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AUTHORS: Burak Bilgehan ÖZPEK

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## THE ANDIJON EVENTS: DEMAND FOR MORE DEVELOPMENT OR THREAT TO STABILITY?

**Burak Bilgehan ÖZPEK\***

### **Abstract**

*The Andijon events created question marks about the economic and political development situation in Uzbekistan. Whereas the Uzbek government and some scholars defined the events as an extremist and Islamic uprising threatening stability, opposition groups in Uzbekistan, and some academics interpreted the events as demands for more economic and political development. In the domestic politics of Uzbekistan, there is no room for secular and democratic opposition which helps people to express their discontent. Since the democratic and secular parties are banned, the government can easily accuse its opponents of being members of radical Islamist groups and tighten up its authoritarian regime. On the other hand, the economic development situation in Uzbekistan is also another source of discontent since there is not a trickle down effect of economic welfare both among the regions of the country and between rural and urban areas. The Andijon events destabilized the country, but the motivations of the events were the product of the undeveloped political and economic record of the country.*

### **Keywords**

Uzbekistan, Andijon Events, Economic and Political Development, Democratization, Trickle Down Effect

### **Introduction**

The Andijon events in Uzbekistan that occurred on 13 May 2005 brought the stability and development concerns over Central Asian states to the foreground. The unexpected independence of these states was defined as “premature birth” because the optimistic atmosphere was replaced by pessimism and it is understood that independence of these states did not create easy and quick solutions for their economic and politic problems.<sup>1</sup>

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\* Burak Bilgehan Özbek is Ph.D student in International Relations Department in Bilkent University

<sup>1</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, *Central Asia's New States*, Washington D.C., U.S Institute of Peace Press, 1996, pp 3-21

Accordingly, violence in Andijon and the repercussions of those events are regarded as the product of an underdeveloped economic political and social atmosphere in Uzbekistan. Contrary to that argument, some scholars argue that existing characteristics of the political and economic system of Uzbekistan played a decisive role in maintaining stability and the reaction of the Uzbek government against Andijon uprising was a necessity to preserve stability.<sup>2</sup>

This paper aims to research the economic, political and social dimensions of Uzbekistan in order to interpret the Andijon events and whether they were a protest against the low economic standards, restricted political freedoms and social limitations of existing government or a political subversion attempt without any development demand that can destabilize the country. In doing so, I will, initially, describe the events and focus on the potential threats of radical Islam in Uzbekistan in the context of order and stability. The second and third sections will concentrate on the political and economic development situation in Uzbekistan. Finally, an assessment will be made and it will be evaluated whether the Andijon events were a threat to the stability or were a demand for more economic and political development.

The story of the Andijon events is a small piece of a complex puzzle of Uzbek democracy. The events started by the imprisonment of 23 businessmen who were accused of being the members of an extremist Islamic group “Akromiyya.”<sup>3</sup> The events started when people, regularly gathering in front of the court, learned that the proclamation of sentence was postponed to an indefinite date on 12 May. On the same night, some armed people stormed into the prison building and freed 600 inmates. The freed people joined an armed group which later joined the people gathered on the Babel Square on the dawn of 13 May. The number of the protestors was approximately 5.000 and they started to express their discontent about the economic social and political situation in Andijon. After the armed group occupied the government building in Andijon, government troops started to attack and fire at the people. As a result, hundreds of people were killed and

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<sup>2</sup> Shirin Akiner, “Violence in Andijon, 13 May 2005: An Independent Assesment”, *Silk Road Programme Paper*, July, 2005

<sup>3</sup> Akromiyya is led by Ekrem Yoldashev who is a former member of Hizbuttahrir. He is a mathematic teacher who aims to found an Islamic state in Central Asia without applying violence. He and his group are not regarded as a terrorist organisation by Western states. He is the author of a religious book *Path to Faith* published in 1992. He was accused of having illegal drugs in 1997. He was captured and released. He was arrested and sentenced to 17 years in 1999 after Tashkent explosions. (Andican, Ahat, Zaman, 21.05. 2005)

hundreds escaped to the Kyrgyz border in order to survive.<sup>4</sup>

The over-reaction of president Karimov of Uzbekistan against Andijon uprising was spread out by media and non-governmental organizations. International NGOs and international organizations put the blame on the Karimov government. Some of the intellectuals criticized Karimov since he ordered the soldiers to fire at unarmed civilians and many scholars accused Karimov of reacting like a dictator.<sup>5</sup> Politically speaking, they evaluated the Andijon events as an explosion of people discontent about the political and social repression of the government and economic plight.

However, the story of the events was interpreted differently by Dr. Shirin Akiner from the University of London. She strongly opposes the general assessments about the Andijon events. She argues that there is no social and economical dimension of the events. The date 13 May was deliberately chosen since it was Friday, the holy day of the prayers. She also claims that the events were inspired from the Kyrgyz uprising and had politically subversive goals. According to Akiner, the events were agitated by sensational media reports and these reports shaped the international reactions. She says that: "The international reaction to the Andijan violence was largely shaped by sensational media reports which portrayed the incident as the deliberate massacre of innocent civilians. Very little mention was made of the fact that the insurgents were armed and that they had quite clearly planned the event as a military operation."<sup>6</sup> Another expert on Eurasian politics and the role of religion in Central Asia, S.Frederic Starr, also supported the argument of Akiner and said that Akromiya is not the rotary club of Andijon. It is a serious organisation which has radical Islamic tendencies.<sup>7</sup>

### **Radicalism in Uzbekistan**

Radical Islamic movements escalated during the 90's and produced serious threats for the newly independent Central Asian states. Fundamentalism, which has the ability to move across borders, flourished during the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan became the home country of leading radical organizations, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan

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<sup>4</sup> Andrea Berg, "All Eyes on Central Asia. Disintegration in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan", in *Andrea Berg and Anna Kreikemeyer, Realities of Transformation*, Munich, Baden-Baden, 2006, pp 211-227

<sup>5</sup> T.K Vogel, Eric Witte, "America Should Ditch Its Tyrant Friends", *International Herald Tribune*, 15.08.2005

<sup>6</sup> Shirin Akiner, Op.cit

<sup>7</sup> Lionel Beehner, "Documenting Andijon", [www.cfr.org](http://www.cfr.org) (Web Site of Council On Foreign Relations), June 26, 2006

and Hizb-ut Tahrir. These organizations could fund themselves by controlling illegal drug and weapon trade between the borders.<sup>8</sup>

The main aim of these organizations is to revive the caliphate institution. They bring the term “*ummet*” to the foreground, which means an Islamic society beyond national identities and borders. Since the languages of the people living in Central Asia is very similar, despite the fact that they are the citizens of different states, these organizations do not experience difficulties in communication and interaction. The military capacity problem of the states of the region makes the radicalism threat more serious because radicalism rapidly spreads out and attract people of the region.<sup>9</sup>

The fundamentalist threat to the order and stability in Central Asia is a fact of post-Soviet Central Asia; and Uzbekistan is the center of this threat. However, the problem here is the effect of the Uzbek government on the escalation of extremist groups. Is the authoritarian regime of Karimov right to maintain its war against terrorism by restricting the “*Lebensraum*” of all opposition groups or is the regime of Karimov itself a reason for escalation of extremism by leaving no chance for people to express their discontent except terrorism? To analyze the different interpretations of the Andijon events, and to understand whether these events were motivated by political, social or economic discontent of atomized people or by a militant revolutionist armed group, political, social and economical situation of Uzbekistan have to be examined comprehensively.

### **Political Dimension**

After the independence of Uzbekistan, the Karimov government rejected a single, universal model of democracy and argued that each country has peculiar conditions to interpret democracy differently.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, Islam Karimov has always said that transnational extremist Islamism and terrorism could expand into Uzbekistan. He also repeatedly argued that Asians are prone to violent outbursts and that their tempestuous character should be controlled by the strong hand of the state.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Svante E. Cornell, Niklas L.P. Swanström, “Eurasian Drug Trade: A Challenge to Regional Security”, *Problems of Post Communism*, vol. 53, no. 4 July-August 2006, pp 10-28

<sup>9</sup> Ahmed Rashed, *The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, London, Penguin, 2002, pp 115-136

<sup>10</sup> “Speech by Islam Karimov At the Festive Ceremony Dedicated to the 13th Anniversary of Constitution of Republic of Uzbekistan, <http://www.uzbekistan.org/news/archive/311/>, 12.12.2005

<sup>11</sup> *Op.cit.*, pp 114

Nevertheless, Karimov's claims about the threat of Islamic fundamentalism were always treated skeptically by some observers and scholars studying Central Asia.<sup>12</sup> They assert that Karimov is playing the Islamic card in order to justify his authoritarian regime. He is creating a dichotomy between his repressive rule and a bloody nightmare of an extremist Islam and civil war.<sup>13</sup> By emphasizing his anti-extremist function, Karimov aimed to gain the support of western governments so his authoritarian regime would be tolerated. The Karimov government used the fear of radical Islam as a tool to legitimize his power instead of founding his legitimacy upon democratic institutions.<sup>14</sup>

Karimov's control over the secular opposition parties aggravates the assessments on the repressive one-man rule government in Uzbekistan. The best-known secular opposition party is *Birlik* (Unity). The movement advocated democratization, political pluralism and secularism. The *Birlik* movement had operated as a political party, but it was not registered as a party and banned in 1992.<sup>15</sup>

The nucleus of the *Birlik* movement was founded before the Karimov regime in Uzbekistan. *Birlik* was founded at the meeting of an initiative group on 11 November 1988. The new organization's leadership included writers, creative intelligentsia and scientists. The movement had a close bond with the Uzbekistan Writers Union. Muhammed Salih, who was one of the leaders of *Birlik*, was a popular poet as well.<sup>16</sup>

The programme of the party was based on the political and economical development of Uzbekistan. In doing so, independence was the motto of the movement. Interestingly, they criticized Moscow-Taskent relations in the framework of "world systems" theory of Immanuel Wallerstein and argued that Uzbekistan is seen as responsible for providing raw materials to the Soviet system. Uzbekistan's role of raw material and cotton producer

<sup>12</sup> Gregory Gleason, "State Building in the Face of Insurgent Islam", *Strategic Asia*, 2004-05, pp 199-226

<sup>13</sup> Boris Rumer, Disintegration and Reintegration, in *Boris Rumer, Central Asia in Transition; Dilemmas of Political and Economic Development*, New York M.E. Sharpe, 1996, pp 53

<sup>14</sup> Adil Maksatliyev, one of the businessmen who was freed during the unrest and could escape to Suzak village in Kyrgyzstan, can justify the ideas of the protestors. Maksatliyev gave an interview to the newspapers and said that he has very little interest in religion and politics. He rejected that he is a member of an extremist group and he argued that his only fault is to be successful since he had an iron processing factory in which 45 people were working. Karimov was afraid of increased income and an improved collaboration network of the businessmen. He is a paranoiac because he perceives each wealthy businessman as a threat to his government, [www.radikal.com.tr](http://www.radikal.com.tr), 25.05.2005.

<sup>15</sup> Profile Series; Political Conditions in Post-Soviet Era, United States Ministry of Justice, September, 1994

<sup>16</sup> William Fierman, Political Development in Uzbekistan: Democratization? in *Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott Conflict, Cleavage and Change in Central Asia and Caucasus*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp 367

had to be abolished. The Soviet economic system was making Uzbekistan more dependent on the Moscow. Politically, Birlik was a strong advocate of individual freedoms and democracy. They were in favor of inviolability of freedom of expression, assembly and communication. Socially; they opposed the eradication of the Uzbek identity, especially the Uzbek language, under the Moscow controlled Soviet era.<sup>17</sup>

The Birlik Movement's impact diminished when one of its leaders, Muhammed Salih resigned to form a second party, *Erk* in 1990. Like the Birlik Movement, *Erk* was also banned in 1992. Muhammed Salih, who ran against Karimov in the 1991 presidential elections, had immigrated to Turkey in order to avoid facing trial.<sup>18</sup> The political programme of the *Erk* Party includes similar policies with Birlik. The general aims of *Erk* party are as follows:<sup>19</sup>

Creation of a new social state system in the form of a parliamentary democratic republic, which provides rights and freedoms according to the UN Declaration on Human Rights;

- Establishment of a society open to all achievements of civilization in the field of state construction;
- Creation of a social market economy by use of intellectual potential, initiative and activity of citizens;
- Formation of a public education system and public health services, paying attention to the fields of science, culture and art.
- The basic condition for the achievement of the set goals is the admission and guarantee of the person's individual freedom and rights (economic, political, legal, etc.)
- Each person possesses the right for well-warranted life and self-realization in a chosen field of activities. Our duty is to oppose any form of impingement of rights no matter where it comes from.

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<sup>17</sup> Op.cit,pp 367

<sup>18</sup> Olcott, Op.cit, pp 115

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.uzbekistanerk.org/programma/chartererk.htm> (official web site of *Erk* Party), 20.07.2007

- We are for equality before the law, freedom of belief, political meetings and demonstrations, liberty of speech and press, independent political and social preferences. The purpose of the authority and state is to provide lawful dominion, personal rights and freedom, democracy and development of human values in the state.
- We consider social equality, based on the principle of social justice, as equality in opportunity for every person, but we argue against inculcating of equality in poverty and envy of wealth, if it was gained by fair means.

As it can be understood from their programmes, there are secular opposition parties in Uzbekistan. They accept the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, democratic rights, political pluralism and integration to international society. The democratic programme of Uzbek secular opposition is also supported by adoption of a western style free market economy.

They give an active role to state on the health, education, art and culture, but they do not ignore the market mechanism. So, secular opposition does not see the state and market as rivals. In contrast, they make the state and market converged on same venue. The increase of the education, health and culture level can feed the market economy, whereas the economic efficiency and individualistic dimensions of the market can both finance the budget and escalate democracy. The programme of these political groups, briefly, aims to create a democratic and economically developed country in a European style. By defending that type of development model, they aim to overcome the peripheral status Uzbekistan against core Russia. Contrary to the elite based system of Karimov, whose bureaucracy was autocratic and out of democratic control,<sup>20</sup> secular Uzbek opposition offers some concepts such as equality before law, equal citizenship and equality of opportunity.

Although there are some other secular parties in Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov has full control over them. The “People’s Democratic Party of Uzbekistan” is the continuation of the “Communist Party of Uzbekistan” and it is led by Islam Karimov since its foundation in September 1991. The Karimov regime also tried to create a pluralist image in country. The “Adalat (Justice) Social Democrat Party” may be a good example to these artificial attempts since the leader of the party was the editor of the government newspaper, *Khalqsozi*.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> International Crisis Group, Uzbekistan; Europe’s Sanctions Matter, 6 November, 2006

<sup>21</sup> Fierman, Op.cit pp 381



Since political pluralism is not the only requirement of democracy, the situation of other democratic institutions in Uzbekistan has to be examined. In doing so, freedom of media, domestic and international non-governmental organizations will be variables.

It is hard to argue that there is an atmosphere of freedom in Uzbekistan for media to function successfully. According to the report of *Human Rights Watch*, "Violations of Media Freedom in Uzbekistan," today there exists a tension between official government policy towards free speech, which allows the *principle* of free media, and the stark reality for journalists and media consumers who cannot enjoy the *practice* of free media because of government harassment. The independent media will continue to suffer until the Uzbek government of President Islam Karimov musters the political will to observe laws protecting free speech.<sup>22</sup>

The report of Human Rights Watch also includes media detection between June 1996 and March 1997. The report interprets the daily media monitoring and says that:

Every news story currently released to the public by the local media has been scrutinized and approved by an apparatus of strict state censorship. Journalists who deviate or attempt to deviate from the unwritten but universally understood limits of "acceptable" topics and tone (a positive, uplifting ideology) have been expelled from the country, fired from their jobs or threatened with dismissal, and on occasion beaten or threatened with violence to them or their families by the security services. Opposition newspapers are banned without legal justification (as are all but the four government-financed, "pocket opposition" parties), and individuals implicated in their possession or distribution within the country are detained and arrested. Careful daily monitoring of the major media in Uzbekistan, in Uzbek and Russian languages, from June 1996 to March 1997, revealed little substantive critical analysis of domestic affairs and no criticism of government policy, common indicators of free speech. The only criticism that is allowed is of low- or mid-level officials, such as of the managers of a factory which is not working efficiently, or of mismanagement in the urban transport system. There is no domestic expression of political views that differ from the government's.

A Similar approach to the media freedom in Uzbekistan is also adopted by Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. A conference on

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<sup>22</sup> Violations of Media Freedom; Journalism and Censorship in Uzbekistan, *Human Rights Watch*, Vol.9, No.7, July, 1997

Freedom of Media in Central Asia was organized in Almaty, Kazakhstan on 10-11 December 2001 by the OSCE. The problems of media freedom were discussed in the meeting by 80 journalists from the region, representatives of NGOs and OSCE officials. Discussions focused on key problems in five Central Asian states including the concentration and monopolization of the media and the use of both legal and illegal means to silence journalists criticizing government policies. The impact of the anti-terrorist campaign and the danger that national security would be used as a pretext for limiting freedom of expression were two major concerns shared by the participants.<sup>23</sup>

The most current evaluation about media freedom in Uzbekistan was published by Freedom House in “Freedom of the Press 2006” report. In this report, Uzbekistan is classified as “not free” country. The report, initially, argues that government has a strict control over media. Constitutionally, it is forbidden for the media to incite religious and ethnic based news and advocate subverting or overthrowing the constitutional order. Economically, there are no private publishing or printing houses. Establishment of a new newspaper requires political approval. The second remark of the report is about the Andijon events and the following developments. The report says that the Karimov government accused international media of performing as a tool of foreign hostile countries. After the Andijon events and international reactions against the Karimov government, physical attacks took place in Uzbekistan against international media. The international media was forced to flee the country. The BBC and IWPR (Institute of War and Peace Reporting) closed their Uzbekistan offices after the attack on their journalists; and RFE/RL (Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty) was forced to evacuate the country by the decision of the Justice Ministry. Finally, less than 1 million people have access to internet.<sup>24</sup>

Freedom House also published a table evaluating the media freedom performance of countries in 2006. Political, legal and economic frameworks are taken into consideration during the evaluation. As the ratings of countries increase, the freedom of media diminishes.

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<sup>23</sup> [http://www.osce.org/tashkent/item\\_2\\_68.html](http://www.osce.org/tashkent/item_2_68.html) ( official web site of OSCE Project Co-Ordinator in Uzbekistan)

<sup>24</sup> Freedom of the Press 2006, Draft Country Reports, Freedom House, April, 2006 ( [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org))

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Rank	Country	Rating	Status
1	Finland	9	Free
	Iceland	9	Free
3	Denmark	10	Free
	Norway	10	Free
	Sweden	10	Free
6	Belgium	11	Free
	Luxembourg	11	Free
	Netherlands	11	Free
	Switzerland	11	Free
10	Liechtenstein	13	Free
	New Zealand	13	Free
12	Andorra	14	Free
	Palau	14	Free
	Portugal	14	Free
15	Ireland	15	Free
	Marshall Islands	15	Free
17	Bahamas	16	Free
	Estonia	16	Free
	Germany	16	Free
	Monaco	16	Free
	St Vincent & Cranadines	16	Free
	United States	16	Free
23	Barbados	17	Free
	Wamaica	17	Free
	San Marino	17	Free
26	Canada	18	Free
	Tunusia	83	Not Free
180	Iran	84	Not Free
	Syria	84	Not Free
182	Rwanda	85	Not Free
	Sudan	85	Not Free
184	Israeli Occupied Territories / Palestinian Authority	86	Not Free
185	Belarus	88	Not Free
	Equatorial Guinea	88	Not Free
187	Uzbekistan	90	Not Free
	Zimbabwe	90	Not Free
189	Eritrea	91	Not Free
190	Burma	96	Not Free
	Cuba	96	Not Free
	Libya	96	Not Free
	Turkmenistan	96	Not Free
194	North Korea	97	Not Free

Status	Number of Countries	Percent of Total
Free	73	38 %
Partly Free	54	28 %
Not Free	67	34 %
TOTAL	194	100 %

Table 1.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> "Global Press Freedom Rankings 2006", www.freedomhouse.org, 05.02.2007.

As it can be seen at the table, point total of Uzbekistan is 90 and it is the 187<sup>th</sup> country out of 194. There are only 7 countries that have less media freedom than Uzbekistan, whereas there are 186 countries whose media can operate more freely than Uzbekistan. If a comparison is to be made for better understanding, Turkey has the 104<sup>th</sup> position in the ranking as a “partly free” country

The role of non-governmental organizations and civil society is also weak and undeveloped in post-Soviet Uzbekistan. The disintegration of the Soviet Union had flourished hopes about the participation of people in governance, but the role of society has remained limited. During glasnost, mass protests and publications of opposition groups, especially Birlik Movement, were able to influence the Communist Party of Uzbekistan somewhat. However, after Uzbekistan gained its independence, the Karimov government perceived the restriction of civil society as a requirement for the stability of his country.

The number of NGOs in Uzbekistan is around 2500-4000, but less than 200 of them are active. Suda Masaru examines civil society in Uzbekistan by focusing on the position of non-governmental organizations. Masaru accepts that Karimov was committed officially on transition to democracy and construction of civil society. However, policies of Karimov escalate civil society but diminish its function.<sup>26</sup>

Masaru also evaluates the Karimov government’s policies in two ways. Firstly, he claims that “mahalle” organizations can not be regarded as NGOs since they are not competitively and independently functioning organizations. Historically, such organizations are used to consolidate the control of central government over the country. So “mahalle” organizations are not western style NGOs that defends the rights and wills of individuals competitively. Secondly, he criticizes Karimov since he compelled international NGOs such as Freedom House, Open Society, National Democratic Institute and International Republican Institute to leave Uzbekistan after the Andijon events in 2005 since he saw these NGOs as the centers of opposition and instability.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Suda Masaru, “The Politics of Civil Society, Mahalla and NGOs: Uzbekistan”, available at [http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no10\\_ses/12\\_suda.pdf](http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no10_ses/12_suda.pdf), 20.02.2007

<sup>27</sup> Op.cit

A speech of Karimov can show us how his administration conceptualizes “civil society” and NGOs. He says that:<sup>28</sup>

Democratic institutions must reflect the mentality and peculiarity of the culture of our people. It is known that the Western model of democracy is founded on the philosophy of the individual and excessive politicization of the masses. On the other hand, the East assumes democracy based the idea of collectivism, paternalism, and priority of social opinion [...]. We are aspiring for the construction of not only a democratic society, but a just democratic society [...] We will build a civil society. That means, as we form our statehood, diverse functions of governance will be transferred to the people themselves, by way of social organs of self-government [*mahallas*]

Karimov’s ideas on civil society lead us to a question: Are the mahalle organizations representing the society against the state or the state against society? According to the survey conducted by Ayşe Kavuncu in Tashkent, 55% of the mahalle residents believe that mahalle organizations represent the central government, whereas 85% of the mahalle administrators argue that they represent the people. To Kavuncu, more than half of the people see mahalle administration as an institution controlling them. She also reflects her interview with a young Uzbek who claims that mahalle officials provide every kind of information about a person applying to the state for job.<sup>29</sup>

Consequently, Uzbekistan experienced the main characteristics of post-communist authoritarianism that are dictatorships, one party states and military regimes. These types of governments preclude stability and weaken the democratization process.<sup>30</sup> As Uzbekistan gained autonomy from the Soviet Union, the influence of the Communist Party was replaced by the one man rule of Karimov. Whereas opponents could create an impact on power as an advantage of glasnost policy of Moscow, one man rule of Karimov restricted the political base of the opposition in the name of struggle against extremism.<sup>31</sup> Despite the fact that there are settled, secular and well organized political parties are available in Uzbekistan, these parties are not registered and their leaders are exiled from Uzbekistan. The alternative development

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<sup>28</sup> Op.cit

<sup>29</sup> Ayşe Kavuncu, “Özbekistan’da Geçiş Döneminde Sosyal Uyumun Sağlanması Ötündeki Engeller”, ( Obstacles for the Social Harmony for Uzbekistan in Transition), *Global Strateji*, Winter 2007, 2: 8, pp 126-142

<sup>30</sup> Bruce Parrott, Perspectives on Postcommunist Democratisation, in *Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott ,Conflict, Cleavage and Change in Central Asia and Caucasus*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp 7

<sup>31</sup> Fierman, Op.cit, pp 374-376

policies of secular opposition are based on market economy, democratic control over bureaucracy and social policies. Since the Karimov government conceives democratic reforms as a threat to the stability of the region, other democratic institutions such as free media and effective civil society cannot function in order to contribute to the political development of the country.

### **Socio-Economic Dimension**

The Andijon events and the following reactions of the Uzbek government also created questions about the position of civil society in Uzbekistan and its future. As mentioned before, a bifurcation occurred among the scholars about whether the people who gathered on Babel Square on 13 May 2005 had expressed their discontent about social and economic policies of Karimov government or the Andijon events were a militarized threat to constitutional order. To understand the motivations of the people involved in the Andijon events, the socio-economic conditions of Uzbekistan also have to be researched and assessed.

By evaluating socio-economic structure of Uzbekistan, the questions of Dudley Seers initially can be asked and his interpretations can be taken into consideration. Seers says that:<sup>32</sup>

“The questions to ask about a country’s development are therefore: What has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three of these have become less severe, then beyond doubt there has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, and especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result development, even if per capita income had soared.”

The questions asked by Seer will be replied to one by one by utilizing tables and graphs. Firstly, poverty will be focused on. According to the “Uzbekistan Report of World Bank,” GDP per capita of Uzbekistan is \$520 and 26% of Uzbek population is living under the national poverty line.<sup>33</sup> When Uzbekistan is compared with the average of Europe and Central Asia, its per capita GDP is one eighth of Europe and Central Asia.

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<sup>32</sup> John Martinussen, *Society, State and Market*, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1997, pp 294

<sup>33</sup> <http://devdata.worldbank.org>, 05.02.2007

	Uzbekistan	Europe and Central Asia (Total)
Population	26,2 million	473 million
GDP	13,7 billion	-
GDP per Capita	520 \$	4.113 \$
Poverty (% of population below national poverty line)	% 26	-

Table 2.<sup>34</sup>

The data about the unemployment rates in Uzbekistan also does not indicate a positive table about the social development of Uzbekistan. According to the report of USAID, which is backed by US government, 50% of the Uzbek population is under 30 years old and 30% of these young people are unemployed.<sup>35</sup> However, the official statistics that were published by Uzbek government and acknowledged both by World Bank and Asia Development Bank shows a very low unemployment rate.

Items	1988	1990	1995	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Total Population (million)	19,8	20,6	22,9	25,1	25,4	25,7	26,0	26,3
Urban Population (% of total)	40,7	40,3	38,3	37,0	36,7	36,5	36,3	36,1
Labor Force (thousand)	-	-	11097	12817	13181	13597	14021	10224
Unemployed	-	-	20,5	37,5	34,8	32,0	35,0	27,7
Unemployment Rate (%)	-	-	0,3	0,4	0,4	0,3	0,4	0,3

Table 3.<sup>36</sup>

Despite the controversy on the unemployment rates in Uzbekistan between the governments of United States of America and Uzbekistan; the total poverty rate is accepted by international organizations. The United Nations Development Programme interprets the unemployment situation as such: “The chief problem for poor workers is not that they cannot find work but that the work that they secure is of low intensity or low productivity. Much of it is in agriculture, for example, which generates net resources for the rest of the economy but offers relatively low incomes for agricultural workers.”<sup>37</sup>

Inequality is another variable to analyze the social development of Uzbekistan. The rural inequality report of the United Nations Research

<sup>34</sup> <http://devdata.worldbank.org>, 05.02.2007

<sup>35</sup> [www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov) 05.02.2007

<sup>36</sup> [www.adb.org](http://www.adb.org) (official web site of Asia Development Bank), 05.02.2007

<sup>37</sup> Terry Mckinley, G. Saidova, Z. Nasritdinkodjaev, Y. Abdugenieva, A. Tukhtarov, *Employment Promotion and Reduction*, [www.undp.org](http://www.undp.org), 05.02.2007

Institute for Development evaluates inequality in Uzbekistan under four titles. Firstly, inequality between rural population and urban population which means that people living in rural areas are much poorer than those living in urban areas. During the post-Soviet period, rural poverty remained higher and the gap has grown. The Second one is regional inequality. The report says that poverty can change disproportionately in rural areas. Namangan and Karakalpakstan's poverty incidence is about 40% and the ratio is 62,6% in Kashkaderya, which is much higher than other rural areas. Thirdly, poverty among children in rural areas is high, and finally feminization of poverty which means there is more impoverishment of females than males.<sup>38</sup>

According to another World Bank document, there are approximately 26 million people in Uzbekistan and 70% of them live in rural areas. An Uzbek living in Kashkaderya is seven times poorer than an Uzbek living in Tashkent. The statistical inequalities between rural and urban areas are shown as follows:

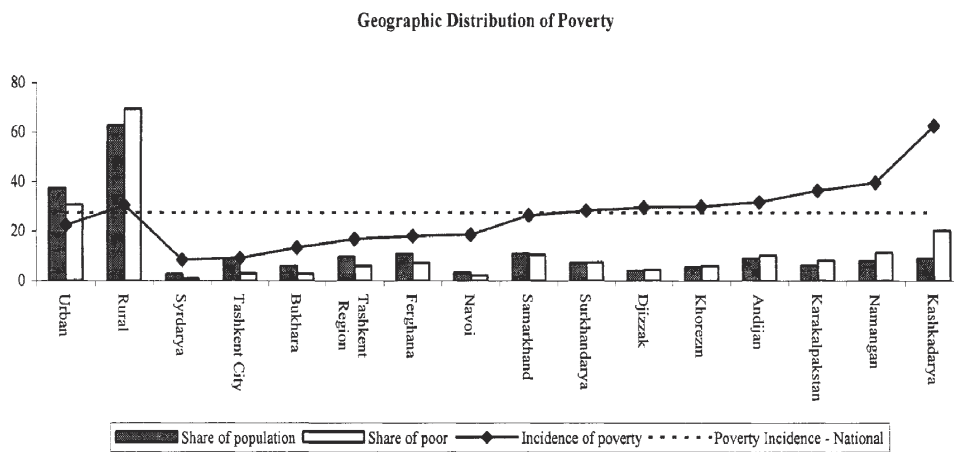


Figure 1: The poor are predominantly rural, and poverty rates differ significantly across regions.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Max Spor, Agricultural Restructuring and Trends in Rural Inequalities in Central Asia, *United Nations Research Institute for Social Development*, November, 2004, [www.unrisd.org](http://www.unrisd.org)

<sup>39</sup> Robert Nolan, *Unrest in Uzbekistan*, [www.fpa.org](http://www.fpa.org), ( Foreign Policy Association), 19.05.2007



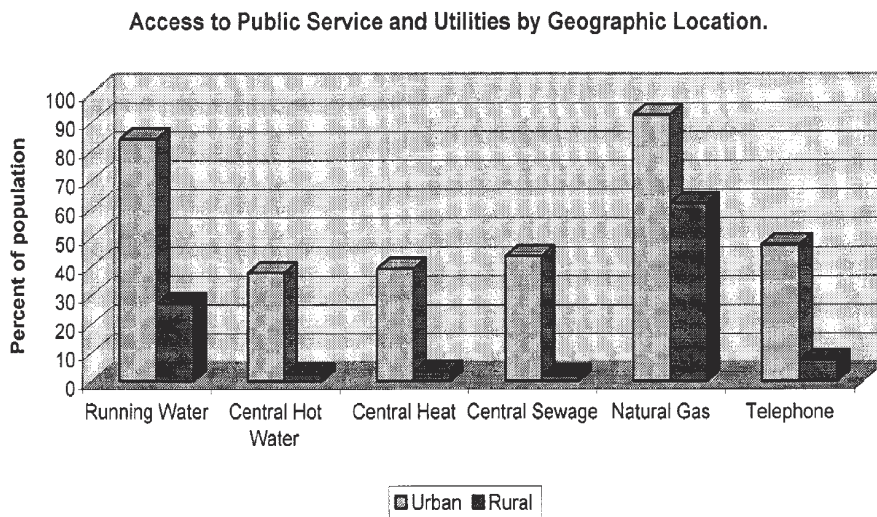


Figure 2: Rural Populations have limited access to many basic services.<sup>40</sup>

The statistical data and comments of international organizations indicate to us that the socio-economic situation in Uzbekistan may be a reason for the Uzbek people to be in conflict with the Karimov government. Poverty is dramatically high in the country. Although there are controversial data about unemployment rates, it is an undeniable fact that productivity is low. Furthermore, there is inequality in the country between urban and rural areas, genders and age groups. Inequality is also observed among rural areas as well.

### HOW TO EVALUATE ANDIJON?

The Andijon events in May 2005 caused people to question what the reasons behind the violence were. A consensus on the motivation of the uprising and the reaction of the government could not be reached. The bifurcated ideas developed completely opposite approaches. While it is argued that the Andijon events were organized by a military group and aimed to overthrow the government, some scholars argued that the Andijon events were motivated by the political and socio-economic discontent of Andijon people.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Op.cit

<sup>41</sup> Robert Nolan, Unrest in Uzbekistan, [www.fpa.org](http://www.fpa.org), (Foreign Policy Association), 19.05.2007

After researching the political and social-economic situation in Uzbekistan it can be asserted that there are political and socio-economic dimensions of the Andijon events. In other words, tension in Andijon has been embedded in the political and socio-economic problems of people.

Political repression and the absence of a platform for people to express themselves can agitate and sharpen their reactions. The Uzbek political system bans not only religious, but also secular political parties. Since the secular parties are banned and their leaders are exiled, the people gathered on Babel Square may have seen the protests as an expression platform to oppose the government. Besides the lack of political pluralism, there are no democratic institutions such as free media, effective civil society or NGOs. The absence of such democratic institutions may be regarded as a factor provoking the reaction of people.<sup>42</sup>

The Socio-economic dimension of research also supports the idea arguing that the Andijon events were the product of economic plight influencing the society. Uzbekistan's per GDP is \$520 and 26% of the population lives under the national poverty line. Although unemployment rates in Uzbekistan are not clear, and different data are given by different countries and organizations, it is mostly accepted that productivity is disproportionately low. In addition to these conditions, there is considerable inequality in Uzbekistan between rural and urban, genders, age groups and among rural areas. It cannot be regarded as a coincidence that an uprising burst out in Andijon, in Ferghana Valley where the poverty rate is about 40%.

The extremist movements themselves have roots in Central Asia, especially in Uzbekistan. There is an ideational dimension of radical Islamic movements. These organizations also have economic support by directing the drug and weapon traffic in Central Asia. So there is financial support for these organizations. However, the rapid diffusion of fundamentalism which makes the threat more serious, leads scholars to think on the political and economic conditions influencing the escalation of extremism in Uzbekistan.

The violence in Uzbekistan in May 2005 indicated how development and stability have equal importance for that country and why the Uzbek

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<sup>42</sup> Didier Chaudet, "Hizb ut Tahrir: An Islamist Threat to Central Asia", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 26, No.1, April 2006, pp 114-125

political system should not surrender political and economic development in order to establish and preserve stability. The socio-economic and political style that Karimov preferred is elite based and isolated from the control of democratic institutions. Political and economic comfort in Uzbekistan is exhausted by a small elite which prevents democratic rights and economic welfare to trickle down. As a result of this policy, Uzbekistan is diverging from both its development and stability perspectives at the end of the day.