. Since the data for this chapter were collected in 1997 and 1998, an improved law on civic groups has passed, but the government of Kyrgyzstan has become increasingly hostile to pluralism. The new law on civic groups does not mention risks, such as potential monitoring by government agencies (The Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on Non-Commercial Organizations 1999). However, an attack on pluralism began in 1994 when the government started to criminally prosecute journalists. Through the end of the decade and into the new century this turn away from pluralism has intensified with a further increase in presidential power, laws

curbing the right to protest, and criminal investigations of members of parliament. There is little evidence that these events have hindered the ability of nonpolitical civic groups to operate. Nonetheless, the de-facto retreat from pluralism does not bode well. The U.S. "campaign against terrorism," beginning in the fall of 2001, and the accompanying increase in aid to Central Asian military allies have led some journalists and scholars to speculate that U.S. involvement in the region will promote democracy. However, there is no guarantee that the greater U.S. attention to the region will be maintained or that aid will flow to NGOs or in any way bolster the civic sphere.

Ironically, observers of Kyrgyzstan tend to exaggerate the negative influence of the state on civic groups while overlooking the very real impact of state control of resources on NGOs. Western academics and government officials often will casually remark that NGOs in Kyrgyzstan are essentially state organs with a civic veneer, and foreign scholars and activists have documented the presence of government-organized NGOs (GONGOs) and quasi NGOs in Kyrgyzstan and other post-Communist countries (Adamson 2000; Kasybekov 1999, 72; Polat 1999; Sampson 1996, 128; Watters 1999, 93). Yet, I found that most of the organizations calling themselves NGOs do not receive money for their leaders' salaries or their operating expenses from government budgets, and these groups were created by private individuals and groups of citizens, not government authorities. Moreover, the low degree of embeddedness, or informal links between activists and officials, challenges the assumptions about GONGOs and quasi NGOs.

In addition to the prevailing wisdom about GONGOs and quasi NGOs, I also challenge other conclusions about the civic sphere in Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian countries. First, Western influence has not had the greatest impact on civic groups in Kyrgyzstan: activists have not adopted Western positions on all issues, and they are not enriching themselves with foreign funds. Foreign money is neither ubiquitous nor the only source of NGO funding. Moreover, the foreign money that has reached Kyrgyzstan tends to be from Western development organizations, not from "Eastern" Islamic groups, as some observers expected. Second, Central Asian traditions do not drive the civic sphere, as is indicated by the fact that Kyrgyzstani and Russian activists share some attitudes. Also, the weakness of connections between activists and officials suggests that claims about the influence of clans and patronage on the civic sphere are exaggerated. Third, Kyrgyzstani NGOs are not inactive but are running credit programs, resolving citizens' problems, providing charity, and holding cultural events, among other activities. Fourth, civic groups in Kyrgyzstan are not

"couch organizations" with one to three members but, in some cases, even have thousands of members. Finally, civic groups do have ties to average citizens through their charitable work, cultural events, and electoral activities.

Most likely, my findings challenge the conclusions and assumptions made by others because I collected data from multiple sources about a wide variety of civic groups. Not surprisingly, those studies that rely on evidence from foreign NGO support organizations, select groups based on the knowledge of these foreign institutions, or concentrate on groups located in the capital cities are likely to overestimate the influence of foreigners. Claims about the influence of Central Asian traditions often lack empirical evidence to support them and thus can easily be challenged with data from the field. Generalizations about the inactivity, small memberships, and elite character of civic groups have been based either on reports from foreign NGO support organizations, which work with only a limited sector of local groups and which have their own concerns, or data about a specific type of group such as environmental organizations. It is likely that specific types of groups exhibit unique features that do not characterize the civic realm as a whole. For example, environmental groups may have greater access to foreign resources, which, in turn, shapes their activities, memberships, and community outreach, as Erika Weinthal demonstrates in chapter 8.

Although my approach to exploring the civic realm in Central Asia helps fill a void left by other studies, it is also important to consider how generalizable my findings are. A number of aspects of my approach inspire confidence in the generalizability of the findings. First, the data are from multiple regions of the country, instead of just the capital, which is not representative of the civic realm. The two regions, Osh and Naryn, were perhaps the most likely of all the provinces to have confirmed the prevailing wisdom that NGOs in Kyrgyzstan are largely inactive commercial fronts, GONGOs, quasi NGOs, and single-person associations that have formed and function only as a result of Western aid and initiative. Naryn is viewed as backward and Osh as traditional by both residents of Kyrgyzstan and outsiders, and foreign NGO support centers exist in each province. Yet, these two "most difficult" cases challenged the conventional thinking. Second, my selection of all the political groups and a random sample of nonpolitical groups makes it easier to generalize the results. Whereas these two factors suggest that the findings represent the civic realm in Kyrgyzstan, the comparison with Russia helps us generalize outside the borders of Kyrgyzstan.

Both Kyrgyzstan and Russia have more supportive environments for

NGOs than the Central Asian states of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Thus, although state control of resources shapes the civic realm in Kyrgyzstan and Russia, we would expect that both state control of resources and state harassment would influence the civic sphere in these other Central Asian states. The civic spheres in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan more closely resemble that in Kyrgyzstan. Civil war brought extreme poverty and weakened government capacity to Tajikistan. Whereas national leaders in Kyrgyzstan chose to create a more permissible NGO environment, officials in Tajikistan were too busy fighting the war to try to control it. In Kazakhstan national leaders have permitted nonpolitical groups to operate more or less freely, while they have increasingly harassed political NGOs. All the post-Communist countries share the economic legacies that have left states in control of resources. The level of economic development and the political environment for NGOs will interact with these legacies to shape the civic spheres, making them resemble the Kyrgyzstani, Russian, or Uzbekistani and Turkmenistani situations.

Outside the former Eastern bloc we would not expect to find similar state monopolies of resources as we see in Kyrgyzstan. Whereas governments in other regions of the world also control resources, only in Communist countries was there a state monopoly of resources. In economically developed, post-Communist countries, where additional resources have been created, this legacy has begun to erode. This suggests that the civic realm in these countries, such as Russia, is beginning to more closely resemble that of countries outside of the former Eastern bloc. By contrast, the civic realm in economically underdeveloped post-Communist countries such as Kyrgyzstan is still distinguished from the civic sphere in other regions of the world by the state's monopoly on resources.

Despite the continuing post-Communist character of Kyrgyzstan's civic realm and the dire assumptions about civic life in the country, it is clear that civic groups' attention to the state, in addition to their involvement in the community, bodes well for political and economic development. However, civic organizations must convince the government of the importance of cooperation and maintain their independence from the state in order to use and preserve their comparative advantage as societal actors.