

Economic swings, political instability and ethnic-specific migration in Kyrgyzstan*

**Victor Agadjanian
Evgenia Gorina**

Center for Population Dynamics
Arizona State University

Abstract

Studies of the effects of economic fluctuations on migration within or toward developed countries typically focus on human capital factors such as education or skills. In many developing settings, however, both the economic and political power and opportunities are strongly conditioned by ethnic, clan, and regional divides, and therefore the impact of economic downturn or political upheaval may differ across those divides. We use recent nationally representative survey data from Kyrgyzstan to examine ethnic-specific variations in migration experiences and intentions. While preliminary analyses of migration histories do not detect a consistent migration response to economic uncertainties or political instabilities, they point to considerable and instructive ethnic differences in migration risks. Likewise, ethnic differences transpire in intentions to migrate. In addition to ethnicity, the effects of clan and region are also examined. The results are interpreted within the context of complex intersections of politics, economy, and culture in this post-Soviet setting.

* Acknowledgment: The support of the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research (NCEEER), Grant #827-01, is gratefully acknowledged.

Introduction and conceptualization

Whereas the effects of economic swings on migration within or toward developed countries have been relatively well studied, little is known about such effects on internal migration in less developed contexts. In addition to the paucity of adequate data, research on the influence of macroeconomic fluctuation on migration in developing settings faces challenges of more fundamental analytical nature. Thus in many developing countries the effects of global economic oscillations on individual wellbeing are often indirect and are conditioned on these countries' economic dependence on more developed countries (e.g., the flow of international migrant remittances). In addition, global economic swings are often asynchronous with local economic cycles and, in many cases, with periodic outbursts of political instability. Local job and housing market constraints and traditions of migration are also important factors that may mediate to impact of global economic fluctuations. Moreover, due to the nature of distribution of political and economic power and resources in some countries, the effects of economic fluctuations often vary along ethnolinguistic and regional lines at least as much as along conventional (from the developed world's perspective) socioeconomic axes.

These complex processes are especially poorly understood in the nations that gained independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The unique legacies of the socialist system—residential registration requirements, inflexible labor markets, and pervasive shortage of housing—have compounded the complexities inherent in the effects of economic fluctuations and political perturbations on migration scope, destinations, and patterns.

An important feature of the independent history of some of these nations, especially of those on the southern fringe of the post-Soviet space, is a dramatic increase in international migration. Most of these migration flows have been directed from Central Asia and the Caucasus toward the

Russian Federation, where massive mineral resources and shrinking population has generated the need for outside labor.

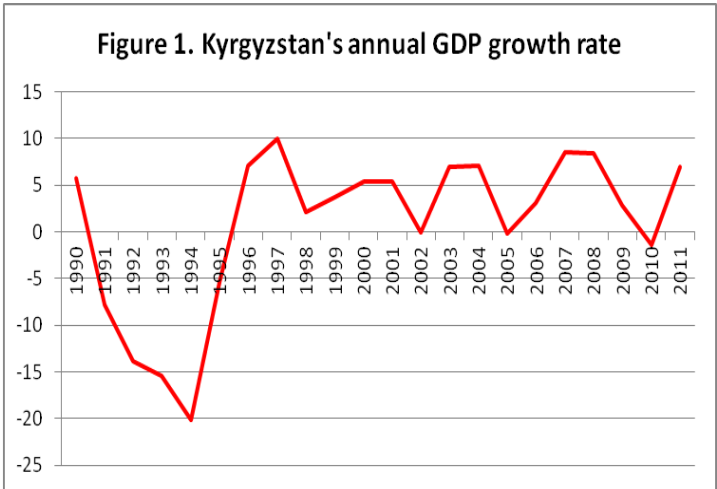
The objective of this paper is two-fold: to examine factors that shape internal migration and possible connections between internal migration and international migration in a post-Soviet context. To address this objective we combine an analysis of economic and political macrodynamics with what we conceptualize as group-specific experiences, opportunities, and insecurities that these macrodynamics generate. We focus in particular on ethnocultural distinctions, as these continue to influence greatly individual destinies in post-Soviet contexts.

For these analyses, we use unique recent survey data from Kyrgyzstan, a multi-ethnic nation in Central Asia of 5.3 million people with a GNI per capita of \$870, which since its birth after the disintegration of the Soviet Union two decades ago has lived through spells of massive economic ups and downs and considerable political instability. Whereas the collapse of the Soviet rule led to the dramatic declines in economic outputs and incomes throughout the post-Soviet space, the later economic recovery, Kyrgyzstan, lived through two violent changes of power (in 2005 and 2010) and saw ethnic tensions and violence, pitting ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks (2010) in the first decade of this century.

The collapse of the U.S.S.R. two decades ago triggered massive migration outside this former Soviet Republic. While the initial migration flows outside Kyrgyzstan were composed mainly of ethnic Russians and other groups of European origin (Kumskov et al. 1997), more recent international migration has included a growing number of Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, and other indigenous groups, which in the Soviet era were characterized by very low migration rates (Ergeshbayev 2006; Kumskov 2002). Along with its composition, the nature of migration has also been changing: permanent emigration of the early 1990s has been increasingly replaced by

seasonal labor migration, primarily to Russia (Schmidt, Sagynbekova 2008). Kyrgyzstan is also characterized by high levels of labor out-migration. As in other migrant-sending developing countries, Kyrgyzstan's economy and its residents' wellbeing are therefore highly dependent on the ebb and flow of migrant remittances (World Bank 2011; Lukasheva, Makenbaeva 2009).

Figure 1 illustrates fluctuations in Kyrgyzstan's annual GDP growth rate over the past two decades. It illustrates the collapse of the nation's economy in the first half of the 1990s and an unsure pace of recovery thereafter. Although the figure offers evidence of a decline in the national GDP growth rate after the 2008 global recession, it also shows nearly as dramatic drops in 2002 and then in 2005 (the first of the two coups d'état).



Source: The World Bank

Whereas economic fluctuation and political instability may catalyze or depress migration propensities, in a setting where different ethnic groups have vastly different political and economic stakes, motivations for migration may be influenced by ethnic-specific perceptions and experiences of socioeconomic, political, and cultural opportunities in the local community and in county in general. Thus members of minority ethnic groups that feel discriminated against (e.g., Uzbeks, Russians) are, all else being equal, more likely to consider migration as a way of

mitigating or eliminating their disadvantage. The groups that have been targets of ethnic violence (e.g., Uzbeks in 2010) should be particularly likely to convert their grievances into migration.

Data

The study uses data from a nationally representative household survey conducted in Kyrgyzstan in the end of 2011—the beginning of 2012. A total of 2030 households were selected through a multistage cluster sampling procedure. In each household, a randomly selected resident aged 18-49, was interviewed. The survey questionnaire was administered face-to-face and included a variety of questions on the respondent's and their household characteristics. Among other information, the questionnaire included detailed questions on respondent's migration history: for each town or village where he/she spent at least three continuous months, the respondents were asked the name and location of that town/village, month and year of the move, main occupation right before arriving there, reasons for moving, with whom they moved, and main occupation while living there.

Method

The analysis of past migration takes advantage of detailed retrospective migration data collected in the survey. We fit a discrete time logistic regression model in which migration in a given year t is the event. Exposure to risk of migration starts at age seventeen (typical age of high school graduation) or in 2002 if a respondent reached the age of 17 before that year. Because we are interested in relating the yearly risk of migration to changes in the country's economic and political environment, we include a set of dummies for calendar years from 2002 to 2011. To test whether migration risks vary across ethnocultural boundaries the model also includes a set of time-invariant dummies for ethnocultural characteristics—ethnic Kyrgyz, the nation's titular

group, ethnic Uzbeks, and ethnic Russians and others (mainly groups of European origin). However, to account for the generations-deep Soviet-Russian cultural influences within the titular group, we subdivide it into non-russified Kyrgyz (ethnic Kyrgyz who chose to be interviewed in Kyrgyz), russified Kyrgyz (ethnic Kyrgyz who chose Russian as the language of interview). This approach has produced informative distinctions in the number of previous analyses (e.g., Agadjanian and Qian 1997; Agadjanian and Dommaraju 2011; Agadjanian et al. 2008)

In addition to the primary variables of interest, several other covariates are included. Gender is a time-invariant covariate. The time-varying covariates include respondent's age and age squared, type of area of residence (the capital Bishkek, other urban North, rural North, urban South, and rural South), marital status (married or not), at least some higher education (yes-no), and employment status (employed or not). All the time-varying covariates, except for age and age squared, are lagged by one year.

To examine whether the effects of the economic swings and political perturbations varied across ethnicity and region, we also explore interactions between main covariates of interest and calendar year.

For the second part of the analysis we estimate a series of logistic regression models predicting plans and intentions to migrate from individual and household characteristics and past migration experience. For these analyses we have available a much larger number of covariates measured at the time of survey. Here again, our main interest in ethnicity: as we argued earlier, ethnic identity is a key factor shaping individual perceptions and preferences in matters of migration.

Preliminary results

Yearly risk of migration

In this extended abstract we present some results of exploratory analyses. More complex analyses will be carried out and presented in the completed paper. Table 1 displays the percentage of the survey respondents who experienced migration (mostly within Kyrgyzstan) in every year between 2002 and 2011 (each year's figure includes only respondents who were seventeen or older in that year). Although the migration rate is generally quite low, the overall rise over time is noticeable. There was a slight dip in migration rate in 2009, the year when the effects of the global economic recession would have been most palpable, followed by a rise in 2010, and a subsequent decline. Yet the most pronounced drop in the percentage of migrants was in 2004, which does not have a straightforward explanation.

Figure 1. Percent of respondents who migrated in a given year

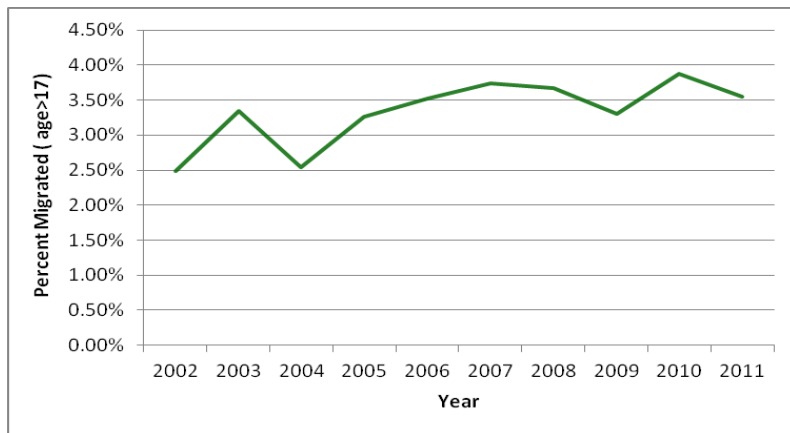
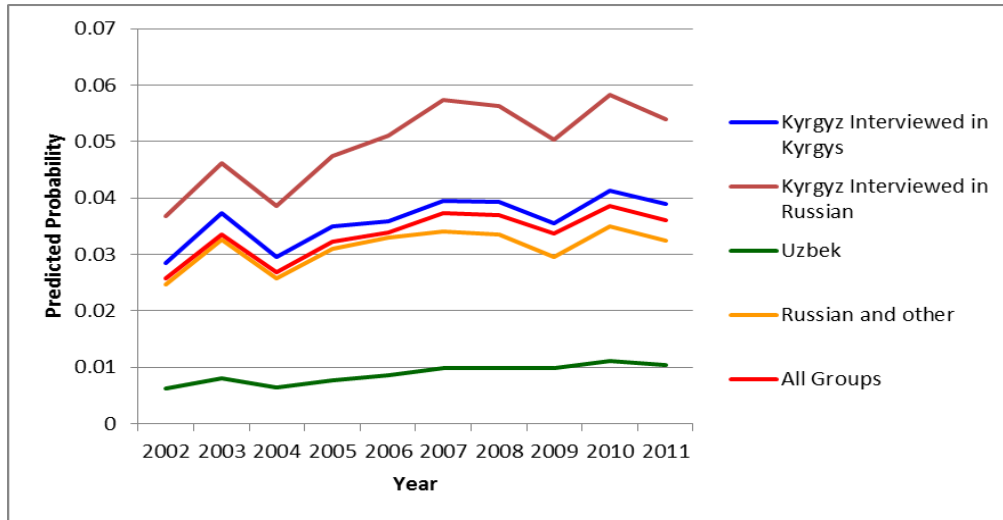


Figure 2 depicts predicted probabilities of migration in every year between 2002 and 2011 for the entire sample and by ethnocultural group estimated from a discrete-time logistic regression which includes the covariates described in the Methods section. Overall, changes in predicted

probabilities follow the pattern displayed in Figure 2. However, the differences across groups are instructive. Thus russified Kyrgyz show the highest probability of migration. Non-russified Kyrgyz and Russians+other are rather similar, whereas the probabilities of migrating among Uzbeks are by far the lowest.

Figure 2: Predicted Probability of Migration by Ethnocultural Group



Migration plans and intentions

Table 1 shows the percentage of respondents in the entire sample and in each ethnocultural group who stated plans or intentions to migrate. Notably, the overwhelming majority of those planning/wishing to migrate had an international destination in mind (mainly the Russian Federation). The table shows considerable variations across ethnic groups. Migration intentions are by far most widespread among ethnic Russian and other European-origin groups. On the other hand, ethnic Uzbeks, despite massive ethnic violence against this group just a year-and-a-half before the survey, show the lowest propensity to migration. Also notable are difference between non-russified and russified Kyrgyz: the latter are significantly more inclined to migrating than the former.

Table 1: Plans/intentions to migrate by ethnocultural group (%)

Ethnocultural group	Plans or intentions to migrate
Non-russified Kyrgyz	10.24
Russified Kyrgyz	19.89
Uzbek	4.22
Russian and other Europeans	36.98
Total	15.12

Table 2 presents the results of a preliminary logistic regression model predicting plans/intentions to migrate. Among ethnocultural groups, the starkest contrast is between Russians/other Europeans and the rest: the former are much more likely to have migration plans or intentions. Contrary to the bivariate pattern, the results also point to a lower propensity to migrate among russified Kyrgyz than among non-russified Kyrgyz but the difference is not statistically significant. The difference between Uzbeks and non-russified Kyrgyz is not significant either. Among other covariates, region of residence and political involvement show significant effects, suggesting avenue for subsequent analyses to be presented and discussed in the completed version of the paper. Finally, prior migration experience has a strong positive effect on plans/intentions to migrate.

Next steps

As we work to complete the paper, we will refine both the event-history analysis of migration risk and the analysis of migration plans and intention. We will also explore interactions of ethnicity with gender and education as the effects of ethnicity may vary between men and women and between individuals with and without higher education. We also plan to explore

possible regional and clan/lineage differences. The survey collected information on Kyrgyz respondents' clan/lineage. Whereas the importance of clan membership in the distribution of economic and political resources is often mentioned in descriptions of Central Asia, our study will be the first to examine the influence of clan (i.e., sub-ethnic) division on migration.

Table 2. Plans/intentions to migrate, logistic regression parameter estimates (standard errors in parentheses)

Predictors and Controls	
Russified Kyrgyz	-0.2011 (0.198)
Uzbek	-0.4877 (0.312)
Russian and other [non-Russified Kyrgyz]	0.9590 (0.241)**
Age	-0.0196 (0.011) ⁺
Some college education [No college education]	0.2765 (0.155) ⁺
Employed in the past four weeks [Not employed in the past four weeks]	-0.2793 (0.144)
In marital union or stable partnership [Not in union/stable partnership]	0.0398 (0.176)
Number of children	-0.1542 (0.074)*
Number of close relatives at the place of residence	-0.0034 (0.032)
Number of close friends at the place of residence	0.0169 (0.046)
Urban area of residence [Rural area of residence]	0.0693 (0.656)
North region of residence [South region of residence]	1.3443 (0.202)**
Migrated previously [Did not migrate previously]	0.3849 (0.178)**
Voted in most recent presidential elections [Did not vote in most recent presidential elections]	-0.3939 (0.153)**
Intercept	-1.690 (0.457)**
-2 Log L	1070.179
Number of cases	2030

Note: Reference categories in brackets; significance levels: ⁺ p<=.10; * p<=.05; ** p<=.01

References

- Agadjanian, V., and Premchand Dommaraju. 2011. "Culture, Modernization, and Politics: Ethnic Differences in Union Formation in Kyrgyzstan" *European Journal of Population* 27(1): 79-101.
- Agadjanian, V., and Zhenchao Qian. 1997. "Ethnocultural identity and induced abortion in Kazakstan" *Studies in Family Planning*, 28 (4): 317-329.
- Agadjanian, V., Premchand Dommaraju, and J. E. Glick. 2008. "Reproduction in upheaval: Crisis, ethnicity, and fertility in Kazakhstan" *Population Studies* 62 (2): 211-233.
- Ergeshbayev, U. 2006. "Trends and development of migration processes in Kyrgyzstan," In Kumskov, G. 2002. *Patterns and Peculiarities of Contemporary Migration Processes in Kyrgyzstan*. Bishkek: Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University (in Russian).
- Kumskov, G. et al. 1997. *Socioeconomic problems of population migration in the Kyrgyz Republic (1991-1996)*. Bishkek: Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University (in Russian).
- Lukasheva, I., I. Makenbaeva. 2009. *The Impact of the Global Economic Crisis on Kyrgyzstan..* Bishkek: OSCE (in Russian).
- Migration and Remittances, Factbook. 2011. The World Bank. <http://worldbank.org>
- Migration Perspectives Eastern: Europe and Central Asia. Planning and Managing Labour Migration*. Ed. by R.R. Rios. Vienna: International Organization for Migration, 45-54.
- Schmidt, M., L. Sagynbekova. 2008. "Migration past and present: changing patterns in Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asian Survey* 27(2): 111-127.