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## Everyday Life Governance in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan

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## *Chapter Twenty*

# **Everyday Life Governance in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan**

Laura L. Adams, Måns Svensson,  
and Rustamjon Urinboyev<sup>1</sup>

People in the Ferghana Valley, whether on the Kyrgyz or Uzbek side of the border, like to compare their political system to that of their neighbouring country.<sup>2</sup> The following quote from rural Ferghana, Uzbekistan illustrates the essence of the matter:



Kyrgyz people often boast about their country saying that they have a democracy and that they can overthrow their presidents if they start to steal from the people. Of course, they can brag about their democracy as much as they want, but democracy brought only trouble to Kyrgyzstan. The state doesn't exist there (“Qirg'izistonda davlat yoq”) and they overthrew their presidents several times, but nothing good happened. Instead, the lack of a strong state resulted in bloody Kyrgyz-Uzbek ethnic conflicts in June 2010. Their economy and living conditions have gotten even worse in the post-Akaev period. As you see, democracy does not bring economic prosperity and political stability in our region. So, you can't fill your stomach with democracy. In Uzbekistan, it is true we don't have democracy and the level of corruption is very high, but most importantly we have a good governance (“Bizni davlatimizni boshqaruvi yaxshi”) and a very strong state that is capable of maintaining political stability and interethnic peace. We can sleep without any fear because our government really works. Even though we have a high unemployment rate and state salaries are very low, you can always find a way if you know the rules and make the right connections (“tanish-bilish”).



This comparison is useful for the following two reasons. First, it gives a clue to the existence of local (contextual) understanding of good governance in post-Soviet Uzbekistan, which implies that good governance is not about promoting democracy and rule of law, but it is more importantly about the government's capacity to maintain political stability and interethnic peace.



This means that there are multiple understandings of “good governance” and that the global (Western) notions of good governance need to be contextualised when discussing and analyzing the governance trajectories of post-Soviet societies like Uzbekistan.

Second, this comparison indicates that, like in many modern states,<sup>3</sup> the governance system in Uzbekistan is constructed in a way that induces citizens to engage in informal practices that help them “find a way” when the state (formal) structures fail to address their needs. In other words, this is a way that the “sistema” (system) works in Uzbekistan—a kind of governance that relies on informal rules, practices and networks. In both formal and informal governance systems, what is important is stability and predictability. While some analysts tend to label informal systems as “corrupt,” many anthropological studies of corruption emphasize a subjective element: the line between good sociability and corruption in many cultures is drawn by the ritual form and emotional valence of the transaction (e.g. propriety vs. humiliation).<sup>4</sup> This chapter explores the nuances in how citizens in Uzbekistan understand corruption versus good (albeit informal) governance.

There are multiple paradigms and understandings of “good governance”, some of which concur with the Western understanding, while others offer alternative criteria. Thus, questions arise as what is a local understanding of “good governance” in Uzbekistan, how it works, how it is perceived and interpreted by the local population, and what implications it has for global debates on good governance? What are the relations between formal and informal structures with regard to governance trajectories in Uzbekistan?

## DEMOCRACY VERSUS GOOD ENOUGH GOVERNANCE

Anyone who wants to understand politics in Central Asia needs to understand how local citizens perceive what, from the outside, may seem like impossibly complex negotiations in everyday life. In most introductions to Central Asian politics, one can find references to the Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index scores for Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan (they are dismal) or Freedom House rankings of Uzbekistan as “not free” and Kyrgyzstan as “partly free.” Both in terms of electoral democracy and freedom of the press, Kyrgyzstan has historically been in much better shape than Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries, but like in most countries, the government is the result not so much of the free will of individual citizens as of coalitions and compromises between patron-client networks.<sup>5</sup>

However, democracy is not end in itself; most of us are fans of democracy not because of some ideological prejudice that sees elections as a manifesta-

tion of divine grace, but because democracies help promote the good life for their citizens and tend to produce a host of desirable public goods. Thus, it is important to note that when it comes to how governments promote the good life and the public good, there are distinct differences among these more or less “unfree” states of Central Asia. Undemocratic governments may be more or less good from the point of view of their citizens, more or less efficacious at promoting and implementing popular policies, stronger or more fragile. Uninformed observers might look at the facts and figures about the poor state of democracy in these countries and conclude that they are relatively similar, but when you look at them from the point of view of governance, some striking differences emerge and it is clear that it is safer to walk at midnight in Tashkent than in Bishkek.<sup>6</sup>

The issue of governance is a major concept in political science today, as reflected in Francis Fukayama’s *The Governance Project*.<sup>7</sup> Scholars of governance are responding to two trends: the failure of top-down reform in the post-Soviet world, and the durability of the dictatorships that were established around the time of the Soviet collapse. Still, as Fukayama observes, there is a wide variance in the states that are commonly labelled authoritarian and democratic. More democracy does not necessarily result in better governance (as he discusses in the U.S. case), and some authoritarian states are remarkably well governed (for which he draws on China as his example).<sup>8</sup> By asking whether good governance can lead to democracy and executive constraint by rule of law (rather than the other way around), Fukuyama turns on its head the first set of criteria most international organizations use when talking about comparative governance issues. For example, the World Bank defines governance as:

the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. This includes the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced; the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies; and the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them.<sup>9</sup>

Governance research questions the causal relationships between these various elements and asks us to look at whether good governance reforms in a country such as Uzbekistan can productively precede democracy.

Governance in Fukayama’s project is defined, at the most basic level, as “a government’s ability to make and enforce rules, and to deliver services” and “about the performance of agents in carrying out the wishes of principals, and not about the goals that principals set.”<sup>10</sup> Good governance in this case is something close to high state capacity, public administration as opposed to politics, a focus on output measures with no value judgment about

the policy goals that the government is pursuing. Fukuyama's approach also follows the good advice to disaggregate the state, acknowledging that some state entities will be more efficacious than others, and that states vary across regions, especially across the urban and rural divide. The state in Uzbekistan is certainly a powerful actor when it comes to using coercion and preventing political instability, but it is weak in terms of enforcing "rule of law" and service delivery. Fukuyama's notion of governance provides useful insights when measuring the state capacity but it can hardly help us satisfactorily explain the paradoxes of governance in Uzbekistan, where the citizens equate political stability and security to good governance. This means we need to go beyond the conventional definitions of governance and thereby employ additional tools and concepts if we are to better understand the local dynamics and governance trajectories in Uzbekistan.

A concept that has more relevance is "good enough governance," forwarded by Merilee S. Grindle in the context of development assistance, and revived by Stephen D. Krasner in the context of U.S. programs to promote democracy abroad.<sup>11</sup> Krasner argues that a well-functioning democracy is hard to maintain and exceptionally difficult to promote from outside, and a more effective way to promote long-term freedoms is "to improve the prospects for security and economic growth in the short run—rather than pressing for direct democratic reforms."<sup>12</sup> Elections may make things worse in terms of prosperity and freedom, and Krasner argues that U.S. policy has been aiming at the wrong target in pushing countries like Iraq and Afghanistan toward consolidated democracy. Instead, Krasner argues that we should start thinking in terms of "good enough governance," which consists of a state being able to provide for the physical integrity of its citizens (but not their more broadly defined human rights) as well as providing some basic public services, especially in the area of health; to provide public order including a norm of property rights, and some degree of security from transnational threats; to constrain corruption and provide some form of checks on the arbitrary power of the state through media or civil society; and since free and fair elections can produce instability and trigger violence, elections "would only be useful *if* they ratified and legitimated agreements that had been reached *ex ante* among political leaders with regard to control over security forces and the distribution of spoils."<sup>13</sup>

Krasner's analysis focuses mainly on post-conflict contexts, whereas Uzbekistan has a long history of stability, so the question remains: is good enough governance an adequate minimal standard for most people most of the time? If so, to what extent does Krasner's "good enough governance" describe Uzbekistan from the perspective of ordinary people living there? In this chapter, we explore the specifics of governance systems in Uzbekistan

and suggest the importance of a contextual understanding of *everyday life governance*. This local Uzbek governance system consists of two important interrelated components: a government that heavily relies on coercive infrastructure for maintaining political stability and interethnic peace, but at the same time induces its citizens to engage in informal practices and networks as an alternative (to the formal) source of welfare. These informal patterns can be gleaned by observing the interactions between ordinary citizens and state officials in the course of daily life. To the extent that such informal practices are knowable, predictable, and free of subjective perceptions of immorality, they may be perceived to be good enough governance, but as we will see, poor service delivery and the relative absence in the *sistema* of constraints on the arbitrary power of the state are where the government of Uzbekistan may fall short in the eyes of the population.

This chapter describes how this system emerged in the post-Soviet period and explores some local understandings of good enough governance in Uzbekistan that emerge within everyday experiences of people as they talk about the role of the state, make moral judgments and engage in informal rules and practices. We make no claims about whether these forms of governance provide better or worse outcomes for citizens in the long term than other viable alternatives, but rather point out that this form of governance seems to have become the part and parcel of everyday life in Uzbekistan, largely internalized by the ordinary citizens and low-level state officials as a ‘getting things done’ strategy.

### THE “SISTEMA” IN POST-SOVIET UZBEKISTAN

In the early 1990s, the political leadership of Uzbekistan made all sorts of bold claims about their strong commitment to democracy, market economy, human rights and the rule of law, as well as about their intention to break the stranglehold of totalitarian forms of governance. There was a widespread euphoria in Uzbekistan and in the outside world that the introduction of institutions of democratic government and market economy would promote a transformation for the better and contribute to Uzbekistan’s emergence as a “great state” in the world. History textbooks linked this great future to a glorious past, highlighting the literary epics, great leaders, and scientists of Central Asia, while at the same time vilifying both Russian Imperial and Soviet rule in Central Asia.

However, as Ruziev *et al.* describe, Uzbek authorities made it clear from the beginning that the “big bang” or “shock therapy” approach to transition would not be suitable for Uzbekistan.<sup>14</sup> Instead, Uzbekistan adopted a “gradualist”

approach,<sup>15</sup> following President Karimov's decree that Uzbekistan would find "its own path" to political and economic independence.<sup>16</sup> Uzbekistan remained dependent on the importation of consumer goods, currency controls, and the exploitation of rural labour. Uzbek authorities were aware of the risk that a rapid transformation of the economy would affect the lives of millions, probably leading to social unrest. Hence, the Uzbek model of transition clearly reflected the concerns for political stability and the peculiarities of the structure of the economy. Preserving the stability of the economy and of social and political order has become an overarching rationale for rejecting all manner of economic and political reforms recommended by international institutions, and for developing a strict border regime.<sup>17</sup>

As a result of these gradualist policies, the Uzbekistan's cumulative decline in GDP between 1989 and 1996 was the lowest of all the former Soviet republics. However, although the gradualist approach to transition contributed to a prevention of sharp output loss and consequential rise in unemployment and social unrest during the early years of transition, by 2000 it became evident that the economy was simply stagnating.<sup>18</sup> As Kandiyoti notes, the partial market reforms the government of Uzbekistan implemented in pursuit of stability paradoxically resulted in inefficient resource allocation and widespread corruption that required increased recourse to coercion.<sup>19</sup> A growing body of scholarly literature demonstrates the ubiquity of corruption in Uzbekistan, focusing on kleptocratic elites in the upper echelons of the state organisation, malfunctioning public administration structures, administratively-commanded economic policies, inefficient post-Soviet agricultural reforms, corrupt law-enforcement agencies, and inadequate ways of dealing with corruption by state authorities.<sup>20</sup> Hence, active government intervention created significant administrative barriers and a high tax burden, thereby causing high transaction costs for national business and the prevalence of an informal economy.

The Soviet legacy also had a profound impact on social policy strategies of the Uzbek government in the 1990s. Given the fact that the former Soviet social welfare system did provide relatively strong social protection and healthcare facilities, the general population of Uzbekistan expected the same treatment and conditions from the new Uzbek authorities. Given the high proportion of low-income groups and the dependence on the import of consumer goods, any attempt at contraction of social welfare benefits would affect millions, which consequently would lead to social unrest. In the same vein, the main concern of the Uzbek authorities in the early years of independence was the prevention of dramatic output loss, strong social protection and modernisation of the economy by strengthening the industrial sector.<sup>21</sup> Thus the social welfare strategies adopted by the Uzbek authorities during the early

years of independence were almost identical to the Soviet-era practices.<sup>22</sup> Uzbekistan did fairly well in terms of providing a social safety net, alleviating poverty and limiting spending cuts in education and healthcare, especially in the mid-1990s.<sup>23</sup> Soviet-style centralised economic management and strong social protection measures seemed to be successful in the transition period, as they prevented large output decline and served to maintain a reasonable living standard.

The “transition” lasted until about 2004 and then the picture largely stabilized, but not in a way that provided for economic prosperity for the majority of Uzbekistan’s citizens. Although the Uzbek economy has been experiencing above-trend rates of growth—about 7–8 per cent since 2004—these indicators hardly reflect everyday life in Uzbekistan where state salaries do not even secure survival, and people are compelled to use informal coping strategies to meet their livelihood needs.<sup>24</sup> For much of the 2000s, the large number of Uzbek labour migrants in Russia and Kazakhstan provided clear evidence of the inadequacy of Uzbekistan’s economic and social policies for its poorer citizens. As Ruziev *et al.* state, the economic growth was not due to structural reforms, but to a better agricultural harvest, large inflows of money remittances sent by Uzbek migrant workers and more importantly, to favourable world prices for the country’s main products such as gold, cotton, natural gas and oil.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Uzbek authorities withdrew social benefits without creating alternative welfare structures. As a result, the absence of state support has created serious social problems, thereby transforming the family and communities into the main shock-absorbing structures of the society.<sup>26</sup>

The analysis of scholarly research on post-Soviet Uzbekistan indicates that very few Uzbeks reaped the rewards of the economic growth.<sup>27</sup> Instead, this energy-driven economic growth comes at the expense of ordinary people in rural areas where service interruptions, often the absence of gas and electricity supply to households during cold winter months, have become customary over the years. Uzbekistan has also made little progress in promoting the rule of law and good governance, and many formal institutions of government have merely a showcase quality.<sup>28</sup> According to the 2016 *Corruption Perceptions Index*, released annually by Transparency International (TI), Uzbekistan is among the most corrupt in the world.<sup>29</sup> The “control of corruption” indicator of the *World Bank Governance Studies* also shows an extremely high level of corruption in Central Asian countries.<sup>30</sup>

Yet the narrative of “transition” persists in the way the government justifies its inadequacies in meeting the economic needs of the population. In the authors’ research, people rarely referred to the “transition” when explaining their economic difficulties; rather they locate the source of their difficulties in economic policies and low salaries, lack of jobs and strong social protection,



corruption, the high inflation rate, excessive interference of law-enforcement bodies and tax officials in business activities, customs duties that were too high, and tightened border controls. Studies have demonstrated that Uzbeks consider their governments inferior to the Soviet one.<sup>31</sup> Despite the despotic and corrupt nature of the Soviet system, the majority of Uzbeks (especially among the older generation) express nostalgia for the former Soviet Union. They frequently mention the availability of inexpensive food, jobs, medical care, affordable housing, and education during the Soviet era. As Marianne Kamp notes, “the idea that this is a passing stage, and that Uzbekistan must and will arrive at capitalism and democracy, is dying more quickly among ordinary people in Uzbekistan than it is among outside ‘experts.’”<sup>32</sup>

The Uzbek regime is a “paradoxical strong-weak state”<sup>33</sup> which now extracts resources, exercises strong social control and foists their ideology on ordinary people without giving anything in return. Most of the people the author met during his fieldwork in rural Ferghana expressed their dissatisfaction with current economic and social policies, mentioning unaffordable health-care and the high unemployment rate. These developments have had far-reaching repercussions for political stability and security in Uzbekistan. As the state retreated from its social welfare obligations, so are ordinary citizens retreating from their loyalty to the current political system, as evidenced by growing social discontent, disobedience to legal systems and rising support for radical Islamic movements. However, this discontent does not necessarily lead to social action in Uzbekistan. The Arab Spring had a dramatic negative impact on democratic developments in Uzbekistan, serving as a “scapegoat” to demonise the Western human rights and democracy initiatives in the region. Ironically, the ruling regime often cites famous Western scholars, such as Samuel Huntington, who argue that establishing centralised authority, even by authoritarian means, is the prerequisite for any type of political or economic development. In light of rising Islamic fundamentalism and the threat posed by the Taliban in neighbouring Afghanistan, the ruling regime “securitized” the issue by convincing the population and supporters abroad that there is only one alternative to their rule—Islamic fundamentalism. In this regard, political leadership of Uzbekistan actively pursues the policy of “political stability at any cost” that provides justification for ruling regimes to deploy coercive strategies and penal sanctions as an exclusive means of social control. And this strategy appears to be working: the saying “*och qornim—tinch qulog’im*” (“*a hungry stomach is better than a worried ear*”) has become commonplace in Uzbekistan.

The international indicators of state capacity, such as World Bank governance rankings, the American Bar Association’s Central and Eastern European Law Initiative’s indices of judicial oversight, and International Crisis

Group reports, have portrayed Uzbekistan as a state that is simultaneously weak, predatory, and unstable.<sup>34</sup> However, as we will show in the next sections, what is seen as the signs of weakness, instability and corruption by international reports and policy documents, actually constitute the form of governance in Uzbekistan. On the one hand, the state in Uzbekistan is heavily reliant on coercive and penal sanctions for maintaining political stability. But on the other hand, the state is potentially weak in terms of enforcing rule of law and has absolved itself from service delivery responsibilities by allowing informal practices and networks to serve as an informal welfare system. This, we argue, is the state of governance in Uzbekistan today and to understand it simply through the lens of corruption or state collapse would be to misunderstand what this experience of everyday life governance is like.

#### INFORMALITY AND “EVERYDAY LIFE GOVERNANCE” IN UZBEKISTAN

As we argued in previous sections, in order to better understand the governance trajectories in Uzbekistan, we need to explore them from the local level, since it is the local level where the state and citizens come into contact on a daily basis. The best we can do in a single chapter to give a flavour of this daily life is to feature a few vignettes from ethnographic field research. The ethnographic material illustrates the role of the informal economy as an alternative to the formal economy and the welfare structure in Uzbekistan that ordinary people and low-level state officials use in their everyday lives for coping with economic hardships. The main point we will make here is that what is viewed as a “corruption” from the outside is often an everyday form of governance from the insider’s perspective. This is the paradox of an authoritarian state with many laws and coercive structures and at the same time, daily life largely being regulated by informality, the process that we call in this chapter “everyday life governance.”

April 2009: The evening flight from Riga to Tashkent Airport on AirBaltic took just under six hours. We arrived at the Tashkent airport in the middle of the night and checked into the Radisson Hotel. After rest and breakfast, we walked through the streets to a nearby bazaar, *Alay*, to observe mundane activities and processes there. The first thing that attracted our attention was a black market for foreign currency exchange. We were welcomed by a group of money changers who immediately approached us, offering their currency exchange services. What struck us was that there were several policemen around; none of them, however, bothered about illegal transactions on the black market, thereby de-facto ‘decriminalising’ the informal practices of

money changers. We have observed many similar incidents in the Ferghana valley as well. What is evident is that it is almost impossible to buy foreign currency at the official exchange rate in the banks of Uzbekistan, and that is why the black market was the only available source where people could acquire foreign currency. We next turned our attention to the informal taxi sector. One of our interesting findings was that almost anybody in Tashkent could work as a taxi driver. As we had some official meetings with the administration of one of the universities in Tashkent, we regularly used taxi services. There were no taxi stops and we did not have to order a taxi. Waving your hand at the side of the street was sufficient to find a taxi in a minute. Observing the magnitude of the informal taxi sector, we came to realise that it has become a major source of self-employment and income-generating opportunities for many of the urban unemployed in Tashkent. The interaction between the taxi drivers and traffic police is also based on informal rules. During our observations, we noticed that taxi drivers often shake the hands of traffic police with money when they break traffic rules, such as exceeding the speed limit or red light crossing. One interesting insight we gained was that the behaviour of both state officials and citizens were largely guided by informal rules, while the laws and regulations were almost indiscernible in everyday life. Hence, informality has become an inalienable part of the governance mode of the political regime in Uzbekistan, making up for the incapacity of the formal structures.

Our field trip to rural Ferghana provided us with important insights on the existence of local standards and morality regarding how state officials should act. Our fieldsite *Oqtepa*,<sup>35</sup> where we conducted observations in April-May 2009 and June-August 2010, is one of the mahallas in *Shabboda* village in rural Ferghana and has a population of more than 2,000 people. Most of the residents in this mahalla were *dehqonlar* (farmers) involved in cucumber and grape production. However, due to our research focus, we were particularly interested in two mahalla residents, *Sardor* and *Rahmon*, who were both state officials and the centre of “everyday mahalla talk.” *Sardor* was a very high-level state official and worked as the deputy chief of Ferghana region police, whereas *Rahmon* was a district level traffic policeman (a low-level official). However, in the everyday mahalla life, *Sardor*, despite having such a high official status, did not have a decent reputation and was often described as “communist,” the term that carries negative meaning and is used in relation to law-abiding state officials who do not share their political influence and resources with their kin and mahalla. As a high-level police official, *Sardor* had an enormous power and he could easily divert the resources of the state to mahalla, but he always rejected the requests of mahalla and asked them to solve their problems through formal channels. Because of his attempts to

keep his public office separate from private sphere, *Sardor* was regarded as “communist” in the words of many mahalla residents we encountered. On the other hand, low-level official *Rahmon* was a “man of respect” and enjoyed very high social status and reputation in mahalla. Unlike *Sardor*, *Rahmon* provided patronage to mahalla residents, for instance by helping mahalla residents to avoid or manoeuvre around the state law. *Rahmon* was especially praised for his ability to act as a bridge between high level state officials and ordinary residents in terms of negotiating the amount of informal payment for job or university admission issues, and bending state laws to meet the interests of mahalla residents. Therefore, when invited to weddings, *Rahmon* was always offered the “best table” and served more quickly than others. Thus, according to the mahalla’s norms, *Sardor* was neither good person nor good state official due to his law-abiding behaviour and unwillingness to help mahalla people, while *Rahmon* was the “pride of the mahalla,” due to his sensitivity to the needs and concerns of the mahalla.

These observations show the existence of “everyday life governance” in Uzbekistan that is in conflict with the Western-centric definitions of good governance and yet embraces ritual forms, norms of sociability, and moral imperatives. As shown above, the state officials in rural Ferghana are torn between loyalty to their family and mahalla networks, and honesty at work. Therefore, maintaining loyalty and respect for such networks often comes at the expense of formal structures, thereby leading to an omnipresence of informal practices in formal arenas. This indicates that behavioural instructions promoted by mahalla influence the implementation of state laws and regulations. Although the mahalla-level relations described above may seem illicit or abnormal in the eyes of Western observers, it is however accepted within rural communities in Ferghana as legitimate coping strategy—regardless of whether they are licit or illicit. Seemingly, the analytical divide between public office and private sphere is not useful in the context of Uzbekistan where the society is mostly based on collectivist traditions and kinship networks.

Another relevant observation of the “everyday life governance” is the encounter with traffic police we experienced in May 2009 while travelling by taxi from Tashkent to Ferghana Valley. Perhaps unexpectedly for readers of this chapter who have not been to Central Asia, the traffic stops are one of the most frequent sites of state-citizen interaction in Uzbekistan and one of the most frequent topics of conversation. Hardly anyone who has been in a car in Uzbekistan has failed to witness the phenomenon of drivers being stopped, seemingly at random, and having their papers inspected, often resulting in the payment of a small bribe. Stories about resisting or subverting this ritual are the subject of popular folklore and YouTube videos.<sup>36</sup> The power of the traffic police is rarely challenged in Uzbekistan, and ordinary people always

show maximum obedience when they interact with the police. Unlike in the West, when stopped by the police, citizens in Uzbekistan get out of the car and hand over documents to the policeman, addressing him as “commander.” Thus, the relations between the traffic police and citizens are very hierarchical.<sup>37</sup>

There is only one route to Ferghana Valley via a mountain pass called *Kamchik*. Since *Kamchik* is the only route connecting the Fergana to the rest of Uzbekistan, it is heavily guarded, and there are many checkpoints where police and border officials check passports. One can also notice the large number of traffic police at the *Kamchik* pass. When we reached the pass, the driver asked us to unfasten our seat belts, as it was uncommon at that time to use seat belts. At least the traffic police did not impose any fine for driving without fastened seat belts.<sup>38</sup> Hence, any use of seat belts by the driver or the passengers could be a clear signal that there was a foreigner/non-native in the car, which may easily attract the attention of the traffic police, always seeking reasons to stop cars. In requesting us not to use the seat belts, the driver was actually trying to avoid any unnecessary attention from the police. However, out of concern for his personal safety, Måns Svensson, one of the authors of this paper, did not unfasten his seat belt. As the driver predicted, our car was soon stopped by the traffic police. As usual, they checked the driver’s documents. Due to the presence of a foreign citizen in the car, the police also wanted to check the car’s luggage compartment. Svensson, suspicious of the actions of the police, demanded that he be present while they checked the luggage compartment. This was an open challenge to the traffic policeman’s traditional authority. Trying to avoid conflict with a foreign citizen, the policeman decided not to check the luggage compartment and politely asked Svensson to sit in the car. Instead, the policeman ordered the driver to follow him to his small office to discuss some minor details in his car documents. After ten minutes, the driver returned to the car with an angry face and told us that he had to pay 15,000 som<sup>39</sup> because of Svensson’s failure to “show proper respect” towards the policeman. Not wanting the driver to take the consequences of his action, Svensson later covered the costs of the driver.

This observation provides useful insights into everyday forms of governance in Uzbekistan. As a foreigner, Svensson was unaware of local social norms and hierarchies. By demanding to be present during the luggage check, Svensson challenged the traditional authority of the policeman as the one who dictates the rules. According to Uzbek law, Svensson’s actions were entirely legal. However, from an “everyday life governance” perspective, his actions were not consistent with prevalent social norms and hierarchies, which resulted in the indirect imposition of a 15,000 som fine. Certainly, the incident described was a clear instance of corruption, since the police officer forcibly

extorted money from the driver (and the driver was angry and humiliated). But what struck us was that corruption was triggered by Svensson's failure to show due respect to the policeman (a violation of the expected form and the normative sociability). Consequently, this observation may provide a starting point for us to reconsider the nature and context of informal transactions in Uzbekistan not only as instances of illegality, but also view them as manifestations of everyday forms of governance.

Thus, our observations provided us with important insights about the nature of everyday life governance in Uzbekistan. It struck us that in Uzbekistan, informality has become the part and parcel of the governance mode where both ordinary citizens and state officials are involved in the exchange and reciprocation of material goods, favours, money and services. Wherever we looked—at institutions such as markets, banks, hospitals, traffic police—we observed the existence of a multitude of informal rules governing economic and social relations. A similar situation was also observed in Johan Rasanayagam's study in which he claimed that informal economy is so influential in Uzbekistan that, in a sense, it is all that there is.<sup>40</sup> Hence, despite the almost mythical coercive power of the political regime in Uzbekistan, especially the regime's ability to withstand internal and external challenges, we found that the state and its legal system have limited meaning in everyday life, and the coping strategies of ordinary citizens are mainly informal. Even the behaviour of state officials was more influenced by the informal rules than the law of the state. We realised that it is not the law, but the informal rules and norms that have more meaning and influence in everyday life in Uzbekistan. We have thus come to the conclusion that there is "everyday life governance" in Uzbekistan that dominates social and economic life itself. These processes will be more specifically demonstrated in the next section, with reference to two informal interviews with traffic policeman and midwife.

## EVERYDAY LIFE GOVERNANCE AS GETTING THINGS DONE

In this section, we present the results of two informal interviews with key informants. Our aim is to illustrate how things get done, how they are perceived by the ordinary citizens and low-level state officials, and their implications for understanding governance trajectories in Uzbekistan. The interviews were conducted in the Ferghana region of Uzbekistan and focus on two state arenas/institutions: (1) the practice of traffic safety enforcement; and (2) the practice of maternity services. The first interview is centred around *Dilshod*, a traffic policeman, and the second focuses on *Umida*, a midwife at maternity hospital in Ferghana. In the subsequent sections *Dilshod*, and *Umida*, speak

in the first person, and the authors' comments are provided to explain and analyse the context.

### **Dilshod, A Traffic Policeman: I "Sell" Traffic Tickets to Drivers to Earn A Salary**

*It is not so easy to work as a traffic policeman in Uzbekistan. We have to communicate with more than a hundred people on a daily basis. We do not have fixed working hours. If you want to get a job with the traffic police, you have to pay a bribe, around 6,000–7,000 USD, to top officials of the traffic police. The biggest problem is, actually, that we do not get paid a salary for our work. The official salary for traffic policemen is 900,000 som<sup>41</sup>, but in fact, we do not receive any salary. In rare cases, we might receive 10% of this salary, 100,000 som. Of course, you may wonder how we survive. Here is the reality for you: Instead of paying salary, our administration provides us with traffic tickets which we may sell to drivers to earn a salary.<sup>42</sup> We usually sell these tickets to drivers who drive without having their seat belt fastened and/or drive cars which do not meet technical safety standards. The price of one traffic ticket is 12,500 som. So we earn our salary by selling traffic tickets to drivers. Since we do not get any salary, we are not required to return ticket receipts or reports to our administration and can keep the revenues made from the ticket sales.*

*This is not the end of the story. Our bosses give us the order (i.e. set the standard) to sell at least twenty tickets per day. However, drivers do not violate traffic rules every day. How can we sell twenty tickets per day? If I do not sell twenty tickets per day, I might get a warning from the administration or even lose my job. Under these circumstances, we are under strong pressure to find drivers to sell tickets to. There is also an informal monthly payment called 'gruz' (burden) which we have to pay directly into our bosses' pocket. The amount of this monthly payment ranges from 50,000 to 100,000 soms. We have to make this payment if we want to keep our job. These circumstances compel us to sell tickets even to drivers who act legally. Ordinary people do not know about these problems and therefore hate us. It is politics. We cannot talk about these problems openly.*

*I know many people look upon traffic police as the most corrupt profession in Uzbekistan. Since we do not receive any salary from the state for our work, the money we earn through selling tickets is completely legal. I am also an ordinary man, like everybody else; I have a family, kids to feed! Instead of giving salary, our bosses force us to earn our salary through selling tickets to drivers. So tell me, how should I feed my kids when the state does not pay me any salary? Had I received a normal salary, I would not bother selling tickets to law-abiding drivers.*

### Umida, A Midwife: 'I Will Not Be Able to Feed My Kids If I Follow The Law'

*I know maternity hospitals are often criticized for being one of the most corrupt places in Uzbekistan. But those people and organizations who label us 'corrupt' are unaware of the serious problems we face in our daily working life. I think all problems are connected to the state and system. During the Soviet era, the state provided everything for hospitals and physicians received a good salary. But, after independence, the state significantly decreased financing for hospitals. There is a serious shortage of medical equipment. Hospitals are over-crowded. Electricity and gas cuts are very common. The state does not supply us with necessary medicaments.*

*According to law, all maternity hospitals are state-owned in Uzbekistan, which means giving birth in a hospital must be free of charge. But this law is rarely enforced in practice. Almost everyone pays for maternity services. Of course, we accept their payment informally through hand-shaking. Often, people themselves slip money into our pocket. Such informal payments are called *suyunchi* (literally "joy" in English), where the father or relatives of the new born baby give cash (or sometimes expensive gifts) to the midwife and nurses who deliver the baby. *Suyunchi* is usually given after the birth of a child. The amount of *suyunchi* varies from one case to another, ranging from anywhere between 50,000 to 500,000 som. If it is an uncomplicated vaginal birth, people give us *suyunchi* of around 50,000–100,000 som. In cases of complicated vaginal births or C-sections, we receive a lot more *suyunchi*, approximately 300,000–500,000 som.*

*I know my actions are illegal according to law, but real life circumstances force me to accept *suyunchi* from patients. Law and real life are completely different things. You will understand what I mean after I explain my work conditions. First, it is very difficult to get a job at a maternity hospital. For instance, if you want to work as a nurse at our hospital, you must pay a bribe of at least 500 USD to top health officials. Second, our salaries are extremely low. A midwife's monthly salary is 280,000 som, around 100 USD, and a nurse's salary is 180,000 som (65 USD). Isn't it frustrating when you pay a 500 USD bribe in order to get a job with a 100 USD salary? Our salary is very low, but I have to feed my kids. I studied for seven years to become a midwife, but I do not receive a high enough salary to live on from the state. Due to my good education, I believe I should earn more money than people who sell potatoes at the bazaar. I, too, have my own dreams, so I want to have a good salary. Everything is expensive at the bazaar. For example, one kilo of meat costs 17,000 som and one sack of flour is 60,000 som. I have to buy clothes for my kids. So, you see, it is impossible to survive on my 280,000 som salary. Since the state does not reward me properly, I have a full right*



*to supplement my salary through suyunchi. I do not force anyone to give suyunchi, but people themselves voluntarily reward me. This is the only way to feed my kids and I do not see any other alternatives. I will not be able to feed my kids if I follow the law. Therefore, it is quite understandable that we expect people to reward us for our efforts.*

To what extent do the stories of midwife and traffic policeman are comparable? In our opinion, they are comparable with respect to their “making-ends-meet” character. Their professional sphere, the amounts of informal payments, the ways of bending the law and other details may vary, but the contextual factors, reasoning, and substance are similar and they both indicate the existence of “everyday life governance” that is normative, predictable, and articulated in relation to formal law.

The interview with traffic policeman reveals that traffic police look at traffic tickets as a commodity for earning income rather than a means to enforce state traffic laws. When describing his informal practices, the traffic policeman tends to use the expression “selling tickets to drivers” rather than saying “imposing a fine on drivers.” This shows that the work ethics of traffic policeman is guided by the unwritten rules. Second, the traffic policeman claims that his salary earning (ticket selling) practices are completely legal, since he does not receive any salary from the state for his arduous work. In the light of these problems, one conclusion could be that informal practices allow low-level state officials such as traffic police to survive in the absence of decent salaries. This situation reminds us of Abel Polese’s anthropological study on Ukraine in which he concluded that corruption needs to be redefined, at least when dealing with cases in which it helps people to survive.<sup>43</sup> Third, the interview illustrates that corruption has different meanings and logic within different levels of society, and that there is a difference between masses of low-level officials on the one hand and the smaller group of state elites on the other. For instance, the elite level corruption, rent-seeking, and “clan struggles” described by scholars such as Ilkhamov and Collins are not the same as the everyday “getting things done” practices of low-level traffic policemen.<sup>44</sup> During the interview, the traffic policeman expressed concerns for his working conditions and criticized the unreasonable demands of his administration. He frequently mentioned that he has to follow the unwritten rules of his organization in order to keep his job.

The midwife’s story also shows that the gap between law, which states that maternity services should be free of charge, and actual delivery (the lack of state financing for hospitals and low salaries), forced maternity hospital workers to frantically search for informal coping strategies that help them survive in the absence of decent salaries. As the midwife asserts, she will not be able to feed her children had she followed the law. Seemingly, since

Uzbek authorities fail to secure the basic needs of its citizens, so the state officials such as midwife and traffic policeman do not feel any moral obligation to act in compliance with the law. According to the midwife's moral code, her informal practices are completely "legal," and she has a full right to reap the benefits of her good education. Subsequently, informal transactions that are interpreted as corrupt in the Western moral and juridical codes could be regarded as morally acceptable behavior according to the unwritten rules of maternity hospitals in Uzbekistan.

### CONCLUSION

In one country, a driver stopped for speeding quickly pays a small amount of money to a traffic policeman, knowing most of it will go to feed the policeman's family. In another country, the same driver goes through a much longer and more expensive process knowing that the violation will have a negative impact on her auto insurance costs, might show up on a background check, and that the fine money goes to an impersonal bureaucracy run by an official she voted against. In which scenario is the driver more free, in which more tormented? The informal transaction we call corruption and the formal transaction is considered good governance, but both transactions are imbued with affect, morality, sociability, and predictability.

We assume that good governance leads to long-term benefits to the common good: bad drivers are punished and become safer drivers; fines go to benefit the community, not a single family; insurance companies and municipal authorities cooperate to produce a broader sense of generalized trust in society. But what are our assumptions about the corruption scenario? We have argued that this kind of "petty corruption" is far from disorderly and immoral, but are these informal practices also contributing to the common good, as culturally appropriate means of exchange that reinforce sociability and interdependence, strengthening the social fabric? Our answer is a qualified yes, but qualified because it seems equally true that people are making the best of a bad situation where the state has largely withdrawn from all but its functions maintaining political stability and interethnic peace.

Returning to Krasner's point, is everyday life governance in Uzbekistan the "good enough governance" that is the best many societies can hope for? Does it provide for individual physical security, public order, limited economic growth, security from transnational threats, basic health and sanitation services (all yes so far), checks on high level corruption (no), and minimal mechanisms of accountability such as media and civil society (also no)?<sup>45</sup> Krasner argues that democracy promotion activities often create instability,

but that good enough governance creates the kind of stability that eventually gives birth to a moderately prosperous middle class, which in turn will push for democratic reforms on its own. Uzbekistan's strong coercive state has produced security for most citizens and overall stability, but its weak welfare state has withdrawn from the social sphere and in its place informal governance systems have emerged. The coexistence of these two strong/weak state systems may be the main reason for the regime's longevity. It remains to be seen if kleptocracy and the top-down closing of spaces for civil society and diverse expression will be an Achilles heel that prevents Krasner's scenario of an expanding middle class from coming to fruition in Uzbekistan.

### NOTES

1. Authors are listed in alphabetical order. This chapter was written jointly with Laura Adams but the empirical material is primarily based on field research conducted by Måns Svensson and Rustamjon Urinboyev between 2009 and 2014 in Tashkent city and Ferghana region in Uzbekistan.

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