



Article

The Role of Political Leaders in Changing National Political Systems in Transitional Periods

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Abstract

The article explores the significance of Kyrgyzstan's political leaders in the formation of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic between 1917 and 1938. Through critical analysis of historical sources and a comparison of key figures, the study highlights the essential role these leaders played in shaping the modern Kyrgyz state. As a result of the conducted research, it was established that the role of a political leader in transitional periods of history was often decisive. The presence of certain qualities in a political leader, such as military and diplomatic abilities, administrative and reform skills, determined the implementation of the political vision. The defining transitional period in the history of Kyrgyzstan, marked by the creation of the first Kyrgyz national state formation, was 1917-1938. The political leaders who played a key role in this historical process were Abdykerim Sydykov, Jusup Abdrakhmanov, Imanaly Aidarbekov, and Abdykadyr Orozbekov. These leaders led the process of establishing the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic, with Abdykadyr Orozbekov serving as its first leader. These political leaders demonstrated diplomatic skills and managed to reach necessary compromises with the central authorities in Moscow. Their efforts were pivotal in establishing Kyrgyzstan as a national entity within the Soviet Union. They championed national self-determination, modernization, and educational reform, laying the foundation for the future development of the country. The study's findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how political leadership influenced the creation of Soviet Kyrgyzstan and suggest directions for further research into leadership roles in state formation.

Keywords: national communism, self-determination, state building, state formation, territorial demarcation

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Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the emergence of modern independent national states brought the issue of state-building and the creation of political systems to the forefront. The young states were faced with choosing which path of political and economic development to take, and how to transform the former Soviet republic into a modern national state. Political leaders played a significant role in determining the direction of state-building. The transformation of the Soviet system into a post-Soviet one, the shift from a planned to a market economy, marked the transitional period of the 1990s-2000s. This era was similar in its significance to the 1917 Revolution and the establishment of Soviet power, when the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) emerged from the former Russian Empire. At that time, colonial administrative bodies were replaced by national Soviet republics, including Kyrgyzstan, which became independent in 1991. In that period of national state-building, individual political leaders also played an important role, so the study of the experience and the assessment of the significance remain highly relevant.

Various scholars have studied the role of political leaders in state-building during transitional periods. Among these scholars is Kubatova (2020), who analyzed the formation of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic. According to Kubatova, Abdykadyr Orozbekov made a significant contribution to the institutionalization of the first Kyrgyz national state formation, who can be considered the first state leader of Kyrgyzstan. Karabekov (2024) researched the issue of national-territorial delimitation in Central Asia in the 1920s. In the author's view, the Kyrgyz national public and political figures substantially formed the Kyrgyz national identity as an autonomous region and later a union republic.

National-territorial delimitation in Central Asia is also the focus of the work by Bektursunov (2022). This scholar explores the conflicts between Kyrgyz and Kazakhs regarding territorial boundaries. The author claims that Central Asian political leaders played a specific role in creating the first national state formations in Central Asia and in the territorial delineation. Edgar (2023) examines Soviet national policy in Central Asia. According to the author, the central Soviet government attempted to manipulate tensions between the various ethnic groups in the region, which nevertheless did not hinder the formation of local national elites.

The policies of the USSR leadership towards the peoples of Central Asia were also studied by Rumer (1989). The author characterized this policy as a "tragic experiment" and reflected on the repressions carried out by Soviet authorities against the political elites. Wang (2024) explores the issue of national and state-building in Kyrgyzstan, discussing the formation of a Kyrgyz political nation. Bozkuş Kahyaoğlu

et al. (2024) conducted a study of civil society in Kyrgyzstan. The authors highlight progress in this area and also point out political traditions in Kyrgyzstan that are based on the previous experiences of state-building. Khalid (2021) studies the political situation in Central Asia at the beginning of the 20th century. This author considers the creation and existence of the first national state formations in Central Asia after the fall of the Russian Empire a key milestone in the history of national state-building.

When discussing the state of research on this topic, it is worth noting that certain aspects remain underexplored. Among these aspects is the need for more in-depth study of the evolution of the political views of Kyrgyz leaders in the 1920s and the degree to which the ideological concept of national communism was integrated into the political life of Kyrgyzstan at that time.

This study aimed to assess the historical significance of the leaders of Kyrgyzstan in 1917-1938 in establishing and forming the Kyrgyz national state. In line with this aim, the following research objectives were defined:

- To identify the qualities required of a political leader during pivotal moments in national history.
- To highlight Kyrgyzstan's most significant political leaders during the formation of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic.
- To assess the contribution of these political leaders to various areas of state-building.

Methodology

While working on the research of the stated issue, various scientific research methods were applied. The historical-critical method allowed the data to be studied with consideration of the context of the era under investigation. This method, through the tools of historical criticism, made it possible to determine the significance of the political leaders of Kyrgyzstan from 1917 to 1938, as well as the views and goals the leaders were guided by. Given that changes in the historical context often led to the same leader being evaluated very differently by contemporaries and future generations, it was precisely the historical-critical method that helped distinguish reliable facts from ideological bias and tendencies.

The comparative method made it possible to analyze the activities of different political figures of Kyrgyzstan in 1917-1938, to determine the extent of the influence, and to assess the role each played in the formation of the Kyrgyz national state. This period was significant in Kyrgyzstan's history, marking the emergence of the first Kyrgyz national state formation. The beginning of this process was in 1917 with the outbreak of the Revolution in the Russian Empire, which intensified national movements. The end of the process was marked by 1938 with the establishment of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic. Using the comparative method, it became possible

to determine the significance of individual political leaders in transforming political systems. The criteria for comparison included the political figures' qualities that influenced the success of the policies, particularly, the diplomatic skills, administrative abilities, leadership of the apparatus, military qualities, and reforming activity. Another criterion was the extent to which the decisions and actions of a given leader had a lasting impact on subsequent events. The comparative method helped to define which qualities a political leader needed to assert the role during a turning point in history.

The dialectical method enabled a clear definition and evaluation of the era in which the modern Kyrgyz national state began to take shape, as well as an assessment of the political leaders of that era. Through contrasting data, this method allowed for conclusive judgments about the role of political figures who implemented national statehood projects during a decisive transitional period marked by political system transformation.

The method of generalization helped to depict a comprehensive picture of the historical era in which the political leaders operated. Thanks to this method's tools, it became possible to draw conclusions about the key factors that shaped the activities of the studied leaders and identify commonalities in political careers and biographies.

The historical-typological method allowed for understanding the transitional period and its defining features. The use of the historical-typological method made it possible to define the extent to which the role of a political leader during a transitional period differed from that of a leader during stable political development.

Results

In the history of various countries, some periods are turning points that determine the course of events. During such historical periods, political systems change, monarchies give way to republics or vice versa; empires or other large supranational formations collapse, giving rise to national states. The new states that emerge from the ruins of empires experience "*growing pains*", facing choices regarding the form of government, the formation of state institutions, and the establishment of security forces. One such example is the national states that emerged after the 1917 Revolution in Russia and the subsequent collapse of the Russian Empire. Similar state formations also appeared in Central Asia during the disintegration of the former Russian Empire. These included the Alash Autonomy or Alash-Orda, covering most of modern Kazakhstan, and the Turkestan Autonomy, which arose on the territory of the former Turkestan Governor-Generalship of the Russian Empire, and included parts of what are now Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan (Ubiria, 2015).

Political leadership is a key factor in transitional periods of history, especially when the creation of national political systems is at stake. The presence of a strong political leader – a charismatic figure ready to become a national leader and make

decisions that determine the countries and people's development path, is essential (Sheikh, 2014; Petkov, 2025; Petrovskyy, 2023). In cases where an outstanding political leader headed a young national state, defended independence, built state institutions, and laid the foundations for state functioning, such a figure became a national hero of the people. There are numerous examples in various countries of such political leaders who laid the foundations of the nation's modern statehood and led the struggle for the people's independence. Thus, a political leader who plays a decisive role in changing or forming a national political system and becomes a national hero should ideally combine the functions of a successful military leader, administrator, reformer, and diplomat (Farooq et al., 2024; Herre, 2020; Wijaya et al., 2025). In global history, it is possible to find several striking examples of such leaders – George Washington and Simón Bolívar are classic examples. The leaders were crucial in creating entirely new political systems and led the newly established states. These leaders fought for the nation's independence and built national political systems (Garavito et al., 2024).

After the start of the 1917 Revolution in Russia and the rise of national movements among the peoples of the former empire, political leaders emerged who, like Washington or Bolívar, led the armies of young states, fought for independence, and organized state institutions. Józef Piłsudski in Poland and Carl Gustaf Mannerheim in Finland were among such leaders. These leaders are successful political leaders with the necessary military command, diplomacy, administration, and reform qualities. The role in forming new national political systems was decisive in many respects (Reddaway, 2024; Sørensen, 2020).

When speaking about state-building in Kyrgyzstan during the transitional period that followed the collapse of the Russian Empire, it must be said that at that time, the Kyrgyz people had no prior experience in full-fledged state construction. With the fall of the Russian Empire in 1917, the peoples of Central Asia were faced with the question of national self-determination, but in many ways, these peoples were unprepared for it (Yerdembekov et al., 2025; Ibrayeva et al., 2016; Auanasova et al., 2021). One obstacle to creating fully-fledged national states was the absence of clear national delimitation among Central Asian peoples. Moreover, one of the prevailing ideologies at the time among Central Asian political and public figures was Pan-Turkism, which had spread under the influence of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, by 1917, there was not so much a distinct Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Kazakh, or Turkmen identity, but rather a broader Turkic identity, which implied a shared belonging of different Central Asian peoples to an everyday Turkic world – a world for which Central Asia itself was the cradle (Artman, 2022; Khalid, 2021). A state formation that emerged in Central Asia after the collapse of the Russian Empire was the Turkestan Autonomy,

with its capital in Kokand. It united representatives of various Turkic peoples, including the Kyrgyz (Laurelle, 2021).

The definition of Kyrgyzstan as a separate national state with its own borders took place under Soviet rule (Auanasova & Auanassova, 2024; Kaluzhynska & Miroshnichenko, 2024; Ormushev, 2024). However, this process was preceded by events that predetermined the creation of the Kyrgyz national state. Among the most significant was the 1916 uprising. At that time, ethnic Kyrgyz rebelled against forced conscription into the Russian army during the First World War. The imperial authorities brutally suppressed the rebellion, and many Kyrgyz were forced to flee their homeland, relocating to China. After the fall of the imperial regime, the Kyrgyz began returning home from China. With the establishment of Soviet rule, the process of forming the Kyrgyz national state began (Dagiev, 2014; Gil, 2024).

In 1922, the idea of creating a separate Kyrgyz national state formation in the form of the Mountain Kyrgyz Region was first voiced, based on the districts of the Turkestan ASSR where ethnic Kyrgyz predominated. Among the authors of this idea were representatives of the Kyrgyz intelligentsia, who would go on to become the nation's political leaders and guide it through the transitional phase of national political system formation. These leaders included the historian and public figure Abdykerim Sydykov, one of the 1916 uprising's participants, Jusup Abdrakhmanov, and educator and Turkologist Ishenaly Arabaev (Gil, 2024; Kubatova, 2020). At the time of proclaiming the idea of establishing the Kyrgyz national state, all three were supporters of Soviet power. Sydykov and Abdrakhmanov were members of the Communist Party, and Abdrakhmanov was also one of the organizers of the Kyrgyz Komsomol. However, the adherence to communist ideals did not imply indifference toward the Kyrgyz national idea. The leaders saw Soviet power and the communist system as tools for the institutionalization of Kyrgyz statehood and opportunities to support the development of Kyrgyz national culture (Khamzina et al., 2020; Palahnyuk, 2024; Zhukorska, 2024). In this sense, the early Kyrgyz political leaders were adherents of the ideology of national communism, which was quite widespread among political figures in the national regions of the early Soviet Union (Boron, 2024). The administrative borders in Central Asia before national-territorial delimitation are shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Central Asia Before the National-Territorial Demarcation in 1924

Source: compiled by the authors based on Bektursunov (2022).

Figure 1 provides an overview of how the political geography of Central Asia took shape during the establishment of the first Kyrgyz national state formation. This map offers insight into the external environment in which political leaders advocating for the self-determination of the Kyrgyz people operated. Analyzing the map presented in Figure 1, it becomes clear that at its formation, the Kyrgyz Autonomous Region was a relatively small territory within the Turkistan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR). It was one of the factors that made it difficult for Kyrgyz political leaders to create a separate Kyrgyz union republic.

Among the first founders of modern Kyrgyz statehood was Abdykerim Sydykov (El-Jaichi & Sheikh, 2020; Auanasova et al., 2024; Shermatov, 2024). A descendant of a noble Kyrgyz lineage, Sydykov had become known even before 1917 as a historian, public figure, translator, and scholar of the Qur'an. In 1917, Sydykov was among the leaders of the Pishpek branch of the Alash-Orda, but in 1918, the man joined the Bolsheviks, who by then had taken control of parts of Central Asia. Sydykov believed that being a member of the Bolshevik party would facilitate the realization of the ideas concerning the national institutionalization of Kyrgyz. Sydykov headed the organizing committee for convening the "Kara-Kyrgyz Mountain Region," which became the first governing body in Kyrgyzstan. However, at that time, Kyrgyz national leaders failed to implement the project for national statehood, and in 1922, by

decision from Moscow, the Kyrgyz Mountain Region was dissolved (Dagiev, 2014; Khalid, 2021).

The issue of creating a Kyrgyz national state formation resurfaced in 1924, during the territorial delimitation process in Central Asia. At that time, the Kyrgyz Autonomous Region was established, and in 1926, it was transformed into the Kyrgyz ASSR. In 1924, the Kyrgyz National Organizing Bureau was headed by Jusup Abdrakhmanov, an intellectual and one of the initiators of the Kyrgyz national statehood project. Like Sydykov, Abdrakhmanov was well known in Kyrgyz socio-political circles before 1917 and came from a noble family. In 1916, Abdrakhmanov participated in the uprising and was subsequently forced to emigrate. Upon returning to Kyrgyz lands, Abdrakhmanov joined the Bolsheviks and began organizing the Komsomol, advocating for Kyrgyz self-determination. In 1927, Abdrakhmanov was appointed the first Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Kyrgyz ASSR, effectively becoming the head of Kyrgyzstan's first government, the country's first prime minister (Khalid, 2021). As head of government, Abdrakhmanov promoted various ideas about the organization of Kyrgyzstan. Abdrakhmanov was one of the leading proponents of transforming the Kyrgyz ASSR into a whole union republic – a concept Abdrakhmanov first proposed to Stalin in 1929. This idea was realized in 1937, when Kyrgyzstan was transformed from an autonomous republic into a whole union republic, ultimately leading to the emergence of independent Kyrgyzstan in 1991. For this reason, Jusup Abdrakhmanov should be regarded as one of the founders of modern Kyrgyz statehood, which defines Abdrakhmanov's significance as a political leader of the Kyrgyz nation. Among Abdrakhmanov's accomplishments were strengthening the role of the Kyrgyz language as part of the *korenizatsiya* (indigenization) policy, fostering national administrative cadres, and initiating the industrialization of Kyrgyzstan. Abdrakhmanov advocated the development of light, mountain, and processing industries as well as infrastructure such as roads and communications. This figure believed that reforms aimed at modernization and industrialization had to consider the country's specific characteristics and therefore opposed the rapid, forced resettlement of the nomadic population (Kubatova, 2020; Tagaibekova, 2013).

From 1924 onwards, new political figures began to emerge in Kyrgyzstan who had previously remained in the shadows of political life (Pancer-Cybulska & Zlenko, 2024; Varyvoda & Gordenko, 2024; Urquiola, 2024). The Chairman of the Kara-Kyrgyz Revolutionary Committee, which replaced the National Organizing Bureau, was Imanaly Aidarbekov, who came from a low-income family, unlike Sydykov and Abdrakhmanov. Aidarbekov began his political career in 1917 as a member of the Left

Socialist-Revolutionaries but joined the Bolsheviks in 1918. At the beginning of his political career, Aidarbekov was Sydykov's ally and protégé. Aidarbekov was among the political leaders who supported unifying all Kyrgyz into a single political entity and was one of the initiators of uniting the mountainous and lowland parts of Kyrgyzstan, which had originally been part of different administrative districts. From 1927 to 1929, Aidarbekov was Chairman of the Supreme Court of the Kyrgyz ASSR and People's Commissar of Justice. Thus, Aidarbekov was one of the architects of Kyrgyzstan's judiciary and the broader justice system (Kubatova, 2020).

In 1925, during the formation of the first Executive Committee of the Kyrgyz Autonomous Region, Sydykov's allies were removed from the leadership of the young state. The leading figure in Kyrgyzstan became the previously obscure politician Abdykadyr Orozbekov. This figure emerged as the political leader who effectively led the process of forming Kyrgyzstan's national political system within the Soviet Union. In 1925, Orozbekov headed the Kara-Kyrgyz Regional Executive Committee, and in 1927 became the first Chairman of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the Kyrgyz ASSR. During Orozbekov's leadership, Kyrgyzstan became a union republic in 1937. Orozbekov became the first Chairman of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the newly established Kyrgyz SSR. Orozbekov led Soviet Kyrgyzstan for 12 years, during which efforts were made to eliminate illiteracy. Among Orozbekov's achievements in education and culture was the establishment of the Central Commission for the New Kyrgyz Alphabet. Orozbekov chaired this commission, which was tasked with developing a Latin-based Kyrgyz alphabet in line with the Soviet policy of Latinization. In 1928, thanks to the efforts of Orozbekov's commission, the Kyrgyz language was officially switched to the Latin script (Gül, 2021). Orozbekov and Abdrakhmanov also deserve credit for resisting large-scale grain requisition plans, which allowed Kyrgyzstan to avoid the mass famine of 1932-1933. Additionally, Orozbekov participated in drafting Kyrgyzstan's de facto first constitution, the 1929 Constitution of the Kyrgyz ASSR, and contributed to the 1937 Constitution of the Kyrgyz SSR (Kubatova, 2020).

Like Aidarbekov, Orozbekov came from a low-income family. This figure had participated in the 1916 uprising, which marked the beginning of the political activity. In 1918, Orozbekov joined the Bolsheviks and rose through the party ranks. Not being associated with the old political elite of the Kyrgyz people, Orozbekov was seen by the Bolshevik leadership as a suitable candidate for leading Soviet Kyrgyzstan (Haugen, 2003; Silvan, 2022). Ultimately, Orozbekov outlasted all other early Soviet Kyrgyz leaders in holding power.

All of Kyrgyzstan's first political leaders of the studied period became victims of the mass repressions of 1937-1938. In 1937, Orozbekov was removed from power, arrested, and died in prison in 1938 on charges of nationalism. Aidarbekov and Abdrakhmanov were also executed in 1938 for alleged involvement in the Socialist Turan Party. Sydykov had already been removed from power in the 1920s, was arrested in 1933 in connection with the same case and remained imprisoned in labor camps until his execution in 1938 (Rumer, 1989).

Thus, the political leaders of Kyrgyzstan from 1917 to 1938 played a crucial role in institutionalizing Kyrgyz statehood, being the initiators of creating the Kyrgyz national state. Although the leaders operated within the USSR and the Bolshevik Party framework, Kyrgyz political leaders defended the people's interests. They established Kyrgyz autonomy, later achieving union republic status, eventually leading to the emergence of independent Kyrgyzstan in 1991. It is important to note that, unlike other countries, Kyrgyzstan did not have a single political leader who unequivocally led the process of national state formation. At first, Abdykerim Sydykov played a leading role in Kyrgyz political life. However, due to Sydykov's disagreements with Moscow, which viewed Sydykov primarily as a nationalist, the leadership passed to Abdykadyr Orozbekov, a Bolshevik from the workers' movement, who successfully led Kyrgyzstan for a considerable period. A list of Kyrgyz political leaders during the formation of the national political system within the Soviet Union is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Political Leaders of Kyrgyzstan, 1917-1938

Name	Years of life	Position held	Years in office
Abdykerim Sydykov	1889-1938	Chairman of the Kara-Kyrgyz Organizing Committee	1922
Jusup Abdrakhmanov	1901-1938	Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Kyrgyz ASSR	1927-1933
Imanaly Aidarbekov	1884-1938	Chairman of the Kara-Kyrgyz Revolutionary Committee	1924-1925
Abdykadyr Orozbekov	1889-1938	Chairman of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the Kyrgyz ASSR (until 1927 – the Kyrgyz Autonomous Region, and since 1937 – the Kyrgyz SSR)	1925-1938

Source: compiled by the authors.

Table 1 provides an overview of the leaders of Kyrgyzstan who held various leadership positions in the country during the period under study. From the data in Table 1, one can understand which posts were held by political figures at specific times. Furthermore, the table provides insight into each figure's tenure in leadership positions. This information helps to identify which political leaders in Kyrgyzstan during the studied period had the most significant opportunities to implement the ideas due to longer periods in power. According to the table, the longest-serving leader of Kyrgyzstan during the period under study was Abdykadyr Orozbekov, who headed the country for 12 years. Jusup Abdrakhmanov also held leadership roles in Kyrgyzstan for a considerable amount of time, leading the government for 6 years. Thus, it is possible to conclude that Abdykadyr Orozbekov and Jusup Abdrakhmanov, although representatives of the second generation of Kyrgyz political leaders of the period, had the most significant impact on the socio-political processes in Kyrgyzstan due to the length of their time in power.

The political leaders of Kyrgyzstan between 1917 and 1938, mentioned in this study, possessed the necessary qualities and demonstrated these qualities during a transitional period in the country's history. As leaders in times of peace, these Kyrgyz political figures proved capable. These political figures were successful organizers of institutions and the political system of early Soviet Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, these people made significant contributions as reformers, particularly in implementing educational reform and substantially overcoming the issue of widespread illiteracy among the population. Abdykerim Sydykov, Jusup Abdrakhmanov, and Abdykadyr Orozbekov also demonstrated diplomatic skills by defending the right of the Kyrgyz people to self-determination and by advocating for the nation's interests in complex relations with the central Soviet authorities in Moscow.

Additionally, some of these political leaders were initially shown as military leaders. For instance, Abdykadyr Orozbekov fought in the ranks of the Fergana Red Guard in 1919-1920. Orozbekov was among the founders of the regular Kyrgyz National Cavalry Division, formed in 1920. This division became one of the first Kyrgyz national military units, illustrating Orozbekov's role as a military organizer, a significant quality for a political leader during a transitional period. In the same years, Abdykerim Sydykov and Jusup Abdrakhmanov also took part in battles on the Semirechye front on the side of the Bolsheviks against the White Army. Jusup Abdrakhmanov held the position of squadron commander, further indicating Abdrakhmanov's role as a military leader (Kubatova, 2020).

The leaders of Kyrgyzstan between 1917 and 1938, discussed in this work, played a significant role in the creation and development of the Kyrgyz national state, which defines the key historical significance. Each of the political figures mentioned contributed individually to this process. In the early stages, Abdykerim Sydykov and Sydykov's associates, including Imanaly Aidarbekov, played a leading role. Sydykov was the main initiator of the creation of the Mountain Kyrgyz Region. Sydykov and Aidarbekov championed the self-determination of the Kyrgyz people, and despite

certain obstacles, the vision was eventually realized. Imanaly Aidarbekov continued the work of Abdykerim Sydykov, heading the body representing the Kyrgyz people's political interests, the Kara-Kyrgyz Revolutionary Committee. Aidarbekov is also credited with establishing the judicial system of Kyrgyzstan in the 1920s.

Due to disagreements with Soviet leadership, Abdykerim Sydykov and Sydykov's associates were removed from Kyrgyz leadership, and new political figures rose to the fore. One such leader was Abdykadyr Orozbekov. Under Orozbekov's leadership, Kyrgyzstan was transformed into an autonomous republic and later a union republic. With Orozbekov's participation, the first Constitution of Kyrgyzstan was drafted. Jusup Abdrakhmanov led the government of Kyrgyzstan for six years. The historical significance of leaders like Jusup Abdrakhmanov and Abdykadyr Orozbekov lies in institutionalizing the first Kyrgyz national state formation, which was completed during their leadership. These leaders advocated for transforming Kyrgyzstan into a separate union republic and unifying the entire Kyrgyz population under its leadership. The leaders also introduced changes in public life aimed at eliminating illiteracy, promoting industrialization, and building infrastructure and communication networks. It is worth noting that both Orozbekov and Abdrakhmanov considered the specifics of Kyrgyz society and traditions and tried to defend the people's interests in dealings with the Soviet Union's leadership. Although all political leaders of Kyrgyzstan from 1917 to 1938 eventually fell victim to Stalinist repressions, the initiatives were not eradicated. On the contrary, these leaders and the initiatives laid the foundation for creating the modern Kyrgyz national state – today's independent Kyrgyzstan.

Thus, political leadership played a decisive role in history during key transitional periods, when new national political systems were formed. The presence of an effective political leader who combines the qualities of a military commander, diplomat, administrator, and reformer ensure the system's viability. During the formation of the Kyrgyz national state, such as the Kyrgyz Autonomous Region, the Kyrgyz ASSR, and the Kyrgyz SSR, which emerged between 1922 and 1938, political leaders like Abdykerim Sydykov, Jusup Abdrakhmanov, Imanaly Aidarbekov, and Abdykadyr Orozbekov played an essential role in institutionalizing these formations and building a new national political system in Kyrgyzstan. This development ultimately led to the establishment of modern independent Kyrgyzstan.

Discussions

The issue of political leadership during transitional periods in national history, as well as the political leaders of Kyrgyzstan in 1917-1938, has been studied by various scholars, most of whom agree that a leader should possess certain qualities that enable the leader to build an effective national political system. Among the scholars who examined the issue of political leadership were Garavito et al. (2024). The authors studied leadership with attention to the psychological aspect. According to the authors, a person with certain psychological traits untypical for most people has a

greater chance of becoming a political leader. The authors argue that a person who could be described as a successful psychopath may reach political heights, and the decisions made under emotional influence subsequently had a significant impact on the historical process. The conclusions drawn by Garavito et al. in the study complement the results of this work by adding a psychological dimension to the issue of political leadership. On the other hand, the findings of these authors partially contradict the conclusions of this work, as the political leaders of Kyrgyzstan examined here did not possess the psychological traits identified by the authors.

Another researcher who studied leadership was James (2021). This author argues that an effective political leader demonstrates abilities in various spheres of public activity, particularly in political institutions and social structures, and formulates and addresses political problems. The conclusions reached by the author in the study confirm the findings of the present work, emphasizing the necessary qualities of a strong political leader. The political leaders of Kyrgyzstan analyzed in this study displayed the characteristics outlined by James. However, it is worth noting that a political leader often must go beyond the boundaries defined by the author. Therefore, claiming that a political leader should merely be an element of institutional systems is not entirely accurate. In this regard, the author's conclusions do not fully align with the results of this research.

Ofori-Anim (2022) and Sørensen (2020) also discuss the role of political leaders in transitional historical periods and the essential qualities that determine the success of the implemented projects. The authors highlight important leadership qualities such as understanding the interests of specific citizens and society, charisma, and the ability to make unconventional decisions. A political leader with the necessary qualities can lead the people through a transitional historical period and become a national hero (Zhussip et al., 2020; Vojtyk, 2023; Zelenov, 2024). The results of the studies mostly coincide with the conclusions of this work and reinforce these findings. The research also partially complements this work by clearly understanding the specific qualities that enable a political leader to achieve positive outcomes during a transitional period.

Artman studied the political situation in Central Asia and its leaders (2022). The author generally considers the evolution of political life in Central Asia from the 19th to the 21st century. The researcher speaks of the colonial legacy, which is still felt in the politics and economy of the region's states. Overall, this scholar views the consequences of the Russian Empire's and the Soviet Union's policies negatively, while noting the active efforts of Central Asian public and political figures who fought for the self-determination of the peoples under challenging external conditions. The author correctly identifies the key political trends in modern Central Asian history, and the study's conclusions align with this work's results.

On the other hand, certain aspects of Artman's work contradict the findings of this research. Artman emphasizes the imperial and Soviet political legacy. However, much of the political culture and traditions, including the nature of political leadership in Central Asia, are determined by the legacy of eras that preceded Russian

colonization. It was precisely these traditions that the political leaders examined in this work relied on in the struggle for the self-determination of the people.

Gül (2021; 2024) studied the politics of Soviet power in Kyrgyzstan during the 1920s. The focus of the research was on the establishment of the Soviet education system in the early years of the Soviet era. The author analyses the process of overcoming illiteracy among the broad population of Central Asia during the period under study. According to the author, the political leaders of Soviet Kyrgyzstan significantly contributed to reforming education and creating a new system of education virtually from scratch. The author's main points largely confirm the results of this study. The role of Abdykadyr Orozbekov and other leaders in educational reforms in Kyrgyzstan had already been mentioned. Changes in education and culture were among the top priorities of political leaders during the studied period and undoubtedly played a crucial role in these developments.

Political leaders in Central Asia, including Kyrgyzstan, are discussed in the context of the modern era in the works of Anisov et al. (2021), Gafu et al. (2024), and Jafari & Kolaei (2020). These authors agree that the turn of the 20th-21st centuries marked a transitional period for Central Asia, characterized by the formation of new national political systems following the transformation of Soviet republics into independent nation-states. In this regard, the situation in the studied region during the first two decades of the 21st century resembles that of 1917-1938, when one political system replaced another, and Soviet republics emerged that would become independent national states in 1991. In this context, the role of political leaders, as in 1917-1938, is crucial. In different Central Asian states, political leaders manifested the potential differently. In Kyrgyzstan, unlike other Central Asian countries, no single political leader has led the country over an extended period and has been associated with the new political system. Therefore, one must speak not of one but several political leaders of Kyrgyzstan during the independence era. This feature of modern independent Kyrgyzstan mirrors the political situation of the 1920s-1930s, when several political leaders were associated with forming early Soviet Kyrgyzstan. The points expressed by the above-mentioned researchers confirm the results of this work and supplement the results with a modern context, as these scholars draw parallels between the present and the past.

Thus, researchers on this topic have studied various aspects, and the conclusions mainly coincide with or complement the findings of this work. The referenced studies discuss the essential qualities of political leaders, psychology, decision-making methods, and specific examples of Kyrgyz political leaders from 1917 to 1938 who met the above-mentioned criteria to some extent. This work presents the activities of these historical political figures in the context of the general issue of political leadership. Determining the extent to which a given political leader in Kyrgyzstan during the studied transitional period met the stated criteria and identifying the sphere in which leadership qualities were demonstrated provides insight into the role played in building a national political system.

Conclusions

The research has concluded that political leaders during transitional historical periods must possess the necessary qualities to ensure the political enterprise's success. Among other things, a transitional political leader must be a military commander, a diplomat, and an administrator, ready to implement significant reforms.

The defining transitional period in Kyrgyzstan's history, when the first national state formation of the Kyrgyz people emerged, was 1917-1938, marked by the collapse of the Russian imperial political system, the formation of the Soviet system, and national-territorial delimitation in Central Asia. During the period under study, the political leaders of the Kyrgyz people, Abdykerim Sydykov, Jusup Abdrakhmanov, Imanaly Aidarbekov, and Abdykadyr Orozbekov, played an important role.

Each of these political leaders of Kyrgyzstan in 1917-1938 had particular significance in forming the Kyrgyz national political system and contributed to state-building processes. Abdykerim Sydykov, together with Jusup Abdrakhmanov, advocated the creation of a separate national entity in the region of compact Kyrgyz settlement. Imanaly Aidarbekov was among the first leaders of this formation, the Kyrgyz Autonomous Region, and participated in creating Kyrgyzstan's judicial system. Abdykadyr Orozbekov led Soviet Kyrgyzstan for twelve years. Under Orozbekov's leadership, Kyrgyzstan became a union republic, and its first Constitution was adopted. During Orozbekov's leadership, a new political system was formed, and substantial reforms were carried out, including educational reform, which helped to overcome illiteracy, and the development of a new Kyrgyz alphabet based on the Latin script. Under the leadership of Jusup Abdrakhmanov, who headed the government, the industrialization of Kyrgyzstan began. Thus, each of these political leaders played a role in creating the first Kyrgyz national state formation, establishing key state institutions, and transforming public life.

This study has limitations and focuses on political leadership during transitional periods in Kyrgyzstan's history from 1917 to 1938. The topic will require further in-depth research into the role of each specific political leader of Kyrgyzstan during that period and the contribution to the formation and development of the Kyrgyz national state.

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