

# **Sideways Concessions: Protest and Cooperative Resource Management in Central Asia**

Sarah J. Hummel

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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Granting direct concessions to protests sometimes causes mass movements to escalate rather than deescalate. Given this risk, governments may employ concessions that are “sideways” to the central issues of the protest. Sideways concessions are policy accommodations that are substantively unrelated to the narrative of the ongoing protest. They help deescalate movements by reducing the level of grievance among potential protesters, while their indirect nature minimizes the likelihood of any escalatory effects. The article illustrates the use of sideways concessions in post-Soviet Central Asia during the 2000s, demonstrating that the Central Asian governments used international cooperation over resource management as a sideways concession to protest in specific subnational regions. This finding implies that sideways concessions are an important part of the protest-and-response story.

Making direct concessions is not always effective at deescalating protest movements and, indeed, can sometimes cause situations to deteriorate. Acquiescing to protesters signals the government vulnerability. This may inspire ever greater demands, creating a cycle of protest and concessions that undermines the authority of the government. In this article, I argue that governments, seeking to avoid these escalatory effects, may employ concessions that are “side-ways” to the demands or narrative of the protest. As the concessions granted are increasingly sideways - that is, further away from the dominant issues of the protest - it becomes increasingly likely that potential protesters internalize the benefits without linking them to the ongoing protests and, therefore, do not view them as signals of governmental weakness. For example, decreasing the price of state-owned utilities could be a sideways response to protests over labor reforms. Used alone or in conjunction with conventional responses, like direct concessions or repression, this can significantly slow the growth of protests at the aggregate level and help deescalate volatile situations.

In addition to being unconnected to ongoing protests, effective sideways concessions must meet two additional criteria. First, they must be valuable to potential protesters, meaning that they lower overall levels of grievance and make it more costly, in terms of time and effort, for protest activists to recruit citizens to join the ongoing movement. Second, they must be practical, meaning that they have relatively low transaction costs associated with implementation and do not require governments to commit to policies they may wish to change once the threat of protest passes.

As well as developing the concept of sideways concessions theoretically, the article illustrates how they are used in practice. I demonstrate that the Central Asian governments used cooperation over international resource management as a sideways concession to domestic protest during the 2000s. Using original data on the occurrence of protest and the relationships between the Central Asian countries over the issue of water and energy, I find that transitioning to cooperative management was more likely when doing so benefited protesting regions; that is, when it was effective as a sideways concession. In contrast, when protests occurred in regions that did not benefit from cooperation, signing an agreement was not as effective as a sideways concession and the likelihood of transition decreased.

The theoretical argument and empirical evidence have broader implications for how we think about both protest and the implementation of government policy. First, the article underscores the need to expand our understanding of how leaders respond to protest. There are well-established literatures concerning the use of both repression and direct concessions. Indeed, with very few exceptions, these are considered the only plausible options.<sup>1</sup> This view is overly narrow. By not accounting for other responses, such as sideways concessions, we overlook important factors that ultimately help explain when and why protest movements succeed or fail.

Second, the article challenges the view that consistent policy implementation is always desirable.<sup>2</sup> I demonstrate that governments sometimes embrace the use of flexible policies that allow them to respond dynamically to protests. Doing so involves updating or altering the policy as protest levels and compositions change. This manifests as a kind of volatility that, contrary to conventional interpretations, is neither a source of instability nor evidence of low state capacity. Instead, it represents a rational response to protest dynamics under conditions of uncertainty.

Finally, by demonstrating that international policies may be used as sideways concessions to domestic protest, the article speaks to a broader literature on how domestic and international policy are linked in nondemocratic contexts. Existing research within this tradition focuses on how different institutional arrangements affect the occurrence of international cooperation and conflict.<sup>3</sup> The evidence from Central Asia implies that short-term domestic factors can also play an important role in determining international behavior. Studying the effects of informal, everyday politics in nondemocratic countries is a fruitful avenue of research for scholars of international behavior that complements the existing focus on formal institutions.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bishara (2015) argues that ignoring protest is a third option. In a similar vein, Franklin (2009) defines toleration to be the “absence of either repression or meaningful concessions” (701). These are the only exceptions of which I am aware.

<sup>2</sup> A typical argument of this kind is that consistent implementation of a policy makes citizens willing to invest in productive behavior that they would otherwise avoid. See, for example, Frye (2004) on property rights.

<sup>3</sup> On cooperation, see Weeks (2008); Mattes and Rodriguez (2014). On conflict, see Peceny, Beer and Sanchez-Terry (2002); Peceny and Beer (2003); Lai and Slater (2006); Pickering and Kisangani (2010).

<sup>4</sup> Weiss (2013) makes a related point, arguing that domestic protest in autocracies can be used to signal resolve in international crises. However, her argument is that informal domestic politics are used to obtain ends at the international level, while my research concerns the way international policy can be used to pursue domestic

## Choosing “sideways” concessions

Even governments that permit or encourage minor protests wish to keep them from escalating out of control. Escalating protests signal ever greater dissatisfaction with the government, challenge the government’s right and ability to maintain order within its boundaries and, in extreme cases, can evolve into the kind of people-power movements that upend the current political system. Traditional government responses to protest involve repression and/or the granting of direct concessions to protesters. However, both of these responses have significant drawbacks. Repression increases the costs of engaging in protest, but can also inspire backlash protest or cause protesters to escalate their tactics.<sup>5</sup> Direct concessions may likewise have an inspirational effect rather than demobilizing one.<sup>6</sup> While receiving these concessions makes individuals more satisfied with the government, it also signals weakness and makes individuals believe that future victories are possible.

Ginkel and Smith illustrate the dual effect of direct concessions in a formal model of the strategic interaction between a government, a set of dissidents, and the masses.<sup>7</sup> On the one hand, the masses may be less likely to join a protest movement instigated by the dissidents (i.e. escalate) because they are happier, overall, with the status quo after receiving the concession. However, only weak governments need to grant concessions; strong governments can survive a challenge without resorting to conciliatory policies. This makes a concession-granting government attractive targets for revolution. Ginkel and Smith conclude that making direct concessions is only rational if it decreases the likelihood of rebellion by making the people happier, more than it increases it by signaling that the government is weak.

In this article, I argue that governments can strategically select policies to minimize the likelihood that citizens observe a signal of its weakness, while still generating the welfare benefits. Certain kinds of concessions are clearly linked to the occurrence of protest. Although movements are not always cohesive,<sup>8</sup> a dominant narrative typically emerges through statements of

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<sup>5</sup> Opp and Roehl (1990); Carey (2006); Moore (1998); Escriba-Folch (2013).

<sup>6</sup> Carey (2006); Bratton and Van de Walle (1992); Davies (2014); Ginkel and Smith (1999).

<sup>7</sup> Ginkel and Smith (1999).

<sup>8</sup> Beissinger (2013).

protest leaders and/or media coverage of the protest. As a concrete example, suppose there is an ongoing protest predominantly aimed at government corruption. The establishment of an anti-corruption investigative body would be a direct concession, rather than a sideways one. An accommodation that legitimizes the occurrence of the ongoing protest, such as the relaxation of martial law, would also be a direct concession, because it is clearly linked to the act of protest. A more sideways concession, in contrast, could take the form of expanding a poverty relief program or the freeing of imprisoned religious leaders.

By using sideways concessions, governments decrease the likelihood that protesters observe any signal of weakness. Granting policy concessions on issues linked directly to the protest narrative is a very public act that will almost certainly be linked to the protest in media reports. Consequently, governments may choose to grant concessions more quietly, in policy areas that are not directly related to the narrative of the protest. Governments do not stop governing when protests occur: they continue to enact policies, negotiate treaties, collect taxes, distribute benefits, and so on. Therefore, policies that appear unrelated to protests can be hidden in “business as usual” politics, rather than being advertised as responses to protest. While some individuals will undoubtedly recognize sideways concessions for what they are (i.e. concessions to protest), their indirect nature makes it likely that others will overlook this connection. This is especially likely to as concessions become less related and less visibly linked to protest.

Effective sideways concessions must meet two additional criteria. First, they must be *valuable* to potential protesters. Existing studies suggest that high-levels of grievance make individuals more likely to join mass movements.<sup>9</sup> Aggrieved individuals are susceptible to frames revolving around injustice, which are common in collective action.<sup>10</sup> Frustration and anger over grievances may also reduce any loyalty to the government that might have prevented individuals from engaging in public displays of dissent. In general, these factors increase an individual’s mobilization potential<sup>11</sup> and make it cheaper - in terms of time, energy, or investment in selective incentives - for activists to convince him or her to join a movement.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Davies (1962); Gurr (1970); Achilov (2016).

<sup>10</sup> Gamson (1992).

<sup>11</sup> This idea builds on Klandermans and Oegema’s (1987) concept of “the mobilization potential.”

<sup>12</sup> Activists take the costs of recruiting individuals into account when deciding who to target, but their decisions also depend on characteristics of the movement itself, such as its goals, ideology, and capacity, as well as the

If sideways concessions are valuable to potential protesters, they decrease the grievance individuals feel towards the government, make them believe their overall situation is improving, and redirect their attention to aspects of life where things are more positive, further decreasing at least the perception of grievance.<sup>13</sup> This, in turn, decreases their mobilization potential. For example, an individual who receives some kind of economic benefit from the government may be less inclined to join a protest over corruption than he would have been in the absence of this benefit, since the anti-government undertones or frames do not resonate with his or her new-found feelings of satisfaction. A protest recruiter would need to generate additional incentives or pressures to convince this would-be protester to join. By making it harder for protest activists to mobilize individuals in this way, sideways concessions can contribute to the dampening of ongoing protest movements at the aggregate level.<sup>14</sup>

I should note that even if sideways concessions are valuable, they may still be more effective at preventing new targets of mobilization from joining than at convincing individuals who are already protesting to return home. As Opp argues, individuals receive positive benefits or negative sanctions from participation, depending on the normative expectations of their “reference persons.”<sup>15</sup> When an individual takes to the street, his or her relevant reference persons shift, in part or in full, to other protesters and the positive benefits associated with continued protest are larger than they were before the individual joined. This generates a kind of inertia: someone who is protesting is inclined to stay protesting, while a nonprotester is more inclined to stay home. Consequently, small changes in mobilization potential that are enough to keep individ-

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political opportunity structure at the moment of mobilization. Thus, individuals with high mobilization potential will not always be targeted for mobilization, explaining why the existence of grievance is more frequent than the outbreak of protest (Snyder and Tilly, 1972; McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Saxton, 2005; Dalton, Van Sickle and Weldon, 2010; Bellin, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> This argument is similar to the central claim in King, Pan and Roberts (2016). They argue that the Chinese government pays employees to “change the subject” rather than engage in online debates with critics.

<sup>14</sup> Central to this argument is the assumption that individuals view government concessions as fungible. In other words, individuals must actually give the government credit for concessions on one issue when deciding whether to protest over another one. I evaluated the validity of this assumption in other research and found that individual propensity to join a particular protest movement declines when the government makes improvements in unrelated issues, especially among individuals who are dissatisfied and less optimistic about the future.

<sup>15</sup> Opp (1990).

uals from joining, may be less effective at convincing individuals to stop protesting once they have begun. However, this can still be enough to prevent escalation and, ultimately, cause the movement to fizzle out. Protests usually occur in waves,<sup>16</sup> creating the expectation they will continue to grow over time. By preventing the protest movement from expanding, sideways concessions can dampen its momentum, disillusioning protesters and leading them to give up their cause.

The second criterion for an effective sideways concession is that it be a *practical* response. This comprises three things. First, benefits must be targeted to possible joiners of the movement and, ideally, exclude those who are unlikely to join anyway. It is inefficient to provide benefits to those who would not plausibly be recruited to the protest. For example, economic elites are unlikely to join a protest in favor of increased union rights. Targeting such elites with a financial regulation reform would be an ineffective sideways concession, since it only decreases the mobilization potential of citizens who are unlikely to join anyway. On the other hand, providing some kind of poverty relief might be an effective way to get benefits to more natural targets of protest activists (i.e. the working class), without weighing in on labor affairs.

Sideways concessions must also have relatively low transaction costs associated with implementation. Protests often occur suddenly and unexpectedly.<sup>17</sup> Once a protest movement gains enough momentum, the use of sideways concessions will be less effective. In the first place, individual “reference persons” - and the expectations of those reference persons - will shift to include more protesters and protest sympathizers as an increasing proportion of the population gets involved, with a commensurate shift in the expectations of these reference persons. Additionally, the number of people protesting has a very strong effect on the proximate cost-benefit calculation of would-be protesters.<sup>18</sup> As turnout increases, both the tangible benefits of protest and the probability the movement will succeed increase, while the expected costs of joining decreases. These dynamics overwhelm other factors once a large enough proportion of the population has joined. For sideways concessions to be effective, the transaction costs associated with turning on their benefits must be relatively small, allowing them to be implemented

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<sup>16</sup> Beissinger (2002).

<sup>17</sup> Kuran (1991); Lohmann (1994).

<sup>18</sup> Schelling (1978); DeNardo (1985); Oliver, Marwell and Teixeira (1985); Yin (1998).

in a timely fashion.

Finally, the most effective policies also allow the flow of benefits to be turned off or switched to other groups once the immediate threat has passed. Even short-lived sideways concessions can generate a tangible improvement in the lives of individuals. In the case of Central Asian resource management, international cooperation can make the difference between crop failures and a successful harvest, which is of huge importance to poor farmers. These farmers would prefer long-term cooperation, but adequate water in the short-term is still better than nothing. Particularly if governments are uncertain about whose support they will need in the future, they will not want to commit to indefinitely providing benefits to the potential joiners of any single protest event, preferring to preserve their ability to alter the distribution of benefits in society as they gather new information or new challenges emerge. This is especially likely in nondemocratic countries, where information about potential challenges to the regime is notoriously poor.<sup>19</sup> Importantly, the reversal or removal of a sideways concession is unlikely to generate new protests. Although, individual mobilization potential will rise accordingly, this is, as its name implies, only about *potential*. In the absence of some kind of recruitment, pressure, or other changes in the costs and benefits of protest, individuals with high mobilization potential do not spontaneously protest. The optimal allocation of benefits differs, therefore, during periods of “normal” politics and those of ongoing protests.

When a policy exists that is unrelated, valuable, and practical governments may choose to use it as a sideways concession to protest. This need not be a substitute for other responses but, instead, may supplement them. For instance, using sideways concessions alongside repression can help blunt backlash by counteracting some of the anger felt by possible joiners. Likewise, employing sideways concessions in conjunction with more direct concessions can augment the deescalatory effects, without significantly increasing the escalatory ones. In this way, sideways concessions can make the difference between a protest movement that gains momentum and one that does not.

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<sup>19</sup> Kuran (1991); Wintrobe (1998).



## **Protest and cooperative resource management in Central Asia**

During the 2000-2010 time period, the leaders of the five post-Soviet Central Asian countries - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan - had credible reasons for being concerned about protest. Generally speaking, protest movements often arise and expand rapidly in nondemocratic regimes such as those in Central Asia.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the consequences of dictators leaving power are harsher in expectation than those of democrats, raising the stakes of preventing protest escalation. More specifically, the experience of Kyrgyzstan illustrated vividly how seemingly benign protests can quickly become dangerous to governments. As Radnitz discusses, the 2005 Tulip revolution in Kyrgyzstan began as a series of unrelated protests about the failure of particular candidates in recent elections.<sup>21</sup> It was only in the much later stages, after networks of elites had joined together, that calls for the resignation of President Akayev were heard. However, regardless of the initial intent, these protests successfully secured his ouster. For these reasons, protests represented a real threat to the stability of the Central Asian countries. Under such conditions, government leaders will be particularly concerned about the escalatory effects of traditional responses to protest, making the use of sideways concessions more likely.

In this article, I evaluate whether the Central Asian governments used cooperation over international water and energy management as a sideways concession to protests during the 2000-2010 time period. Cooperation, in this case, meant the continuation of water-for-energy exchanges developed during Soviet times. In these exchanges, the upstream countries released water during the growing months for use by downstream agricultural producers and, in return, received subsidized energy during the winter.<sup>22</sup> There are clear short-term costs associated with cooperation over water and energy management, most notably for downstream energy elites. In accordance with the water-for-energy exchange scheme, at least some portion of energy was sold to the upstream countries at a subsidized rate. This reduced the profits that the elites in-

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<sup>20</sup> See Kuran (1991). Even the most democratic of these countries, Kyrgyzstan, was quite authoritarian during the period I study in the statistical analysis and, further, experienced major protest movements that led to the ouster of first President Akayev in 2005 and then President Bakiev in 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Radnitz (2010).

<sup>22</sup> See Weinthal (2001) for an overview of these exchanges and an excellent discussion of why they persisted.

volved in energy production could otherwise obtain from selling their products on the open market.

Despite these costs, cooperation of resource management was an effective sideways concession to protest in particular geographic areas. First, cooperation over resource management was *unrelated* to most of the issues being protested about in the 2000s. I collected an original dataset of protests that occurred in each of the Central Asian countries during the 2000s.<sup>23</sup> I used newspaper coverage to divide protests into five broad categories: political, economic, ethnic/religious, foreign affairs, and human rights/environment. Political protests include opposition protests, protests against the government or its actions (including imprisonment of opposition members and/or the government’s use of force), and protests over elections. Economic protests include labor protests and strikes, protests over living conditions, and those related to housing and land issues. The ethnic and religious category includes any protest with an explicitly ethnic or religious tone or over an explicitly ethnic or religious issue. The foreign affairs category includes protests over the actions of foreign actors, outside the borders of the country. Finally, human rights and environment protest include those over environmental conditions, arrests of non-political and non-religious figures, and general issues of human rights. More detail on how I coded these protests is located in the Appendix. Table 1 shows the different types of protest, by country. As is evident, protest occurred in all five categories, with political and economic protests being the most common.

Table 1: Types of Protest, 2000-2010

	<i>Political</i>	<i>Economic</i>	<i>Ethnic &amp; Religious</i>	<i>Foreign Affairs</i>	<i>Human Rights &amp; Environment</i>
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	6	6	1	1	0
<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	52	10	12	2	3
<b>Tajikistan</b>	8	7	1	2	1
<b>Turkmenistan</b>	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	3	5	3	0	2

*This is the number of months (out of 132 possible months) in which at least one protest over this issue occurred*

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<sup>23</sup> Data on protests are drawn from extensive article searches using the EastView database. Where possible, events are cross-referenced with at least two sources in an attempt to ensure the accuracy of the severity measure, which will be discussed in the next section.

Very few of these protests could be tied directly or indirectly to the issue of international resource management. One such protest occurred in October of 2007 in Kazakhstan over bread prices, which is plausibly related to the availability of water.<sup>24</sup> In Kyrgyzstan, a protest occurred in January of 2004 over interruptions in the electrical supply.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the April 2010 revolution was arguably linked to a rise in domestic electricity prices, although this was primarily a domestic - not international - issue.<sup>26</sup> In Tajikistan, there were a couple of protests about the lack of power in January 2007<sup>27</sup> and, in 2010, protests occurred outside the Uzbek embassy over the Uzbek blockade of trains, which was allegedly related to water issues.<sup>28</sup> No protests in Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan were linked to resource issues. Consequently, for the vast majority of protests in these countries, resource management was neither directly nor indirectly related to the narrative of ongoing protest.<sup>29</sup>

Second, transitioning to cooperation over resource management was *valuable* to specific subnational groups. Selecting sideways concessions that benefit the region where protests are occurring is an effective way to target possible joiners of the protest. Logistically, protests are easier to join if they are geographically proximate. In addition, region is itself a salient identity in Central Asia, which overlaps with other important identities such as clan, ethnicity, and religion.<sup>30</sup> This means that a transition to cooperative resource management can be used as a sideways concession to protests occurring in regions that receive benefits from such a transition, which I call the “beneficiary regions.”

In the downstream countries of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the main beneficiaries are individuals involved in agricultural production. These individuals are geographically concentrated in areas located in or near irrigation networks. Official or unofficial Water Users Associations typically oversee local management of water resources and aim for an even distribution of water, meaning that farmers in these networks benefit, more or less equally, from

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<sup>24</sup> *Pensioners protest over rising prices* (2007).

<sup>25</sup> Neshkumai (2004).

<sup>26</sup> *Kyrgyzstan: Bakiyev confronts political crisis* (2010).

<sup>27</sup> Kondrashova (2007).

<sup>28</sup> Chorshanбиеv (2010).

<sup>29</sup> As I discuss in the results section, I run models excluding these protests, as well as economic protests more broadly, and find that the results remain the same.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Schatz (2004), Collins (2006), and Khalid (2007)

obtaining enough water.<sup>31</sup> Cooperation not only increases the satisfaction with the government, it also raises the opportunity costs associated with protest; it is more costly for farmers to take time to protest when they have enough water than it does if their crops were going to die. Additionally, adequate water for agricultural production has positive spillovers for non-agricultural producers in the same region,<sup>32</sup> including increased food availability and decreased prices at local bazaars.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, I conclude that areas located on or near the rivers benefit from cooperative management,<sup>34</sup> while those located further away do not. Figure 1 illustrates the relevant geographic divisions.

In the upstream countries of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, energy consumers rely predominantly on electricity to power and heat their homes. Electricity tends to be cheaper than coal and gas and, due to the extensive electric grid constructed during Soviet times, it remains the most widely available and accessible type of energy.<sup>35</sup> In the absence of cooperation, some segments of the population lack electricity during winter when temperatures are extremely low, harming the health and economic well-being of ordinary citizens and hindering the development of the country more broadly. In Tajikistan, the relatively small storage capacity of the Nurek reservoir ( $10.5km^3$ ) means that all citizens benefit in expectation from importing energy from their downstream neighbors. Since the Tajiks cannot store adequate quantities of water during the peak flow months, they face a serious energy deficit in winter when water inflows are lowest and domestic demand is highest. Electricity rationing, when implemented, tends to

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with local scholar and policy advisor on water issues. November 17, 2011. Conducted in English. Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

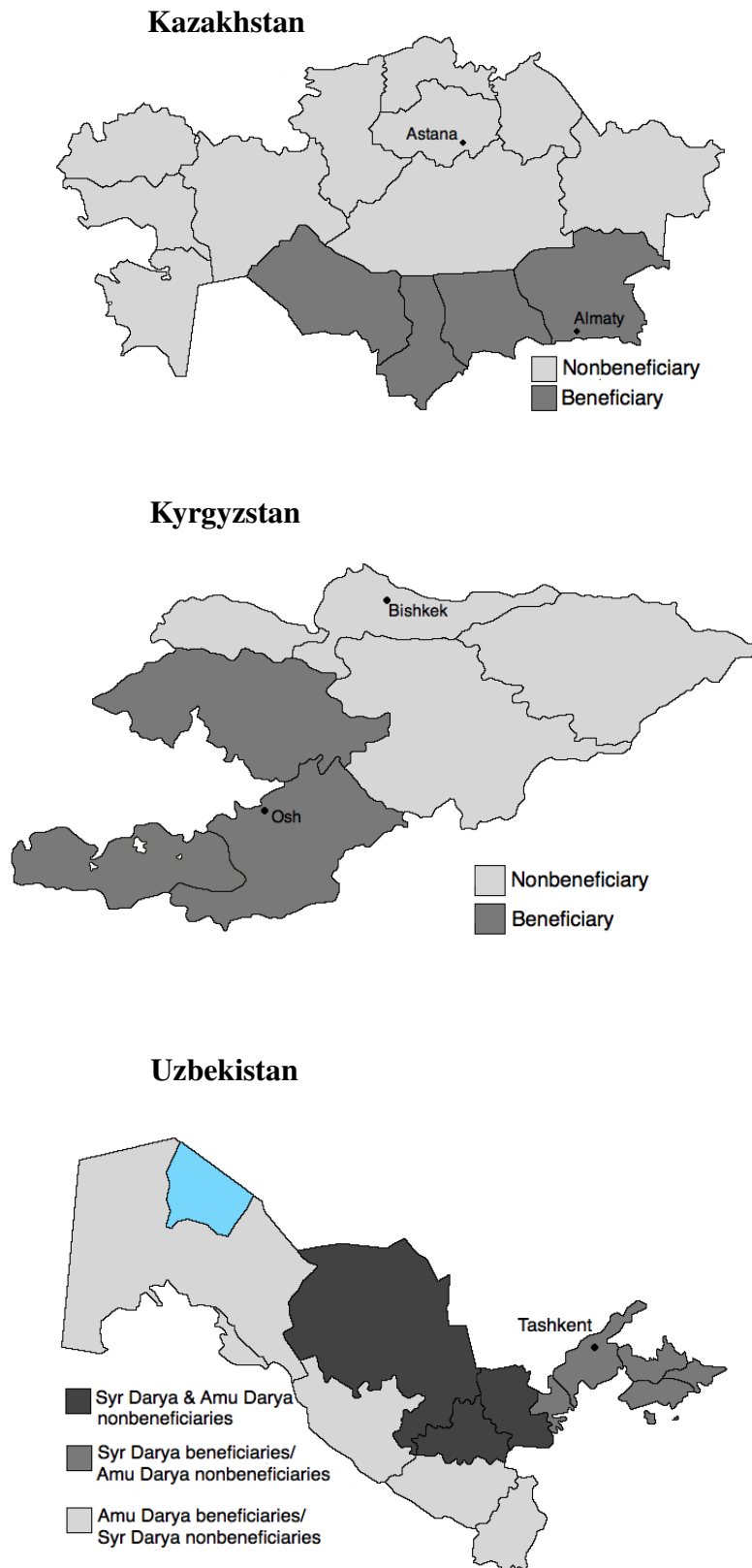
<sup>32</sup> Kasara (2007) makes this argument for policies that promote agricultural growth in Africa

<sup>33</sup> In a study on trade of consumer goods (especially food) in Kazakhstan, Grafe, Raiser and Sakatsume (2008) found that the internal barriers to trade in the region were very high, suggesting that prices will change most in local areas.

<sup>34</sup> There are some elites involved in agricultural production and export, especially cotton, that are not located in the region (Abdullaev, Giordano and Rasulov, 2007). However, given that I will be focusing on responses to mass protest, these individuals - whose location is not clear and whose number is small - are unlikely to affect the results.

<sup>35</sup> Interview conducted by the author with a local employee of a state-controlled energy company. June 15, 2012. Conducted in English. Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

Figure 1: Countries with geographic divisions of beneficiary and nonbeneficiary groups



be countrywide.<sup>36</sup> In the Kyrgyz case, on the other hand, there is a distinct regional dimension. The Toktogul reservoir in Kyrgyzstan has a greater storage capacity ( $19.5km^3$ ) than the Nurek reservoir in Tajikistan, theoretically reducing the size of the energy deficit Kyrgyzstan faces in winter under a noncooperative regime. However, the configuration of the Soviet-constructed electric grid means that electricity produced by hydropower cascades associated with Toktogul cannot reach the South of the country without passing through Uzbekistan. This makes cooperation necessary for Kyrgyz energy to reach southern Kyrgyz citizens. Consequently, I consider residents of the South beneficiaries of cooperation over water and energy management, while those in the North are not (see Figure 1).<sup>37</sup>

Finally, cooperation over resource management is *practical* for use as a sideways concession to protest. Transitioning between noncooperative and cooperative resource management during the 2000s had relatively low transaction costs. Despite the emergence of many regional organizations in the immediate post-Soviet period, even the highest profile of these had little actual influence on how resource policy was made during the time under consideration. Commitment to these organizations remained shallow.<sup>38</sup> As one government employee told me in 2012, decisions made at meetings of regional organizations were not implemented if they did not align with the wishes of the presidents.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the presidents had complete control over the issue of resource management, streamlining the decision-making process.<sup>40</sup> This decreased the number of bureaucratic delays and distortions, and allowed leaders to make and implement decisions quickly.

Finally, the frequent negotiation and renegotiation of these agreements resulted in a highly

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<sup>36</sup> For example, Chorshanbiyev (2008).

<sup>37</sup> This is true for cooperation with Kazakhstan, as well as Uzbekistan. Cooperation with Uzbekistan means that electricity can be imported from the North, while cooperation with Kazakhstan means greater quantities of coal to generate electricity at the Osh thermo-electric plant that can then be distributed to other areas in the South. Specifically, Batken, Osh and Jalalabad are considered beneficiary regions and all others are nonbeneficiary regions. In Tajikistan, all provinces are considered beneficiaries.

<sup>38</sup> See Weintal (2002) for a discussion of how the Central Asian countries adopted the form, but not the substance, of cooperation over resources in the early post-Soviet period

<sup>39</sup> Interview conducted on January 11, 2012, in Dushanbe, Tajikistan

<sup>40</sup> Interview with a foreign employee of an international organization involved in water and energy issues. January 10, 2012. Conducted by the author in English. Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

flexible form of cooperation, in which defections were forgiven as a matter of course. Regularization of this kind decreases the costs associated with information asymmetries,<sup>41</sup> alleviates information asymmetries,<sup>42</sup> and makes short-term defection from the norms of the regime less attractive.<sup>43</sup> There are shared expectations and informal rules around water and energy management negotiations that make the formation of new agreements much easier than they would have been if the presidents had to start afresh each time. It also allowed them to defect from cooperation once the proximate threat from protest passed. At these moments, the downstream leaders had to balance the preference of the energy elites for noncooperation with the desires of cooperative management's beneficiaries. Likewise, the upstream leaders had to balance the political and financial capital required to induce cooperation against the wishes of downstream energy elites with the need to appease individuals in their own country who benefit from cooperation. Flexibility allowed leaders to end cooperation if its costs outweighed its benefits during periods of more normal politics.

What, then, are the empirical expectations if cooperative resource management was used as a sideways concessions to protest? The most direct implication is that *cooperation will be more likely as protest levels increased in regions that benefit from cooperation*. In addition, I expect *cooperation will be less likely as protest levels increased in regions that do not benefit from cooperation*. Transitioning to cooperation was a clearly ineffective way to deliver benefits to potential protesters in nonbeneficiary regions, since it did nothing to increase their satisfaction with the government or raise the opportunity costs of protest. At best, negotiating a new agreement is an ineffective use of the leader's time and, at worst, might antagonize would-be protesters who see no benefit from doing so.

Resource management in Central Asia is, of course, an international policy. This has the potential to complicate the application of the theory. Unlike domestic policy, the initiation of a cooperative period required both countries to agree. However, the terms of these agreements were determined endogenously, meaning there were many ways for one country to offer more

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<sup>41</sup> Keohane (1984).

<sup>42</sup> Akerlof (1970).

<sup>43</sup> Axelrod (1984). In this case, the relevant norms involved flexibility and forgiveness rather than rigidity and punishment (Chayes and Chayes, 1993).

to another as cooperation became more valuable.<sup>44</sup> If one leader offered more favorable terms, it is reasonable that the likelihood of reaching an agreement would increase. Leaders wanting to use cooperation as a sideways concession could thus offer a better deal to their partners, raising the likelihood of cooperation. For this reason, I do not expect the international nature of this policy to modify the empirical expectations, although it may weaken the relationships somewhat.

In addition, it is possible that outside influences - particularly on the part of Russia - affected water and energy management in the region. However, Russia had only a limited influence in Central Asian water and energy management during the 2000-2010 time period. While the Central Asian leaders courted Russian investment in water and energy, they were not willing to give up control in this sphere. For example, disagreement over the details of the Roghun dam's construction in Tajikistan led to a rejection of Rusal financing in August 2007.<sup>45</sup> Russia limited itself to financing smaller projects like the new Kambarata-2 in Kyrgyzstan and the Sangtuda cascade in Tajikistan, and to broad conversations in multilateral forums of questionable impact, like the EurAsian Economic Community (EurAsEc) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).<sup>46</sup> This changed in the following decade. Kazakhstan joined a Customs Union with Russia in 2010, and Kyrgyzstan signed on to the Eurasian Union soon after. Russia also began to invest in larger hydroelectric projects, notably Kambarata-1 in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>47</sup> Most importantly, Russia's Gazprom took over Kyrgyzstan's state-owned gas provider, Kyrgyzgaz in 2014 at a cost of \$1 in return for a huge write-off of Kyrgyz debt to Russia, significantly changing the dynamics of water and energy cooperation in Central Asia.<sup>48</sup> Since these changes occurred after 2010, I expect Russia's effect to be minimal during the period under consideration.

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<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, I cannot observe how all of these terms change over time. However, agreements whose terms I did observe varied significantly, suggesting that more favorable terms could be offered if cooperation was particularly desirable.

<sup>45</sup> Chorshanbiyev (2012).

<sup>46</sup> Yuldoshev (2008), The Times of Central Asia (2010), Itar-Tass Daily (2008*b*), Itar-Tass Daily (2008*a*)

<sup>47</sup> Rickleton (2013).

<sup>48</sup> Pannier (2014); Sadykov (2014).



## Statistical analysis

To test the expectations derived above, I collected original data to track the relationship at a monthly level between the relevant pairs of Central Asian countries over water and energy management. I utilized mostly secondary sources in English and Russian, which were supplemented, where necessary, with primary sources obtained during fieldwork. While there are problems with relying on newspapers,<sup>49</sup> this was the best way to obtain information about relations over this issue. To minimize bias, I looked at a variety of sources and cross-referenced events where possible. The dataset includes the six major dyads for the period January 2000-2010: Kazakh-Kyrgyz, Kazakh-Uzbek, and Kyrgyz-Uzbek for the Syr Darya and Tajik-Turkmen, Tajik-Uzbek, and Turkmen-Uzbek for the Amu Darya. The time period excludes the turbulent years immediately after independence and, as discussed above, the more recent years during which Russia played a greater role in the issue of resource management.

First, I identified whether an agreement occurred between two countries who were not previously cooperating or an old agreement come back into force. An agreement here is defined as a contract between two or more countries that includes concrete provisions regarding quantities, prices, or schedules. Following agreement, I consider countries to be cooperating until there is a break in their relationship - specifically, the unilateral suspension of the agreement or the failure of negotiations over a new agreement. Suspensions could be either formally announced or not, but the resultant nondelivery must be substantial.<sup>50</sup> A failure of negotiations differs from the mere occurrence of negotiations; it means that the parties intended to reach agreement, but failed to do so and thus ended any ongoing cooperation. Following a break, I consider countries to be in a state of noncooperation until they sign a new agreement or the preexisting agreement comes back into effect. Further details on the coding procedures used can be found in the Appendix.

The unit of analysis is the dyad-month. This means that multilateral agreements are coded separately for each relevant dyad of participants. However, the vast majority of agreements

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<sup>49</sup> Chojnacki, Icler and Spies (2012); Eck (2012).

<sup>50</sup> I looked for suspension greater than 25% by volume, or for more than 3 days. However, due to data availability reasons, I sometimes had to rely on more vague phrasing, such as “significantly reduced.”

were bilateral, with only 5 of the 108 unique agreements in the data involving more than two countries. Figure 2 graphically depicts transitions between cooperative and noncooperative resource management using these data. Although there is clear variation between dyads, this figure underscores the general volatility of relations on this issue during the time period under consideration.

The empirical analyses examine the relationship between protest and transitioning from non-cooperative to cooperative management. Therefore, the relevant sample is all dyad-months in which the countries *were not* cooperating in the previous month. Cooperation cannot be used as a sideways concession if it is already ongoing. The main dependent variable then takes a value of 1 if transition to cooperation occurred during the current month and 0 if not.

The main independent variables measure the occurrence of protest in beneficiary and non-beneficiary regions. Each of these events is coded with respect to date (year and month), severity, and location within the country. Since I expect that larger and more widespread protests increase the government's imperative to act, some measure of severity is desirable. However, despite cross-referencing events where possible, I was not confident in precise estimates of protest size. I use a four-category measure of protest that roughly captures escalation to balance these competing considerations: small protests (less than 1,000 people), multiple small protests or one large protest (greater than 1,000 people), multiple large protests or single large protests with violence, and multiple large protests with violence. I split these events with respect to whether they occurred in beneficiary or non-beneficiary regions, according to the geographic divisions described in the previous section.<sup>51</sup>

Figure 3 depicts the occurrence of beneficiary and nonbeneficiary protest in each of the Central Asian countries. Notably, this figure shows that protest in Turkmenistan was nonexistent. In addition, relations between Turkmenistan and both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan were more stable than between the other four dyads (see Figure 2). Although other factors are likely also at play, the absence of protest in Turkmenistan may help explain the stability of its relations over resource management.

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<sup>51</sup> In a few cases, Kyrgyz protesters from the South travelled to the capital in order to protest. Despite occurring in the North, these were coded as beneficiary protests to capture the fact that Southerners were the most likely targets of protest activation.

Figure 2: Interactions between major dyads, 2000-2010

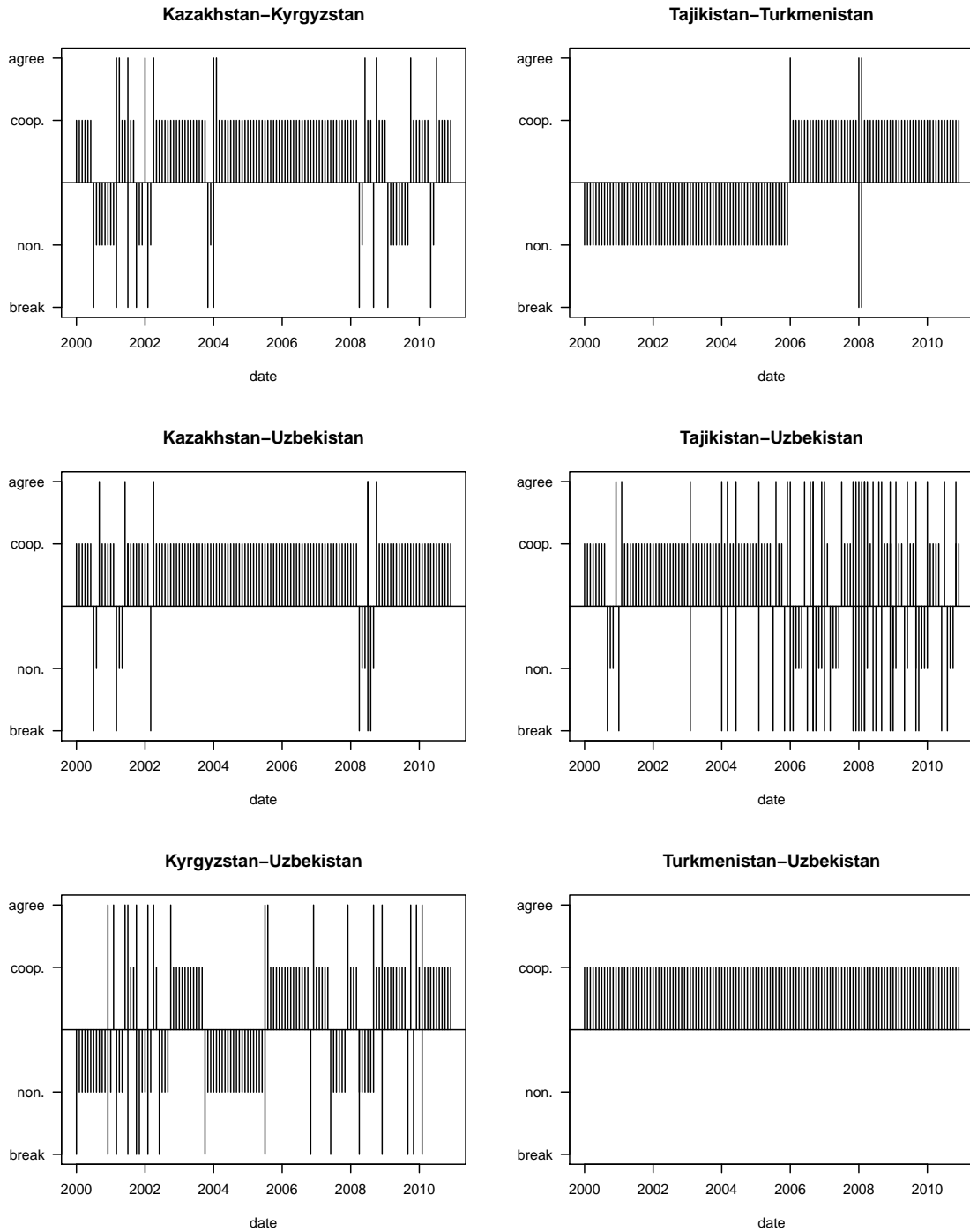


Figure 3: Protests in Central Asia, 2000-2010

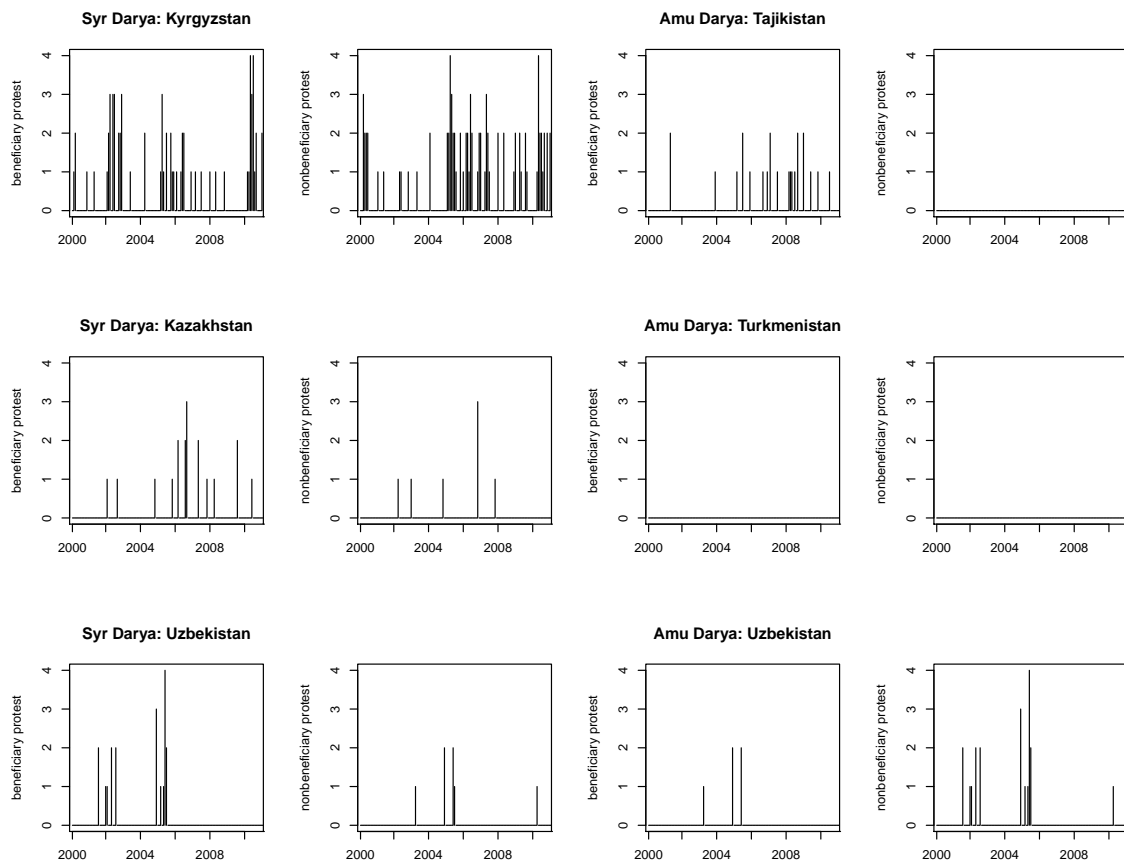


Figure depicts the level of protest (from 0 to 4) in beneficiary and non-beneficiary regions of each country.

Since the main dependent variable is dyadic, it is necessary to convert the protest data to a dyadic measure that captures when the involved countries most wish to sign an agreement. In the primary analyses, I use the lagged level of protest in each of the beneficiary and non-beneficiary regions, averaged over three months and between the countries in the dyad. This allows protest in one or both countries to affect the occurrence of an agreement. The Appendix also includes models that instead take the maximum average protest level of each dyad, capturing the possibility that the country with the highest level of protest dictates the resource management regime.

I also include several control variables. A central concern with modeling the effect of protest on signing an agreement is that the absence of such an agreement may contribute to protest growth. Restricting the sample to only those dyad-months in which no agreement is in place helps alleviate this concern. In addition, I construct a measure of relative water scarcity. Water shortages affect the value of cooperative resource management and, subsequently, the likelihood an agreement is signed (see, for example, Tir and Ackerman, 2009; Brochmann and Hensel, 2009). It is also possible that water scarcity is correlated with the occurrence and strength of protest, since dissatisfaction over water issues may be stronger when water is scarce, making potential protesters easier to recruit. For these reasons, water scarcity is an important control variable.

Since I am most concerned with the effects of short-term scarcity, the *water scarcity* variable captures the availability of water relative to normal levels. To calculate this, I took the average inflow of water between 1992 and 2010 to the two major reservoirs and determined the mean level for each month. Then, for the 2000-2010 time period, I subtracted these monthly means from the actual monthly inflow levels and converted the resulting differences into standard deviations to make the level of scarcity comparable across rivers and between months. As with the protest variables, this is lagged and averaged over three months. I multiply the resulting variable by -1 to ease interpretation: a greater value indicates a higher level of scarcity and a small value indicates a lower level of scarcity.

The upstream countries benefit most from cooperation during the summer months (when water is delivered) and the downstream countries benefit most during the winter months (when

energy is delivered). Since protest may also be seasonal, I included an indicator variable, *grow*, for whether it is the growing season (June-November). In addition, I include an interaction between *grow* and *water scarcity*, since water scarcity may have a different effect on international management depending on whether the upstream or downstream country is the primary beneficiary.

Although many other factors affect the signing of resource management treaties and/or the occurrence of protest, I limit the number of control variables to those described above and include dyad fixed effect in some of the model specifications to capture any remaining dyad-specific factors. This approach is only problematic if there are omitted variables that are (1) time varying, (2) directly affect the signing of an agreement, and (3) are correlated with the occurrence of protest. Besides water scarcity, the existing literature on international resource agreements focuses primarily on international and geographic determinants that are unlikely to be correlated with domestic protest, including flow geographies, international power configurations, and international economic factors (see Waterbury, 1997; Espey and Towfique, 2004; Stinnett and Tir, 2009; Song and Whittington, 2004). Most of these factors are also time invariant and are accounted for by the dyad fixed effects.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, while they are clearly important determinants of water cooperation, including them in the statistical models is not necessary for the purposes of evaluating the relationship between protest and cooperation.<sup>53</sup>

For some of the analyses I restrict attention only to those dyads involving Kyrgyzstan (i.e. the Kazakh-Kyrgyz and Kyrgyz-Uzbek dyads). There are several reasons to believe the use of cooperation as a sideways concession is particularly likely in this sub-sample. First, it includes only dyads that are involved in direct water-for-energy exchanges. The tight linkage of water and energy allows the cooperation seeking country to offer more favorable terms in order to induce cooperation. This dynamic is absent, or at least weaker, for the Kazakh-Uzbek and

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<sup>52</sup> Even joint democracy (Tir and Ackerman, 2009), which is plausible correlated with the occurrence of protest, is held fairly constant over time in this case.

<sup>53</sup> I do not control for the past or present use of other responses to protest (i.e. direct concessions and/or repression). Sideways concessions can be used alone or in conjunction with other responses and, therefore, the decision to use sideways concessions should not be systematically related to the use of repression or direct concessions, other than through their impact on the severity of protest.

Turkmen-Uzbek dyads, since both countries in these cases have indigenous energy resources and are less reliant on exchanges. Second, cooperative management is a more valuable sideways concession on the Syr Darya than the Amu Darya. The agricultural regions are more important along the Syr Darya, especially in the fertile Ferghana Valley. In addition, there is a clear divide between beneficiaries in the South of Kyrgyzstan and nonbeneficiaries in the North. Since the benefits are targeted in Kyrgyzstan, while being diffused throughout the country in Tajikistan, there is a tighter link between potential protesters and the targets of benefits in the former case than the latter. This makes cooperation a more practical sideways concession in Kyrgyzstan than in Tajikistan. Finally, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan were engaged in heated arguments over Tajikistan's proposed construction of the Roghun dam during the second half of the 2000s. This reduced the value of cooperation as a sideways concession, as agreements were more expensive to achieve and certainly harder to maintain for any length of time. Since the goal of this article is to demonstrate that governments may use sideways concessions as an additional response to protest, a "most likely" case design is appropriate. In some of the Kyrgyzstan models, I include an indicator, *south*, for the time period in which the South of the country (i.e. the beneficiaries of cooperative management) was politically dominant, which coincides with the time when President Bakiev was in office: April 2005 to March 2010.

The first set of models look at the effect of protest on the probability that countries sign a new cooperative agreement, given that they were not previously cooperating. If the Central Asian governments used cooperation as a sideways concession, then the theory predicts protest in beneficiary regions will be associated with an increased likelihood of signing an agreement, and protest in nonbeneficiary regions will result in a decreased likelihood of signing an agreement. The main results are displayed in the top row of Table 2. The first column presents the results from a logit model with robust standard errors clustered at the dyad. The second uses a conditional logit to estimate the same model with dyad fixed effects. Models 3 and 4 also include the water scarcity and growing season control variables discussed above.

Table 2: Effect of protest on signing a new agreement

<b>FULL SAMPLE</b>	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>	<b>Model 4</b>
Beneficiary Protest	1.128*** (0.240)	0.937* (0.529)	1.143*** (0.287)	0.982* (0.561)
Nonbeneficiary Protest	-0.699*** (0.243)	-0.574 (0.591)	-0.641** (0.265)	-0.548 (0.600)
Water scarcity			-0.095 (0.264)	0.051 (0.296)
Growing Season			-0.167 (0.173)	-0.171 (0.289)
Scarcity x Grow			0.032 (0.420)	-0.137 (0.453)
Constant	-1.308*** (0.414)		-1.244*** (0.389)	
Fixed effects?	No	Yes	No	Yes
N	305	305	305	305
<b>KYRGYZ SAMPLE</b>	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>	<b>Model 4</b>
Beneficiary Protest	4.150*** (1.336)	3.924* (2.104)	4.955*** (1.390)	4.720** (2.306)
Nonbeneficiary Protest	-3.585*** (1.038)	-3.426* (1.994)	-4.725*** (1.278)	-4.514** (2.256)
South	2.373*** (0.865)	2.026 (2.064)	3.371*** (0.842)	3.160 (2.263)
Water scarcity			0.770** (0.311)	0.728 (0.529)
Growing Season			-0.214 (0.542)	-0.196 (0.799)
Scarcity x Grow			-0.181 (0.462)	-0.166 (0.769)
Constant	-3.077*** (0.943)		-3.471*** (1.095)	
Fixed effects?	No	Yes	No	Yes
N	48	48	48	48

\*\*\* p < .01; \*\* p < .05; \* p < .1

For both panels, Models 1 and 3 are regular logit models with robust standard errors clustered at the dyad and Models 2 and 3 are conditional logit models.



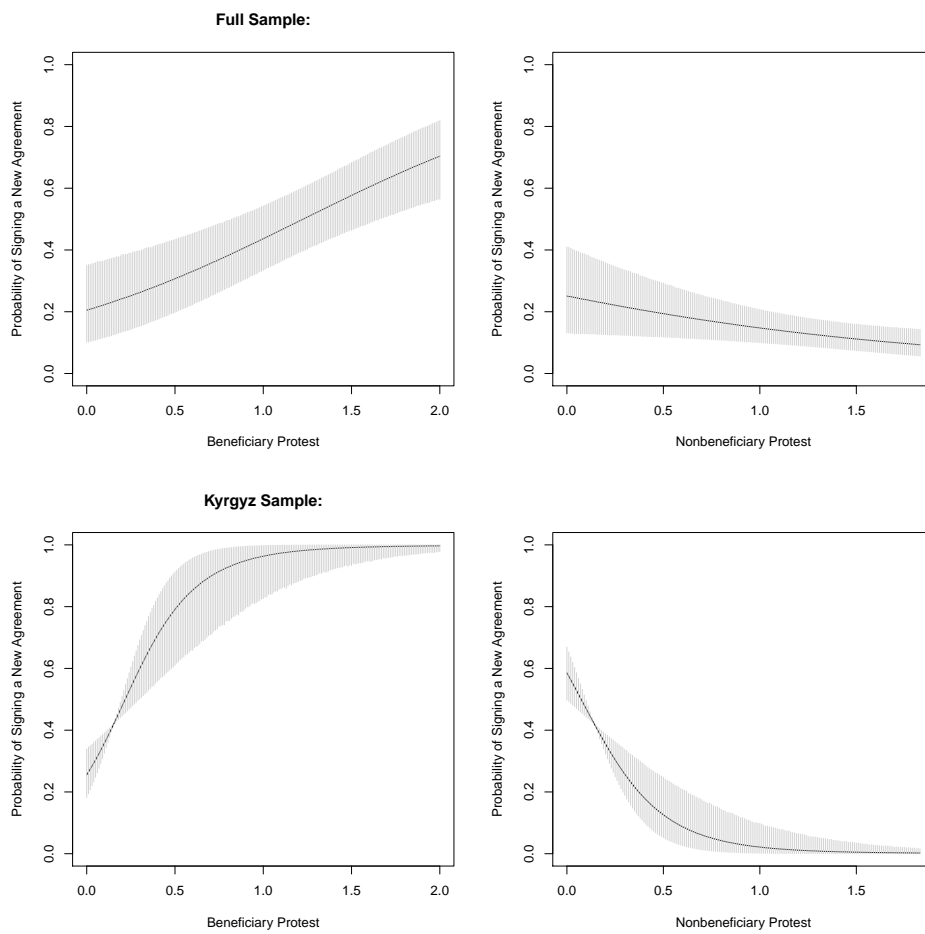
In general, the results from Table 2 support both of the theoretical expectations, although the findings concerning protests in beneficiary regions are more consistent and substantively larger than those concerning protest in non-beneficiary regions. Protest in beneficiary regions is positively correlated with the signing of a new agreement and the result is statistically significant across all four specifications. The occurrence of protest in nonbeneficiary regions is negatively correlated with a new agreement in the regular logit models, although this result loses significance when fixed effects are included in the model. None of the controls have statistically significant effects.

I illustrate the predicted substantive effect of both kinds of protest on signing agreements in the top panel of Figure 4. The predicted probability of signing a new agreement ranges from 0.20 when beneficiary protest is at its minimum, holding all other variables at their means, to 0.70 when beneficiary protest is at its maximum (a change of 0.50). The predicted probability of signing a new agreement ranges from 0.25 to 0.08 (a change of -0.17) when nonbeneficiary protest moves from its minimum to maximum value. Intuitively, this suggests that the direct effect of beneficiary protest is substantively larger than the more indirect effect of nonbeneficiary protest.

I performed the same analyses using the sample restricted to Kyrgyz-Uzbek and Kyrgyz-Kazakh dyads. The results of these analyses are presented in the second row of Table 2. Given that this represents the “most likely” case, the fact that these effects are substantively larger and consistently statistically significant should be expected (see Table 2 and the bottom panel of Figure 4). In these models, the period of southern dominance and water scarcity (at least in the non-growing season) have positive and significant effects on the likelihood of agreement, suggesting that transition was more likely when beneficiary regions were politically privileged and in nongrowing seasons when water was scarce. However, neither of these results are robust to the inclusion of fixed effects.

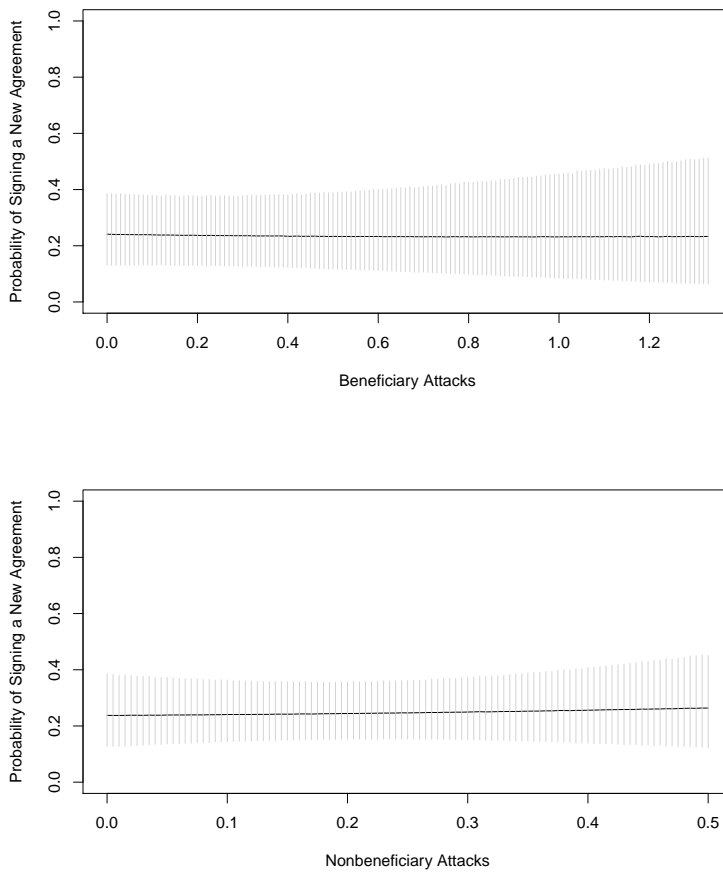
To check whether cooperation is a strategic response to protest, rather than just a general reaction to increased threat, I also repeated the analysis for violent attacks against the state or representatives of the state, such as bombings or assassination attempts. Like protests, violent attacks represent threats to the leader’s power. However, they are carried out by a select group

Figure 4: Predicted effect of beneficiary and nonbeneficiary protest



Predicted probabilities are calculated using the Model 3s in Table 2. The (3-month average) level of protest in beneficiary and non-beneficiary regions is varied from its minimum to maximum, while all other variables are held at their means. The vertical lines represent the 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 5: Predicted effect of beneficiary and nonbeneficiary attacks



Predicted probabilities are calculated using Model 3 in Table 2 of the Appendix. The (3-month average) level of attacks in beneficiary and non-beneficiary regions is varied from its minimum to maximum, while all other variables are held at their means. The vertical lines represent the 95% confidence intervals.

of individuals that, at least in the Central Asian case, do not require the support of those in the region where they occur.<sup>54</sup> They are also isolated in the sense that sympathizers do not pose an immediate threat as they do in the case of protest; terrorist attacks rarely snowball in the way that protests do. Granting sideways concessions to areas experiencing these attacks is therefore unlikely to be effective at reducing the threat of future attacks. As Figure 5 shows, there is no discernible correlation between these attacks and the signing of cooperative agreements.<sup>55</sup> This suggests that signing resource management agreements was a strategic response to protest, selected because the government believed it would have a deescalatory effect. This provides further evidence that sideways concessions should be incorporated into our understanding of how governments deal with mass mobilization.

Finally, I re-estimated the models, first excluding all protests that are directly or indirectly linked to resource management and, second, excluding all protests that concerned economic issues. Since the main benefits associated with cooperation over water and energy are economic - or at least, related to quality of life - economic protests are more closely related to this concession than, for example, those over ethnic or religious issues. The findings were robust to both of these restrictions (see Appendix), suggesting that transitions to cooperation occurred as sideways, rather than direct, concessions to protest.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, I argued that governments may choose to make concessions that are sideways to the issues being protest about, rather than relying exclusively on more direct accommodations or on repressive responses. Sideways concessions can be used either alone or to supplement conventional responses. By decreasing mobilization potential, sideways concessions lower the likelihood that individuals join ongoing protest movements, potentially making the difference between escalation and deescalation at the aggregate level. In Central Asia, cooperation over

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<sup>54</sup> This calculation may differ in countries experiencing civil war, where insurgents are geographically concentrated and winning the support of civilian populations is an important counterinsurgency tactic (see Berman, Shapiro and Felter, 2011).

<sup>55</sup> Information on the data collection procedures for these variables and the models from which the predicted probabilities were calculated can be found in the Appendix.

international resource management was unrelated to most protests, valuable to certain geographic regions, and practical to implement. Consequently, it was a likely choice for use as a sideways concessions to protest. Consistent with this, I found that the occurrence of protest in beneficiary regions positively correlated with transitions to cooperative management, while protest in nonbeneficiary regions negatively correlated with this occurrence.

Although the article examines the use of sideways concessions in a particular case, the implications are much broader. There is no reason to believe the Central Asian governments were more inclined to use such concession than other governments. Consequently, we need to broaden our view of how governments react to protest and begin looking for responses that are not explicitly tied to the occurrence of protest. Doing so will help us understand not only government responses to protest, but also why some protests escalate and others do not. The article also suggests concessions to protest may be short-lived. As the Central Asian case demonstrates, using an international policy to provide sideways concessions to domestic protesters can result in apparently volatile relations between countries that are actually caused by very rational responses to changing domestic factors.

The primary goal of the article was to demonstrate that governments can and do use sideways concessions in response to protest. This fact alone suggests that sideways concessions are an important part of the protest-and-response story. However, future research should focus on whether sideways concessions actually work at the aggregate level. The current article suggests that the Central Asian governments view sideways concessions as a worthwhile tactic, but we should also evaluate empirically whether sideways concessions decrease the likelihood that protest movements expand and, when used in conjunction with repression or direct concessions, help make the deescalatory effects larger than any escalatory ones.

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