

**Belonging and Political Participation:
Evidence from a Presidential Election in Kyrgyzstan**

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Abstract

This study examines the effects of social embeddedness on interest in politics and on electoral behavior using data from a nationally representative survey conducted shortly after a presidential election in Kyrgyzstan. We find that interest in politics is positively associated with community trust, public sector employment, and the sense of national belonging. Controlling for the effects of interest in politics, community trust and public sector employment are also positively associated with voting in the national election, whereas evidence on ethno-cultural inclusion is mixed. These findings highlight the role of social embeddedness in the political participation in young post-Communist democracies.

Introduction

Studies of political participation have offered many individual- and group-level explanations for interest in politics and voting behavior. However, this research has developed almost exclusively in mature democracies with historically strong democratic traditions and cultures of political participation. In this study, we focus on the determinants of interest in politics and of voting in the transitional setting of Kyrgyzstan, a Central Asian post-Soviet state with a historically recent yet relatively buoyant experience of democratic development. We show that in addition to the commonly identified socioeconomic drivers, political participation is affected by individuals' position in their social environment. The study makes two major contributions. First, it informs the literature on political behavior in Kyrgyzstan and similar transitional post-Communist settings by demonstrating that community trust and organizational belonging have positive implications for political participation. And second, the findings highlight that many determinants of political behavior identified in mature democracies also operate in transitional settings of nascent democratic tradition like that of post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. Hence, the study both extends the existing, mainly Western-based knowledge to emerging democratic contexts and highlights the unique features of such contexts.

The rest of this article proceeds as follows. First, we present Kyrgyzstan as a setting for studying the relationship between social embeddedness and political participation. Next, we frame interest in politics and voting as outcomes of embeddedness at the community, organizational, and national levels and formulate the hypotheses. In the following section we describe the dataset and the methods. In the Results section, we present the results of the empirical models for political interest followed by the models for voting behavior. Finally, we

discuss the findings in light of the original hypotheses and interpret them in the context of Kyrgyzstan's economic and democratic transformation.

The Context of Kyrgyzstan

A multiethnic Central Asian nation with the gross national product of slightly over \$1,000 per capita (World Bank, 2017) and population of 6 million, Kyrgyzstan (the Kyrgyz Republic) represents an understudied yet distinct setting for investigating determinants of political participation. Nominally a democratic state, Kyrgyzstan has long been characterized by fragile legitimacy of democratic institutions and practices. Upon gaining independence after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Kyrgyzstan, like many other former Soviet republics, endured hard economic and political challenges of transition (Huskey 1995, Collins and Gambrel 2017). Industrial production across much of the post-Communist world plummeted by 15 to 40 percent, rivaling in scale only the economic collapse of the Great Depression of the 1930s (Kapstein and Converse 2010), and Kyrgyzstan was not an exception. The fall of the old economic system caused dramatic declines in the new nation's output and incomes (Ruziev and Majidov 2013), which drastically increased unemployment and contributed to socioeconomic inequality. To the credit of its political leadership, Kyrgyzstan was one of the few post-Communist countries to consistently and rapidly carry out market liberalization reforms in the early years of transition and also to liberalize international trade by entering the World Trade Organization in 1998 (Ruziev and Majidov 2013). Though these reforms did not translate into substantial economic recovery, they contributed to the development of market-based economic relationships and the country's financial sector. At the same time, Kyrgyzstan's poor endowment with natural resources conditioned lackluster interest of foreign investors, which, while slowing

its economic growth, also protected the country from dramatic swings in output during the global financial crisis that were experienced by its oil-rich neighbors (Franke et al. 2009, Ruziev and Majidov 2013). Lack of employment opportunities and weak social safety net pushed many residents into temporary labor migration, mainly to Russia, with remittances from abroad providing the livelihood to many families and hovering around a fifth of the country's gross national product (Ruziev and Majidov 2013).

Kyrgyzstan's economic challenges have long been accompanied by profound changes in national governance. In the aftermath of the USSR collapse, Kyrgyzstan, like most former Soviet republics, went through a tumultuous and painful period of establishing institutions of democratic governance (Cokgezen 2004, Collins 2006, 2011, Ziegler 2016). Its early experience with democratization and with new electoral institutions was strongly influenced by the political legacy of the former Soviet Union where centrally-enforced voter turnout rates had exceeded 95 percent, representing the politics of acclamation of uncontested candidates rather than an actual political choice (Huskey 1995). Extremely high levels of turnout in Kyrgyz elections in the early years of independence resembled those Soviet electoral participation patterns (Huskey 1995). Over the past two decades, however, electoral participation rates have dropped, with voter turnout in national elections ranging from 56 to 75 percent (Election Guide 2018) and approximating that of mature democracies. Paradoxically, this drop in political participation in the Kyrgyz context may be interpreted as an advance in democratization and a qualitative change in the perception of the individual political right not to vote.

Another important aspect of Kyrgyzstan's political transformation is a strong legacy of clan politics and corruption (Cokgezen 2004, Collins 2006, Engvall 2014), which has privileged political incumbents as well as their kin and cronies while inevitably discrediting public officials,

undermining trust in state institutions, and disheartening more principled voters. In fact, public discontent with abuses of power fueled mass protests in 2005 and in 2010 that led to the overthrow of the political elites that had been elected to fight corruption but failed to do so (Collins 2011, Collins and Gambrel 2017). Overall, after independence, Kyrgyzstan has endured several cycles of ‘democratization’ and liberalization interrupted by periodic recurrences of authoritarian practices (Ziegler 2013). As a result, Kyrgyzstan’s political system represents a hybrid regime that still lacks democratic experience and yet shows ostensible movement toward a more transparent and more representative democratic government (Collins and Gambrel 2017).

Among other challenges to building democracy in Kyrgyzstan are the issues of ethnic rights and representation. The country’s ethnic divisions have produced substantial differentials in social and political inclusion and repeatedly led in the escalation of ethnic tensions. The roots of the most violent ethnic tensions go back to territorial disputes and a competition for power between Kyrgyz, the titular group, and Uzbeks, the largest minority group settled mostly in southern Kyrgyzstan that borders Uzbekistan (Bond and Koch 2013). The rich tapestry of ethnic diversity includes other groups. In the latest census, conducted in 2009, 71 percent of the Kyrgyz population identified themselves as Kyrgyz, 14 percent as Uzbek, 8 percent as Russian, and 7 percent as members of other ethnic groups (World Bank 2011). Importantly, although the titular group is by far the largest, many Kyrgyz, including elected officials, continue to use the Russian language in daily communication. Though immediately after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Kyrgyz replaced Russian as the “state” language, the latter was granted the status of an “official” language in 1996 after Kyrgyz political leadership recognized that by embracing radical language reforms it ran the risk of alienating a large Russian minority and angering Russia’s government.

Overall, Kyrgyzstan's history of building civil society and democratic institutions of governance is patchy and inconsistent. Recurring political crises, a rather rough record of economic liberalization tempered by intermittent returns to more authoritarian rule (Collins 2011, Ziegler 2013), a long history of clan politics and corruption during and after the Soviet era (Collins 2006, Collins and Gambrel 2017, Engvall 2014), as well as ethnic fragmentation and outright violence that translated into vast differentials in individual experiences of belonging at the community, organizations, and national levels all prevented many ordinary Kyrgyz from experiencing the benefits of democratic system. More broadly, these challenges, exacerbated by slow economic and institutional development led to the disillusionment with political institutions of democracy and hampered its normative consolidation and success as a form of governance (Collins 2011, Collins and Gambrel 2017). At the same time, Kyrgyzstan's rich traditional social fabric and forms of social organization based on kinship, ethnicity, religion and other identities have offered alternative forms of social contract (Anderson 2000) and could have played an essential role in shaping political solidarity and engagement in the absence of a strong civil society. Our study examines to what extent traditional social capital and social connectivity shaped individual political engagement in this distinctly heterogeneous transitional context.

To study determinants of interest in politics and voting behavior, we use data from a nationally representative survey conducted shortly after the 2011 presidential election which took place after a period of political unrest and violent coups d'état in 2005 and 2010. The election followed the ouster of President K. Bakiyev in 2010, whose failed attempts to curb corruption and stabilize utility pricing, along with his intent to develop an economic partnership with China at the expense of relations with Russia cost him office. Soon after Bakiyev's ouster, massive ethnic violence, targeting ethnic Uzbeks, erupted in the nation's south (International

Crisis Group 2010). In election held in October 2011, with a 61 percent turnout, a pro-Russian candidate A. Atambaev was elected President by getting 63 percent of the votes (Kyrgyz National Voting Commission 2011).

Determinants of Political Participation

Studies of political participation have long acknowledged influence of social contexts on political awareness and mobilization (Huckfeld 1979, La Due and Huckfeld 1998, McClurg 2003, Pietryka et al. 2012, Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, Putnam 1993a, 1993b, 1995, 2000, Teney and Hanquinet 2012, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). More specifically, social inclusion has been found to increase political involvement by improving one's knowledge of public life, putting peer pressure to participate in elections, and developing a sense of civic duty (Galston 2001; Fowler 2006; Edlin, Gelman and Kaplan 2007, McClurg, 2003; Pietryka et al. 2012, Putnam 2000). Yet, social interactions have also been found to affect political participation negatively by exposing individuals to new information and weakening their resolution to vote (Costa and Kahn 2004, McClurg 2006, Mutz 2002) or by acting as a substitute for political involvement (Atkinson and Fowler 2013). In addition, the distinction between individual- and group-level determinants of political participation has not been fully fleshed out because the effects of social factors have often been explained through individual-level behaviors and experiences (Pietryka et al. 2017).

Expansive research in political science, economics, and sociology has highlighted multiple determinants of political interest and voting. One of the earliest theories in political science singled out individual socio-economic status (SES) variables such as education, income, and occupation as key contributors to the development of political interest and participation (Verba and Nie 1972). This perspective was later reframed and refined into the 'resource' theory

of political participation, which while acknowledging a correlation of SES with political participation, argued that a causal relationship exists only between political participation and resources available for such participation: time, money, and civic skills (Brady et al. 1995). With respect to civic skills in particular, it has also been argued that such skills develop through social engagement at school, workplace, and other formal and informal institutions such as churches or voluntary organizations (Brady et al. 1995; Putnam 2000; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Yet, mechanisms through which social contexts exert their effects on civic skills as well as the interplay of individual and social factors in this process have not received enough attention in political science (Pietryka et al. 2017).

Theories of political participation developed or influenced by economists typically view political participation as an outcome of cost-benefit analysis (Downs 1957; Buchanan 1987; Pacek 1994, Pacek et al. 2009). Under this framework, low political participation is a problem of collective action when the social benefits of voting may be significant but individual incentives for participation are low (Atkinson and Fowler 2012). Socioeconomic variables correlate with political participation because individual perception of benefits and costs depends on one's socioeconomic status. More generally, political participation is viewed as a function of individual value systems shaped by social and economic factors. Social embeddedness increases the likelihood of political participation if one's social networks attach importance to politics and if one attaches importance to meeting social expectations (Abrams et al. 2011; Gerber et al. 2008). The cost-benefit perspective, while offering a plausible analytical framework, is not easily amenable to testing because the weights that individuals assign to their costs and benefits are unknown.

Sociological research has proposed several distinct concepts to explain interest in politics and voting through social factors. By studying non-respondents to household surveys, Brehm (1993) and Groves and Cooper (1998) showed that social inclusion is distinct from social involvement and found that socially involved individuals are more likely to vote because involvement makes them more interested in public affairs. In the absence of social involvement that is of ongoing social relationships, one's willingness to participate in political activities declines. Voogt and Saris (2003) distinguished between social involvement and attachment and posited that the latter may be yet another distinct determinant of participation in politics. Unlike involvement, which means taking part in social life and is behavioral, attachment means acceptance of social norms and values and is attitudinal. Social attachment affects interest in politics and voting because it prompts an individual to participate in the political life of the society with which they identify and to uphold the norms and values of that society. However, social attachment at the community level has also been shown to decrease participation in political life when it spurs community engagement which works as a substitute for political participation (Atkinson and Fowler 2012).

Women's interest and participation in political life traditionally lags behind men's, though this differential has been shown to disappear after controlling for the effects of education, cultural norms, and family-level factors (Burns et al. 2001; Putnam 2000; Verba et al. 1997). Qualitative research suggests that political participation of men and women is strongly affected by socialization, cultural norms, and family responsibilities (Clark and Clark 1986; Leighley 1995; Kenworthy and Malami 1999, Sartori et al. 2017). Even though women tend to have more informal social connections, spend more time visiting with friends and relatives and overall tend to be more avid "social capitalists" than men (Putnam 2000), they are also more likely to draw

on their social capital to balance the competing demands of home, work and family well-being rather than to develop socio-political engagement (Lownders 2004; O'Neill and Gidengill 2006, Sartori et al. 2017, Valentova 2016). Women's social capital may be mobilized as a political resource, but we still do not have a good understanding of the factors that trigger the mobilization of women's social capital for political participation (Lownders 2004, Valentova 2016).

Research on political participation in contexts of emergent democracies over the past decades has largely focused on data aggregated to the country-level and tested determinants of political engagement identified in established democracies (Gunther et al. 2016; Kostadinova 2003; Kostadinova and Power 2007; Pacek et al. 2009; Tucker 2007). Central Asia has been largely excluded from this research, however. Political participation in transitional systems and young democracies, such as that of Kyrgyzstan, often happens in the context of low credibility of politicians and their inability to develop, sustain and communicate policy orientations and deliver on their electoral promises. This, in turn, makes politicians more likely to engage in political favoritism and rent-seeking to attract voters, which often leads to corruption, fraud, and other forms of illegitimate political action (Keefer 2005). In such contexts, voter behavior tends to be affected by actual policy positions of candidates relatively less than in mature democracies, and is likely to be influenced by compensatory and somewhat more rudimentary forms of political, economic, and ethno-social awareness and embeddedness (Birnie 2007, Blais 2006, Duch 2001, Pacek 1994, Pacek et al. 2009).

A large cross-national study by Catterberg and Moreno (2006) that compared transitional and developing nations of former USSR, Eastern Europe and Latin America with established democracies shows that interest in politics is most strongly associated with political trust and that

the latter increases along with perceptions that a government acts in the interest of its people as well as the perceptions of individual financial well-being. Interestingly, political trust is also positively associated with interpersonal trust in such transitional and developing settings, while its effects in mature democracies are not pronounced (Catterberg and Moreno 2006). This relationship in societies with a legacy of communist or authoritarian regimes suggests that interpersonal trust may be a leading indicator of political trust as it “spills up” from individuals to institutions (Mishler and Rose 2001). Ambivalence toward breaking social rules and norms (that is corruption permissiveness) decreases political trust in both established democracies and countries of the former Soviet bloc (Catterberg and Moreno 2006). Working with rare Kyrgyz survey data, Collins and Gambrel (2017) also show that perceptions of corruption in Kyrgyzstan decrease trust in state institutions.

Hypotheses

In formulating our hypotheses, we begin by acknowledging that individual interest in public life develops in social environments (Putnam 1993a, 1993b) that represent a hierarchy of community, organizational, and national experiences of belonging. Social connectedness at each of these levels may involve both social involvement and social attachment, where involvement is behavioral and attachment is attitudinal. Both may play into one’s decision to get politically engaged. More broadly, belonging is an individual experience of a social context that reconciles the individual and social determinants of political participation.

At the community level, social networks may affect interest in politics through the exposure of an individual to relatively more local and national matters of public relevance. Since casting a ballot is socially desirable, networks may affect voting through social pressure even

when political interest is unaffected. We expect that the size of one's personal social network will be positively associated with political interest and participation in the national election (**H1**).

As the length of residence in a community increases, so does one's knowledge of community life, and a sense of civic duty and social responsibility with regards to the local community. We expect that after civic duty and social responsibility is engendered at the local level, it transcends the local context and manifests itself as interest in social and political affairs more broadly. The length of residence in a community is therefore expected to be positively associated with interest in politics and participation in the national election (**H2**).

In addition to the size of personal social networks and length of residence, the quality of social relations may strengthen one's sense of belonging and manifest itself through greater involvement in public life. Community trust may affect one's appreciation of their social relationships and help foster civic and political engagement (Alesina and LaFerrara 2000, Cox 2003, Kwak et al. 2004, Uslaner and Brown 2005). Therefore, individuals from communities with high community trust are expected to have higher levels of political participation than individuals from communities with low community trust (**H3**).

One's economic status in relation to other community members, may also affect one's perception of their role in public life and self-efficacy for participating in it (Alesina and LaFerrara 2000, Uslaner and Brown 2005, Brown-Ianuzzi et al. 2017). We expect that individuals who view themselves to be at least as well-off as the majority of community members will be more likely to exhibit interest in politics and participate in elections than individuals who believe that they are less well-off in relative terms (**H4**).

Assessment of changes in community life is another measure that we use as a proxy for social attachment and as an opportunity to examine the role of social attachment in political

participation. We expect that individuals with either positive or negative views on recent changes in community living conditions will have higher levels of political engagement than individuals with undefined views on community changes (**H5**).

Similar to the social interactions in the home community, social interactions at work are likely to increase one's exposure to politically relevant issues and put relatively more pressure on individuals to vote in elections. We expect the effect of employment on political participation to be positive (**H6**). Within the working population, individuals employed in the public sector are expected to be more politically engaged than individuals working in the private sector, due to a relatively higher level of state dependence or clientelism among public sector workers (**H7**).

Political behavior may also depend on one's assessment of the value of their political engagement for national policy outcomes. In a multiethnic nation, individuals belonging to non-titular groups may be more likely to discount their role in the political process than individuals belonging to the titular group and may lack social integration and political efficacy that would facilitate their political incorporation (Diaz 2012, File 2013, Jang 2009, Miller et al. 1981, Verba et al. 1995). We expect to see that in Kyrgyzstan, a country with marked differentials in the minority and majority groups' social and political power, differentials in political interest and behavior will be particularly pronounced: a non-titular ethnic status will be negatively associated with interest in politics and participation in the national election (**H8**).

Our last two hypotheses address political belonging at the national level. First, we argue that political interest and participation may be influenced by one's engagement with the world outside their country of residence through own experience or social ties abroad. Specifically, we expect that one's past international migration experiences, social connections abroad, and plans

to migrate abroad will each be negatively associated with interest in the political present and future of Kyrgyzstan and decrease the odds of voting (**H9**).

Finally, individuals' assessment of the nation's economic development should also influence their political participation. Thus, we expect that those who view changes in the national economy since the Soviet times as either positive or negative, will be more politically engaged than those who see no changes or are unsure about their direction (**H10**).

Out of ten research hypotheses that we will test using data from the 2011 presidential election in Kyrgyzstan, we expect the strongest positive relationship between interest in politics and voting and variables at the level of national belonging (**H9** and **H10**). Institutional and community-level variables are likely to be relatively weaker determinants of participation in a national election. In light of the differences in the use of social capital by gender, we also expect that the effects of belonging at the institutional and community levels will be relatively stronger for men than for women.

Data and Method

Data for the analysis come from a nationally representative household survey conducted in Kyrgyzstan within three months of the presidential election in October 2011. Multistage cluster sampling was used. At the first stage, 102 clusters (villages, towns, or city boroughs) were selected with probability proportional to population size. At the second stage, in each cluster, 20 households were randomly selected (2040 in total). Then, at the third and last stage, in each selected household one resident aged 18-49 was randomly chosen and interviewed. This survey design yielded the response rate of 78 percent and participation rate of 98 percent. A standardized survey interview was administered face-to-face in Kyrgyz (58 percent), Russian (33

percent), or Uzbek (9 percent) based on respondent's choice. The 30-page survey instrument included a variety of questions on respondents' demographic, socioeconomic, and ethno-cultural characteristics and the characteristics of their household. Among other questions, the instrument also included items measuring respondents' political attitudes and experiences. The survey resulted in 2032 complete interviews. The project was carried out in collaboration between Institutions 1 and 2 [omitted for blind review] and was approved by the Institutional Review Board of [omitted for blind review].

The variables are operationalized as follows. Social interactions in the home community are measured through the reported number of relatives and friends living in the same community but not in the same household as the respondent. Community trust is gauged through the number of individuals who, in the respondent's view, could lend them money without interest. Community attachment is measured through the length of residence in the community, a three-level categorical variable for respondents who have lived at their current residence for 0 to less than 4 years, 4 to less than 9 years, or for 9 years or more, respectively. We conceptualize residence in the community for 0 to less than 4 years as a low level of embeddedness; 4 to less than 9 years - as a medium level of embeddedness; and 9 or more years - as a high level of embeddedness.

Relative economic standing of a household is captured with a binary variable that equals one if the respondent views their household to be poorer than the average household in their community, and zero otherwise. To capture community involvement, we include subjective measures of community changes in the past three years.

Organizational belonging is measured through binary variables of employment in the public sector, private sector, self-employment or family business. Unemployed individuals are

the reference category. We include a set of dummy variables to measure national belonging: ethnic Kyrgyz who speak only or mainly the Kyrgyz language at home (the reference category), ethnic Kyrgyz who speak only or mainly Russian at home, Uzbek, and other ethnicity. Past international migration experience and plans to migrate abroad are also included as binary variables. The number of friends and the number of relatives outside Kyrgyzstan are continuous variables that measure the extent of one's social attachment to countries other than Kyrgyzstan.

Similar to community attachment, national attachment is gauged through a subjective perception of changes in the national economy compared to the Soviet times. Respondents who view the economic conditions to be better or worse than during the time of the Soviet Union are expected to have higher odds of political engagement than respondents who do not have an opinion on this subject.

Besides measuring individual embeddedness at the three levels, we use socio-economic variables such as age, gender, marital status, parity, religiosity, education, income, and place of residence to control for other factors that may affect political interest and participation.

We use two dependent variables in the analysis - political interest and voting in the presidential election. Both variables are operationalized as dichotomies. Political interest is based on the survey question that asks whether the respondent is interested in politics. Two of the three response options - strong interest and some interest in politics - are grouped into one category and assigned the value of one; no interest is assigned the value of zero. Voting in presidential elections equals one if the respondent said that they had voted in the election and zero otherwise. As a self-reported measure, this variable may suffer from an upward bias because voting is a socially desirable activity. According to the official national voting statistics, 63 percent of eligible voters participated in the Kyrgyz presidential election in 2011 (KNEIS 2011); according

to the survey we use – 79.7 percent of the respondents voted in the election. A higher than the national percentage of voters in the sample aligns with the 74.8 percent of survey respondents who expressed interest in politics in a survey question that preceded the question on voting. Because interest in politics is not a socially desirable quality, respondents had no incentive to over-report it. Therefore, we believe that the social desirability bias is not particularly strong in the sample. Instead, it is likely that the sample over-represents the population of Kyrgyz voters: politically engaged individuals are more likely to agree to participate in a survey than less politically engaged ones. For both dependent variables, we fit binomial logistic regressions, run separate models for each level of belonging as well as full models and also examine gender-specific models.

Descriptive statistics

Out of the original sample of 2032 respondents, 2008 respondents had complete records on all variables of interest. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the sample, which includes 54.3 % women, 34.5 % urban residents, and 46.7 % respondents from the North. At the time of the survey, the average age of a respondent was 32.7 years; 62.2 % of the respondents were married or lived in a civil union; an average respondent had 1.8 children and an average monthly income of 3.7 thousand Kyrgyz soms per person in the household (roughly equivalent to 75USD at the time of survey). Close to 18 % of the respondents had complete tertiary education. As mentioned above, 74.8 % of the respondents expressed interest in politics and 79.7 % of the respondents reported having voted in the presidential election. About 15.4 % of the respondents had lived in their current community from 0 to less than 4 years; 13.6 % of the respondents had lived in their current community from 4 to less than 10 years, whereas the remaining 71.0 % of the respondents had lived in their current community for 10 years or more. On average, the

respondents had 13.8 relatives and 10.2 friends living in the home community but not in their household, though standard deviations around these averages were high. Close to 22 % of the respondents believed that positive changes had taken place in the community, 20.3 % of the respondents believed that negative changes had taken place, and the remaining 58 % of the respondents either did not know or believed that no changes had happened in their community over the past three years. On average, respondents stated that 2.5 people in their community could lend them money without interest. Over 13.6 % of the respondents said that people in their community often helped each other; 56.8 % of the respondents said that people in their community helped each other sometimes; and 29.6 % of the respondents said that they were living in a community where people did not help each other. About 45 % of the respondents were not working, 17 % worked in the public sector, 11.7 % worked for a private company, and 26.2 % were self-employed or worked in a family business. Close to 50 % of the respondents were ethnic Kyrgyz who spoke Kyrgyz at home, 19.8 % Kyrgyz who spoke Russian at home, 16.4 % were Uzbek and the remaining 14.4 % belonged to other ethnic groups. About 31 % of the respondents thought that the national economy was doing better than in the USSR times, 41.5 % believed that the national economy was doing worse than in the USSR times, and 27.8 % said that they did not know or thought that the economy was doing just as well as in the USSR times. Close to 8.5 % of the respondents had migrated internationally and 8.8% wanted to migrate internationally. On average, respondents had 2.5 relatives and 1.2 friends abroad, with high standard deviations around these means.

<Table 1 here>

Results

The results for the multivariate models that predict interest in politics are presented in Table 2. We have hypothesized that interest in politics will be positively affected by community belonging which is dynamically generated out of a relationship of an individual and their local social environment. Contrary to the expectations, we do not find that the size of social networks and the length of residence in the community affect political interest. **H1** and **H2** are not supported. As expected, the quality of social interactions does have a statistically significant association with political interest: as the number of locals who would lend the respondent money without interest goes up, so do the odds of their interest in politics. This effect is robust in the presence of other predictors and persists, without changing in magnitude, in gender-specific models. **H3** is supported. We conclude that interest in politics is more likely to exist in trusting and supportive social environments. This finding adds specificity to Putnam's (2000) view of community trust as a valuable form of social capital for political engagement.

Relative social standing that we measure through one's assessment of their economic wealth compared to the wealth of other community residents is another statistically significant predictor of political interest. Respondents who view themselves to be poorer than an average community member are less likely to be interested in politics than respondents who view themselves to be at least as well-off as the rest of the community. **H4** is supported. Next, we observe that respondents with positive views on changes in their communities' living conditions are more likely to be interested in politics than respondents with no opinions or with negative views on such changes. **H5** is supported partially.

Compared to being unemployed, being employed in the private sector or a family business is positively associated with interest in politics in the base model but the effect is not significant in the full or gender-specific models. **H6**, the hypothesis about the effects of

organizational embeddedness is, therefore, supported partially. In line with the expectations, public sector employment increases the odds of political interest compared to being unemployed. The effects are strong and significant in the base model, the full model, and in the model for women. **H7** is supported partially. Increased interest in politics of the individuals employed in the public sector may be explained through a relatively higher dependence of their economic wellbeing on the outcomes of national policy, otherwise known as a higher degree of clientelism between an individual and the state. In addition, public sector employment may be making individuals more aware of their civic duties than employment in the private sector, family business, or unemployment.

The models show a statistically significant and robust effect of ethnicity on political interest. Uzbeks, the largest ethnic minority in Kyrgyzstan, have significantly lower odds of being interested in politics than Kyrgyz-speaking ethnic Kyrgyz. However, differentials in the political interest of Russian-speaking Kyrgyz or other ethnic groups are not pronounced. **H8** is supported partially.

Contrary to the expectations, social connections with friends and relatives abroad and the desire to move abroad have no effect on the odds of political interest either in the full or gender-specific models. Prior international migration experience decreases the odds of political interest in the baseline model but the effect disappears in the other models. **H9** is not supported. The lack of effects may reflect the selectivity of return migration. Individuals who had travelled abroad and returned are likely to have an attachment to Kyrgyzstan that pulled them back and are, therefore, just as likely to be interested in politics as residents who have not migrated abroad. Individuals with no attachment to Kyrgyzstan are likely to have moved abroad and been excluded from the sample.

Similar to the perception of community changes, we use views on the economy as an indicator of interest in national affairs. We observe that individuals with optimistic views on national economic changes are more likely to be politically engaged than individuals with pessimistic or undefined views. **H10** is supported partially. While both positive and negative assessments of changes support our hypotheses about national attachment and political participation, a stronger association of positive assessments with political interest adds a curious nuance to the findings.

Among other covariates, a higher level of human capital measured through higher educational attainment has a positive association with political interest. Gender-specific models unveil that this effect in the full model is driven by the role of higher education for women. The full model demonstrates that on average, men are approximately twice as likely to express interest in politics as women. Higher education countervails this disparity by putting university-educated women on par with non-university educated men, *ceteris paribus*. Controlling for regional differences, urban residents are more likely to express interest in politics than rural residents.

<Table 2 here>

The results for the model that predicts voting behavior are presented in Table 3. In addition to all independent variables discussed above, this model also controls for the respondent's interest in politics. At the level of community belonging, the length of community residence is the strongest predictor of participation in the national election. H2 is supported. This finding supports the idea that rootedness in a *local* community has a positive spillover effect on the involvement in *national* political affairs (Boulianne and Brailey 2014, Kwak et al. 2004). The likelihood of voting in the election is also positively affected by the size of social networks

and the number of locals who can lend money without interest though the effects are not strong. The gender-specific models show that these effects in the full model are driven by the role of social capital for women. We, therefore, conclude that community embeddedness plays a larger role in the political participation of women than men. **H1** and **H3** are supported partially.

The experience of being poorer than the rest of the community has no statistically significant effects on voting, controlling for other factors including political interest. **H4** is not supported. Positive views on changes in community living conditions increase the odds of voting while the effects of negative views are statistically identical to the effects of having undefined views. **H5** is supported partially.

At the level of organizational belonging, employment relative to unemployment does not increase the odds of voting in a consistent fashion, with private sector workers displaying lower odds of voting than the reference category of the unemployed. **H6** is not supported. Employment in the public sector has a very strong positive effect on the likelihood of voting that does not change much across the models. **H7** is supported. Individuals working in the public sector may be more engrained in public life and exposed to the political discourse to a larger extent than the unemployed or individuals working outside the public sector. It is also possible that public sector employees overstate their voting more than the other respondent groups due to a stronger pressure to conform to the social expectations of being good citizens in the public sector.

At the level of national belonging, non-Russified Kyrgyz have the highest likelihood of participating in the national election compared to the other ethnic groups. The effects of a non-titular status are consistently negative though not consistently significant to warrant a generalization. **H8** is not supported. Similar to the results of the political interest model, no robust effects of migration experience or migration plans on the national election turnout are

detected. Irrespective of the previous migration experiences, migration intentions, and the size of social networks abroad, individuals tend to participate in national elections on par with individuals without these characteristics. **H9** and **H10** are not supported.

Not surprisingly, interest in politics has a strong positive association with participation in the presidential election. The causal link from political interest to political participation, however, cannot be assumed with certainty. It is most likely that political interest leads to political participation but causality may go both ways as political participation may also lead to increased political interest and increased political knowledge. Importantly, the magnitude of the effect of political interest on voting is roughly half as strong for women. It appears that women's voting behavior is affected relatively more by social influences than by actual interest in politics. The effect of higher education is positive but statistically significant only in the full model and the model for men. The model for interest in politics demonstrates that university education has a strong positive effect on women's political interest. Yet, once political interest is controlled for – university education does not increase women's odds of voting. Interestingly, the role of marital status is positive and substantively strong for women, while being negative and of marginal importance for men. The number of children positively affects the odds of voting for men. Residence in an urban area has a strong negative effect on the political participation of women.

<Table 3 here >

Discussion

We have examined the associations of community, organizational, and national belonging with interest in politics and voting in the 2011 presidential election in a hybrid post-communist

regime of Kyrgyzstan, which continues to struggle with building political stability and a culture of democratic participation in a traditionalist, ethnically diverse, and economically poor environment tainted with a long history of political corruption. While being one of the first large scale nationally-representative multivariate analyses of the determinants of political engagement in Kyrgyzstan, our study contributes not only to an understanding of the processes of democratic development in this particular country but also to a broader literature on political participation in emergent democracy contexts. Using rare individual-level data, we bring into the limelight the relationship between social embeddedness and democracy and add to the scarce quantitative empirical evidence to support this relationship in developing and transitional settings.

At the level of community embeddedness, the models suggest that community trust and perception of one's relative economic standing are robust and statistically significant predictors of political interest. Stronger communities appear to boost while the experience of relative deprivation appears to depress the odds of having interest in politics. In the models of voting behavior, length of residence in the community is the strongest predictor of voting in the national election. These findings echo the literature on social attachment and economic inequality as drivers of political involvement and efficacy (Brown-Ianuzzi et al. 2017; Fowler 2006; Fowler and Kam 2007; Eldin et al. 2007; Pacek et al. 2009). We conclude that high community trust that strengthens social capital is likely to have positive effects on the development of direct democracy at the national level. These findings point to the social and economic policy levers that may help reinforce democratic practices of political participation in emergent settings.

In terms of organizational belonging, employment in the public sector is a robust and statistically significant predictor of political interest and voting, with a substantially stronger effect on the latter. Whether it exerts its effect through social desirability, peer pressure or

clientelism with the state, this finding implies a relatively higher potential for mobilization of public sector workers and, at the same time, points at a relative disengagement of private sector workers, the self-employed and the unemployed individuals from national politics. Such differentials suggest asymmetries in political representation which are common in both developed and developing settings (e.g., File 2015, Pacek et al. 2009).

Ethnic differences are present in the model for political interest but muted in the voting behavior model, which is a puzzle to resolve. Even though Uzbeks demonstrate a pronounced lack of political interest, they appear to participate in the national election to the same extent as the titular group (the negative coefficients are not statistically significant). We reconcile these seemingly contradictory findings through the symbolic effects of the non-titular ethnic identity. Uzbeks may lack interest in politics because, compared to the titular group, they lack comparable inclusion in Kyrgyzstan; yet, they may be compelled to participate in the national election to affirm their group identity and voice their ethnic presence in the political process that is characterized by ethno-cultural tensions. Other research on group identity and ethnic fragmentation shows that once a group identity is politicized, it has a powerful effect on turnout and other forms of political engagement (e.g., Valenzuela and Michelson 2016; Evans and Whitefield 1993, Tavits 2005).

Contrary to the expectations, other measures of national belonging such as plans to migrate, prior migration experience, and social connections abroad, do not exhibit robust associations with either interest in politics or voting. It is possible that plans to migrate may result from one's attentiveness to the issues of national policy, which produces engagement and dissatisfaction with the political, economic and social aspects of life in their current country of residence. More generally, plans to migrate may be viewed as the 'exit' strategy (Hirschman

1970), which is a form of political participation rather than a form of political disengagement. As a result, in terms of their interest in politics and voting behavior, respondents with plans to migrate abroad may be on par with the respondents without these intentions. The null effects of prior migration experience and social connections abroad may also be related to the self-sorting of individuals into living in Kyrgyzstan versus abroad. Because the survey captured only those individuals who had decided to return to Kyrgyzstan after migrating abroad and after forming social connections there, those individuals could be as vested in their life in Kyrgyzstan as those without prior migration experience and social connections outside Kyrgyzstan.

Overall, we conclude that political behavior in Kyrgyzstan resembles that of the citizens of developed democracies when it comes to the conventional socio-economic axes of variation, particularly education, income, gender and the urban-rural divide. In this regard, the Central Asian context does not stand out as idiosyncratic in spite of its cultural, economic, and political peculiarities of a post-communist society in transition. By testing the effects of social, organizational, and national embeddedness on interest in politics and voting, we conclude that community trust and public sector employment are the strongest positive correlates of political engagement and that ethnic fragmentation, while present at the level of political interest, actually contributes to the political mobilization of minority voters. This highly salient ethnic-based competition in Kyrgyzstan may be instructive for investigating turnout dynamics in other transitional contexts with politicized ethnic cleavages.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean / Percent	Standard Deviation
<i>Community Belonging</i>		
Number of relatives living locally	13.8	17.1
Number of friends living locally	10.2	11.3
Length of residence in the community 0-3 years	15.4 %	-
Length of residence in the community 4-9 years	13.6 %	-
[Length of residence in the community over 9 years]	71.0 %	-
Number of people who can lend money locally	2.5	4.8
Positive changes in the community in the past 3 years	21.8 %	-
Negative changes in the community in the past 3 years	20.3 %	-
[No changes in the community in the past 3 years/Do not know]	57.9 %	-
Perception of being poorer than most community members	21.4 %	-
Community members help each other often	13.6 %	-
Community members help each other sometimes	56.8 %	-
Community members do not help each other	29.6 %	-
<i>Organizational Belonging</i>		
Works in the public sector	17.0 %	-
Works for a private company	11.7 %	-
Works for a family business or self-employed	26.2 %	-
[Unemployed]	45.1 %	-
<i>National Belonging</i>		
Russified Kyrgyz	19.8 %	-
Uzbek	16.4 %	-
Other ethnicity	14.4 %	-
[Kyrgyz conversing in Kyrgyz]	49.4 %	-
Kyrgyzstan's economy is better off now than in the USSR	30.7 %	-
Kyrgyzstan's economy is worse off now than in the USSR	41.5 %	-
[Kyrgyzstan's economy is the same as in the USSR/ Do not know]	27.8 %	-
Has migrated internationally	8.4 %	-
Would like to migrate internationally	8.8 %	-
Number of relatives abroad	2.4	5.5
Number of friends abroad	1.2	3.4
<i>Controls</i>		
Age	32.7	9.4
Female	54.3 %	-
Complete college	17.8 %	-
Religious	75.5 %	-
Married or in a civil union	62.2 %	-
Number of children	1.8	1.6
Household income per person (1000's of soms)	3.7	2.6
Resides in the North	46.7 %	-
Lives in an urban area	35.4 %	-
Interested in politics	74.8 %	-
Voted in presidential elections in 2011	79.7 %	-
Number of observations	2008	

Table 2. Predicted: Interest in politics, logistic regression parameter estimates, standard errors in parentheses.

Predictors and Controls	Community	Organizational	National	Full	Men	Women
Number of relatives living locally	0.00 (0.005)			0.00 (0.005)	0.00 (0.007)	0.00 (0.005)
Number of friends living locally	0.01 (0.007) *			0.01 (0.001) +	0.01 (0.006)	0.02 (0.011) +
Number of people who can lend money locally	0.10 (0.027) **			0.08 (0.026) **	0.08 (0.030) **	0.08 (0.035) *
Length of residence in the community 0-3 years	-0.14 (0.184)			-0.16 (0.201)	-0.26 (0.305)	-0.12 (0.245)
Length of residence in the community 4-9 years	-0.06 (0.159)			-0.10 (0.173)	0.13 (0.400)	-0.22 (0.224)
[Length of residence in the community over 9 years]						
Positive changes in the community in the past 3 years	0.43 (0.159) **			0.32 (0.187) +	0.39 (0.312)	0.32 (0.229)
Negative changes in the community in the past 3 years	-0.04 (0.155)			-0.09 (0.169)	-0.47 (0.243) *	0.14 (0.205)
[No changes in the community in the past 3 years/Do not know]						
Perception of being poorer than most community members	-0.42 (0.164) **			-0.41 (0.167) **	-0.45 (0.259) *	-0.36 (0.186) +
Community members help each other often	-0.47 (0.256) +			-0.38 (0.233) +	-0.10 (0.320)	-0.54 (0.302) +
Community members help each other sometimes	0.10 (0.152)			0.14 (0.156)	0.14 (0.224)	0.19 (0.186)
[Community members do not help each other]						
Works in the public sector		1.13 (0.229) **		0.69 (0.244) **	0.32 (0.307)	0.84 (0.326) **
Works for a private company		0.39 (0.204) +		0.03 (0.212)	-0.08 (0.331)	0.05 (0.288)
Works for a family business or self-employed		0.61 (0.170) **		0.35 (0.185) +	0.35 (0.255)	0.31 (0.241)
[Unemployed]						
Kyrgyz using mainly the Russian language			0.28 (0.253)	0.04 (0.259)	-0.04 (0.301)	0.10 (0.357)
Uzbek			-0.49 (0.197) **	-0.80 (0.230) **	-0.82 (0.267) **	-0.80 (0.321) **
Other ethnicity			-0.16 (0.194)	-0.24 (0.210)	-0.76 (0.325) *	0.27 (0.284)
[Kyrgyz using mainly the Kyrgyz language]						
Kyrgyzstan's economy is better off now than in the USSR			0.79 (0.177) **	0.61 (0.190) **	0.28 (0.280)	0.85 (0.214) **
Kyrgyzstan's economy is worse off now than in the USSR			0.50 (0.169) **	0.39 (0.182) *	0.63 (0.236) **	0.31 (0.222)
[Kyrgyzstan's economy is the same as in the USSR/ Do not know]						
Has migrated internationally			0.34 (0.219)	-0.08 (0.250)	-0.04 (0.300)	-0.52 (0.387)
Would like to migrate internationally			-0.00 (0.179)	0.15 (0.188)	0.38 (0.295)	-0.07 (0.265)
Number of relatives abroad			-0.00 (0.005)	-0.00 (0.005)	-0.00 (0.008)	-0.01 (0.005)
Number of friends abroad			0.01 (0.005)	0.00 (0.005)	0.02 (0.012)	-0.00 (0.006)
Age				-0.05 (0.009)	-0.01 (0.017)	-0.01 (0.012)
Female				-0.65 (0.146) **		
Complete college				0.56 (0.186) **	0.40 (0.395)	0.64 (0.230) **
Religious				0.20 (0.185)	0.48 (0.241) *	-0.01 (0.243)
In union				0.11 (0.161)	0.29 (0.283)	0.05 (0.219)
Number of children				0.06 (0.064)	0.19 (0.113) +	0.02 (0.085)
Household income per capita				0.07 (0.031) *	0.10 (0.050) *	0.06 (0.040)
Lives in an urban area [Lives in a rural area]				0.47 (0.216) *	0.38 (0.237) +	0.58 (0.256) *
Lives in the North [Lives in the South]				-0.24 (0.223)	-0.01 (0.290)	-0.37 (0.274)
Intercept	0.81 (0.203) **	0.72(0.010)**	0.69 (0.152)**	-0.02 (0.391)	-0.05 (0.600)	-0.51 (0.451)
-2 Log likelihood Chi-square	2187 83	2210 59	2199 70	2006 263	779 91	1187 167
Number of observations	2008	2008	2008	2006	917	1091

Note: Reference categories in brackets. Significance levels: + p<=0.10; * p<=0.05; ** p<=0.01, standard errors are clustered at the level of a survey geographic cluster.

Table 3. Predicted: Voting in presidential election, logistic regression parameter estimates, standard errors in parentheses

Predictors and controls	Community	Organizational	National	Full	Men	Women
Number of relatives living locally	0.01 (0.005) *			0.02 (0.006) **	0.01 (0.008)	0.02 (0.008) *
Number of friends living locally	0.01 (0.008)			0.01 (0.010) +	0.01 (0.010)	0.03 (0.014) *
Number of people who can lend money locally	0.07 (0.030) *			0.05 (0.026) +	0.03 (0.003) **	0.10 (0.046) *
Length of residence in the community 0-3 years	-0.84 (0.164) **			-0.64 (0.175) **	-0.65 (0.274) **	-0.69 (0.247) **
Length of residence in the community 4-9 years	0.01 (0.190)			0.04 (0.208)	-0.47 (0.321)	0.29 (0.229)
[Length of residence in the community over 9 years]						
Positive changes in the community in the past 3 years	0.49 (0.169) **			0.17 (0.190)	-0.05 (0.308)	0.41 (0.231) +
Negative changes in the community in the past 3 years	0.18 (0.189)			0.19 (0.181)	-0.15 (0.241)	0.46 (0.229) *
[No changes in the community in the past 3 years/Do not know]						
Perception of being poorer than most community members	0.13 (0.176)			0.11 (0.193)	0.18 (0.239)	0.08 (0.280)
Community members help each other often	0.44 (0.233) +			0.20 (0.238)	0.32 (0.307)	0.09 (0.346)
Community members help each other sometimes	0.24 (0.146) +			-0.01 (0.144)	0.27 (0.217)	-0.16 (0.181)
[Community members do not help each other]						
Works in the public sector		1.40 (0.222) **		1.20 (0.253) **	1.30 (0.374) **	1.25 (0.315) **
Works for a private company		-0.34 (0.155) *		-0.03 (0.201)	0.32 (0.268)	-0.00 (0.300)
Works for a family business or self-employed		0.44 (0.157) **		0.06 (0.170)	0.49 (0.228) *	-0.37 (0.226)
[Unemployed]						
Kyrgyz using mainly the Russian language			-0.76 (0.216) **	-0.20 (0.237)	-0.36 (0.308)	-0.11 (0.277)
Uzbek			-0.29 (0.202)	-0.33 (0.207)	-0.23 (0.303)	-0.41 (0.280)
Other ethnicity			-0.48 (0.213) *	-0.07 (0.275)	-0.17 (0.358)	-0.00 (0.331)
[Kyrgyz using mainly the Kyrgyz language]						
Kyrgyzstan's economy is better off now than in the USSR			0.59 (0.204) **	0.35 (0.203) +	0.21 (0.277)	0.45 (0.266) +
Kyrgyzstan's economy is worse off now than in the USSR			0.30 (0.183)	0.04 (0.178)	-0.18 (0.265)	0.20 (0.232)
[Kyrgyzstan's economy is the same as in the USSR/ Do not know]						
Has migrated internationally			0.12 (0.248)	-0.34 (0.293)	-0.53 (0.284) *	-0.24 (0.717)
Would like to migrate internationally			-0.38 (0.211) +	0.07 (0.209)	0.01 (0.292)	0.08 (0.290)
Number of relatives abroad			-0.00 (0.004)	-0.00 (0.004)	-0.01 (0.006)	-0.01 (0.004)
Number of friends abroad			0.00 (0.004)	-0.01 (0.005)	0.00 (0.009)	-0.01 (0.006) *
Interested in politics				0.65 (0.155) **	0.94 (0.275) **	0.45 (0.201) *
Age				-0.01 (0.010)	0.00 (0.018)	0.01 (0.012)
Female				-0.14 (0.136)		
Complete college				0.51 (0.224) *	0.81 (0.381) *	0.19 (0.274)
Religious				-0.03 (0.206)	-0.06 (0.268)	-0.04 (0.243)
In marital union				0.35 (0.178) *	-0.05 (0.308) +	0.42 (0.225) +
Number of children				0.17 (0.068) *	0.44 (0.126) **	0.04 (0.081)
Household income per capita				-0.04 (0.028)	-0.05 (0.040)	-0.05 (0.032)
Lives in an urban area				-0.37 (0.194) *	-0.18 (0.272)	-0.59 (0.230) **
Lives in the North [Lives in the South]				-0.46 (0.245) *	-0.47 (0.302)	-0.37 (0.279)
Intercept	-0.80 (0.195) **	1.14 (0.113) **	1.43 (0.176) **	0.17 (0.398)	-0.12 (0.655)	-0.10 (0.493)
-2 Log likelihood Chi-square	1912 112	1952 55	1961 40	1708 316	714 171	945 192
Number of observations	2008	2008	2008	2008	917	1091

Note: Reference categories in brackets. Significance levels: + p<=0.10; * p<=0.05; ** p<=0.01, standard errors are clustered at the level of a survey geographic cluster.

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