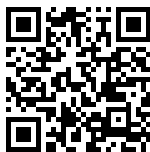


Law and Policy Review (LPR)

Volume 3 Issue 2, Fall 2024

ISSN(P): 2076-5614, ISSN(E): 3007-4290

Homepage: <https://journals.umt.edu.pk/index.php/lpr>



Article QR



Title: **The Trends and Challenges of Globalization in Central Asia: Exploring Economic and Political Dimensions**

Author (s): Freeha Naz and Jawwad Riaz


Affiliation (s): University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32350/lpr.32.07>

History: Received: October 06, 2024, Revised: December 05, 2024, Accepted: December 27, 2024, Published: December 30, 2024

Citation: Naz, F., & Riaz, J. (2024). The trends and challenges of globalization in central Asia: Exploring economic and political dimensions. *Law and Policy Review*, 3(2), 117–138. <https://doi.org/10.32350/lpr.32.07>

Copyright: © The Authors

Licensing:  This article is open access and is distributed under the terms of [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Conflict of Interest: Author(s) declared no conflict of interest



A publication of
School of Law and Policy
University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan

The Trends and Challenges of Globalization in Central Asia: Exploring Economic and Political Dimensions

Freeha Naz¹, and Jawwad Riaz^{2*}

¹Department of Political Science, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

²University Law College, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

Abstract

Central Asia consists of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and has emerged as a cardinally vital region mainly because of its contiguity to major powers like China and Russia. It is also significant for both the Eastern and Western block's reliance on the region's oil, natural gas, and coal reserves. Moreover, despite the abundance of these minerals and metals, Central Asian Republics (CARs) desperately need to enhance their infrastructure and transportation means to connect the rest of the world being landlocked. After the disintegration of the USSR, the Central Asian region was prone to globalization for greater socio-economic and cultural integration not only in the region but across the globe as well. From an economic point of view, the region has enhanced its connectivity, but politically, Central Asian States are still autocratic. The process of democratization is still at a slow pace. The basic aim of the article is to see the trends of globalization in Central Asia while keeping in view the economic and political dimensions. This article gives insights into the role of greater and regional powers like Russia, China, the US, EU, Turkey, India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan to influence the Central Asian States. It also studies the impact of regional and global organizations and the role of oil and gas in the process of globalization. This is a purely qualitative study that has utilized facts and figures collected by the various international regimes. This article also suggests recommendations on how Central Asian Republics (CARs) can grab the opportunities emanating from globalization.

Keywords: Central Asian Republics (CARs), economic aspect, globalization, political convictions, regional integration

Introduction

Globalization is as old as human history. Primitive men were nomadic in culture and were accustomed to traveling in search of better life options.

*Corresponding Author: jawwad.law@pu.edu.pk

This quest played a vital role in creating the foundations for today's world. Currently, no state can claim to survive without integrating itself across the globe. This integration initially promoted globalization. Neoliberals were the staunch supporters of globalization, claiming to eradicate human sufferings through interconnectedness and interdependence, but the world has witnessed that globalization has both cons and pros (Elma & Gurbanov, [2012](#)). After the disintegration of the USSR in 1991, Central Asia emerged as a different place, and was subject to globalization. It has integrated itself into the global economy through economic liberalization. Central Asia's strategic location, its natural resources and regional integration have transformed the region, but the process of political liberalization is still at a slow pace. This transformation raises some basic questions, including why Central Asia needed to concede to globalization and what the dynamics of globalization are in the region. Furthermore, one might wonder how globalization has contributed to economic and social integration in Central Asia as well as how the competition among global powers has contributed to globalizing the region. This study also raises the inquiry about the challenges, expected benefits and the downside of globalization, especially in the context of CARs.

This article presents a two-folds analysis of the process of globalization in Central Asia. First, the article gives an insight into the correlation between globalization and economic development by assessing the updated infrastructure, the role of oil and gas, regionalism and global outrage of CARs in terms of the competition among regional and global powers influencing the region. Secondly, it explores the dynamics of globalization through the lens of the political convictions of CARs. It also explores the opportunities of how CARs can maximize their economic and political benefits through the process of globalization.

Globalization

Globalization, in terms of internationalization, is a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses economic, political, and social aspects, including the flow of ideas, capital, movement of humans and services through interconnectedness and interdependence across the globe. It is the increasing condensation of the world in terms of culture, politics and economy as a larger hub of society. According to Bloor ([2022](#)) globalization is a complex web of interdependence in various ways (economic, social and political). It is characterized by interlinked elements such as technological

advancement, economic integration and the flow of ideas and people. According to Lechner and Boli (2003), globalization refers to all dynamics by which the peoples across the globe are incorporated as a single global society. More precisely, the Swedish journalist Lersson (2001) has defined globalization as “the idea of world shrinkage, of distances becoming limited, things drawing nearer. It relates to the rising ease of how someone on one corner of the globe can interact, for shared benefits, with someone on the other corner of the globe” (p. 9). Through globalization, an event in one state or continent influences the dynamics of other states or continents. Advanced technology has enabled people to connect and influence each other in many ways. Ideologically and culturally, the world has never seen this level of connectedness before.

Conventionally, globalization can usually manifest in three ways: economically, politically, and culturally. From an economic point of view, the world resembles a huge global stage where local and national markets are interconnected organically due to supply and demand across borders. From a political point of view, interconnectedness and interdependence is unavoidable, even for powerful states to reach common goals. The rapid relevance of global and regional organizations is another evidence of this fact. Nation states are no longer the sole influencers of the global political decision-making process. From a cultural point of view, social and electronic connections have shrunk time and space by enhancing cultural encounters. Cultural amalgamation has crossed unprecedented borders. Cultural and linguistic barriers are no longer a hinderance in communication. In a nutshell, the three aspects of globalization are inevitably connected and have turn the world into a global village. It is impossible to comprehend one aspect without it influencing the other two.

Globalization is an organic phenomenon that is based on supply, demand and competition. However, it is yet to be unveiled how much it has contributed to equitable and sustainable development. Neo-liberals are positive about the shared benefits of globalization; economic integration can flourish better living, while poverty, unemployment, and social inequalities may reduce. However, the global financial crisis, increasing poverty, and inequalities are indicating the downside of the approach across the globe politically. Furthermore, especially during the last ten years, socio-economic problems have deepened globally (Elma & Gurbanov,

[2012](#)). Despite its pros and cons, globalization's impacts are unavoidable for any state in any part of the world and Central Asia is no exception.

Globalization and Central Asia

Early traces of globalization in Central Asia were observed when nomads and non-settlers sought to stay here. Being landlocked, the region was accessible to great powers like Turks, Persians, Greeks, Arabs, Chinese and Russians from the sixth century to the last decade of the 20th century. These powers transformed the region in their respective ways. This transformation and interaction made the region economically stable and culturally rich (Hiro, [1994](#)).

Halford John Mackinder's famous Heartland theory made the region known to the world on account of its geostrategic and geo-economic significance. He argued that the Central Asian region is immune to external aggression. It can also give its people an integrated identity due to its particular geography, extended from the basins of the Volga River, Yenisey River, Amu Darya, Syr Darya, and the Caspian Sea (Chowdhury & Kafi, [2015](#)). In 1919, Mackinder amended his theory, keeping in view the region's geopolitical dynamics. He expanded the region to the Black and Baltic Sea basins and termed it a 'pivot of influence' across the globe (Ismailov & Papava, [2010](#)). The significance of Halford John Mackinder's famous Heartland theory also lies in the integration and transformation of Central Asian States as a region, which are the essential features of globalization.

Russia, being a communist empire, left deep imprints on all aspects, including political, social, and economic, during its occupation of the region from 1911 to 1991. CARs were under the iron hand of the Tsarist of Russia (Adnan & Fatima, [2015](#)). Despite abundant natural resources, this region was marked as the least globalized region in the world. It was only after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 that the Central Asian States grabbed the opportunity to open and coalesce themselves to Western Europe and other regional and global powers, particularly with China, in terms of economic benefits (Laurelle & Peyrouse, [2012](#)). Moreover, frail infrastructure, economic underdevelopment, corruption and the absence of Soviet assistance forced the CARs to extend their connectedness to the outer world. This opportunity kept the interest of giant enterprises and MNCs alive in the region (China GNN2). In a nutshell, the Central Asian region was prone to globalization first due to its crucial geostrategic significance,

being located at a junction between Europe and Asia, which made it an extremely important region for the global economy. Secondly, it has emerged as a hub for global trade and investment due to its infrastructural and economic drive as a region. Lastly, technological advancement has led the world to huge connectivity, interconnectedness and dependence, and Central Asia is not beyond this impact of globalization.

Central Asia has emerged as an important region, being at a crossroads for Western and Eastern blocs. Its proximity to two major powers, China and Russia, and their involvement in the region, gave immense importance to it mainly due to oil, gas, and rarely found metals (Adnan & Fatima, [2015](#)). Furthermore, to contain Sino-Russian influence in the region, the US also extended its assistance to the CARs. These dynamics led the CARs to become connected not only within the region but across the globe, enabling them to evolve in cultural, economic and political aspects.

The Economic Facet of Globalization in Central Asia

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are the two most significant economies of Central Asia. The two states accumulate 81.83 percent of the region's total GDP. Their fairly economic liberal policies have led these two states not only to regional integration but also to enhance infrastructure through increasing trade volume and investments (Tomar, [2023](#)). The rest of the three states are gradually opening up to acquire economic benefits through liberalizing infrastructure and exploring oil and gas. Regional integration, global outrage and competition among regional and global powers are also contributing factors. In this section, an analysis is drawn on all these aspects.

Globalization through Infrastructure

For centuries, Central Asia remained connected to the outer world through the old silk route, but with the advanced modes of transportation, its importance was diminished. The new silk route or silk road or shipping lane provides a connection between Europe and Asia. This road has not only enhanced trade and energy supply between the regions but has also contributed in terms of service delivery, political mobility, cultural integration, transportation, mining and exchange of labor (Hettne, [2003](#)).

The infrastructural development has significantly improved. Though Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are still struggling in this regard, Kazakhstan has made significant improvements by catching up with regional and global actors. According to the IMF, the recent structural development has

contributed to raising the overall GDP growth rate of CARs. (See Table 1 for GDP growth rate of CARs)

Table 1
GDP Growth Rate of CARs

	GDP(Billions of US Dollars) in Year 2000	GDP(Billions of US Dollars) in Year 2023
All of Central Asia	46.4	453.1
Kazakhstan	18.3	260.5
Kyrgyzstan	1.4	12.8
Tajikistan	1.0	11.9
Turkmenistan	8.6	77.1
Uzbekistan	17.2	90.9

Note. Source: The researchers have collected the data from the official website of the IMF: <https://www.imf.org/en/Home>

TAPI (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India) pipeline, along with the new silk road, is beneficial for transporting the gas from Caspian Sea from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan and India. Turkey's originated silk road plan 2008 has also had a significant impact on the socioeconomic integration of the region. Pakistan, Germany, Syria, India, Georgia, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Mongolia, Russia, China, South Korea, Afghanistan and Azerbaijan are integrated through the silk road strategy (Adnan & Fatima, [2015](#)). Furthermore, USA is integrating the hydropower venture with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan through CASA1000, the Central Asia South Asia electrical dissemination line. The BRI has boosted this pace of development (Yoshino et al., [2021](#)). Central Asia's transport, air, roads, railways and gas pipeline infrastructure have remarkably improved through collaboration with regional and global players.

According to a report issued by the World Bank ([2023](#)), improving infrastructure related to electricity trade among Central Asian countries could conservatively generate economic benefits of up to \$6.4 billion between 2020 and 2030. The report also mentioned that the cargo transportation along the Western Europe – Western China road corridor was reduced from 45 days to 8-10 days due to the Kazakhstan - East West Roads Project. With infrastructure, the oil and gas reservoirs of Central Asia have

also emerged as a vital commodity in the process of globalization in Central Asia.

Globalization through Oil and Gas

During the 1990s, it was believed that oil and gas reserves could be vital for the globalization of a region. These commodities transformed and integrated the region inside and outside mainly due to three reasons. First, it generated hope to overcome the economic shock, keeping in view the new geopolitical dynamics of the region during the first decade after independence. Second, it transformed the landlocked states into new strategic partners during the second decade. Third, it strengthened the political stability through autocracy during the third decade of independence. In this way, economic liberalization played an essential role in political development in the region (Jafalian, [2020](#)).

Central Asia's oil and gas reserves have contributed to the diversification of global energy markets and integrated the region economically. The region's oil accounts for 2% and gas for 10% of global reserves (British Petroleum [BP], [2018](#)). Some of the Central Asian States fairly adopted liberal legislation regarding the exploration and extraction of oil and gas, which led them to a massive inflow of foreign capital and foreign direct investment (FDI). One example is Kazakhstan. The country also adopted a pragmatic policy of connectedness by working with three great powers simultaneously: the US, Russia, and China in this regard (Jafalian, [2020](#)). Chinese, French, Turkish and Iranian companies are fairly involved in the exploration of oil and gas in other Central Asian States. Even Azerbaijan has fully benefitted from the integration process of CARs in terms of oil and gas. Chinese oil company CNPC has emerged as a leading player in the exploration process in Turkmenistan. Along with finding foreign investors, CARs neighboring the Caspian Sea are keen on their sovereign rights over its resources. After an exhaustive negotiation, the parties reached a mutual conclusion about their exclusive sovereign rights, collective shared benefits of resources, and responsibilities overall (Kubaik, [2018](#)). Thus, oil and gas have played a vital role not only in integrating the CARs but also connecting them with other regional and global players. Globalization through oil and gas has generated quite stable impacts.

Globalization through Regional and Global Cooperation

After 9/11, CARs emerged as important for global energy security policymakers. Some European and Asian states were keen to explore the Caspian Sea oil and gas due to increasing energy consumption by integrating either Russia or the Middle East. By doing so, they looked forward to regional integration with Central Asian States, keeping in view that it was economically viable. Southern gas corridor is an evident aspect of Europe's energy security policy (European Countries, [2014](#)). China's geographical proximity and its capacity to manage capital flow have led it to integrate with CARs through the silk rout strategy (Niquet, [2015](#)). Driven by shared economic well-being, developing oil, and gas export infrastructure has allowed the CARs to establish territorial contacts and strengthened their geopolitical standing, particularly regarding ties with regional and global powers.

Initially, Central Asian States depended on the old infrastructure of the Soviet period for oil and gas transport routes, but now these states are integrating with other global powers. Despite this fact, Russia is still influential in integrating the policy of CARs. Central Asian republics are trying to balance Russia's influence by collaborating with Turkey, Europe and China (Nurgaliyeva, [2019](#)). Russia competes with Caspian Sea states in oil and gas markets. CARs' dependence on Russia's routes for exporting their commodities has led them to diversify their oil and gas export routes. The Central Asia-China gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to China through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan is one example (Olmos, [2023](#)) and TAPI is another example. The role of Iran, Afghanistan and India is also evident in this regard. Thus, globalization or integration through various routes can enhance not only infrastructural development but also economic growth. Globalizing trends in Central Asia as a region present both challenges and opportunities.

Central Asia remained an integral part of the USSR's foreign policy to enhance its supremacy in the region, but in the last few years, the dynamics of Russia's engagement with Central Asia have predominantly transformed towards cooperation and partnership in the fields of energy, security, infrastructure development and regional integration. Russia has actively pursued economic integration initiatives, such as the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the North-South Transport Corridor etc. (Usman, [2023](#)). In the past, Russia

had diversified gas pipelines in a way that gave edge to it in the transportation of oil and gas (Hynek, [2021](#)). Though Russia itself has abandoned energy resources, it still needs to retain a major role in Central Asian gas production and export to enhance its energy industry. Moscow also aimed to restore Soviet-era communication and trade networks between Russia and Central Asia, as well as to expand Russian private sector investments in the region beyond the energy industry. In line with these goals, Russia has launched a significant project to revive and modernize the old North-South transportation corridor, which connects Russian Baltic ports via the Volga River, across the Caspian Sea, to Central Asia and Iran, and further to Pakistan and India. During the Soviet era, this route was a major freight corridor and an alternative to transporting goods from Europe to Asia via the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal (Hill, [2002](#)). The post-independence period of CARs is characterized by the integration model borrowed from the European Union by Russia to integrate with CARs. The escalation of conflict between the West and Russia, particularly after 2014 and then after the Russia-Ukraine war, led to diminishing Russian influence in the region, but Russia has prioritized its policy to retain its influence in the region after its decisive position in the Ukraine war. Moreover, Russia has expressed its willingness to engage in the consolidation of intra-Central Asia political issues through the diplomatic approach. This diversification is beneficial both for the region and Russia itself. Between 2021 and 2023, the total trade volume between Russia and the five Central Asian countries reached approximately \$41-42 billion annually, which is remarkable despite Western sanctions (Takchenko, [2024](#)). Hence, the Russia-Central Asia engagement is fruitful to both sides, but the emergence of a new player, China, brings both challenges and opportunities for the region.

China's growing need for energy resources and the Central Asian states' quest for economic and infrastructural enhancement led the two to integrate. China is looking to cooperate to the region to ease the separatist elements in its Xinjiang Uyghur province by accelerating economic growth through establishing regional free trade zones. To promote its geo-economic policy, it needs to enhance its connectivity to trade routes across Europe (Cash, [2023](#)). On the other hand, Central Asia being part of the former socialist republic, the Soviet Union, shared some legacies with communist China. Thus, both China and CARs are consolidating to share the benefits of economic integration.

For energy security, the local franchises and companies of CARs are doing joint ventures with Chinese corporations like China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC), China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation (SINOPEC) and Petro China for exploration and drilling of oil and gas. Projects like the 2,798km long Kazakhstan-China pipeline are directly linking Kazakhstan's huge oil reserves in the Caspian Sea along with China's oil consumer market. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) includes the Eurasian Railway, which facilitates the transport of goods from China's manufacturing hubs located in its coastal, inland and border regions. It was first displayed by President Xi Jinping in Kazakhstan in 2013. This vision revived the old silk road with the new Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and the twenty-first-century Maritime Silk Road. This project led China to enhance its relations with the Central Asian region. Likewise, China's CNPC is the largest investor in assisting Turkmenistan in exploring, drilling, and other related services, along with another Chinese company, SINOPEC (Firdous et al., [2022](#)).

Figure 1
Trans-Eurasian Railway Connectivity

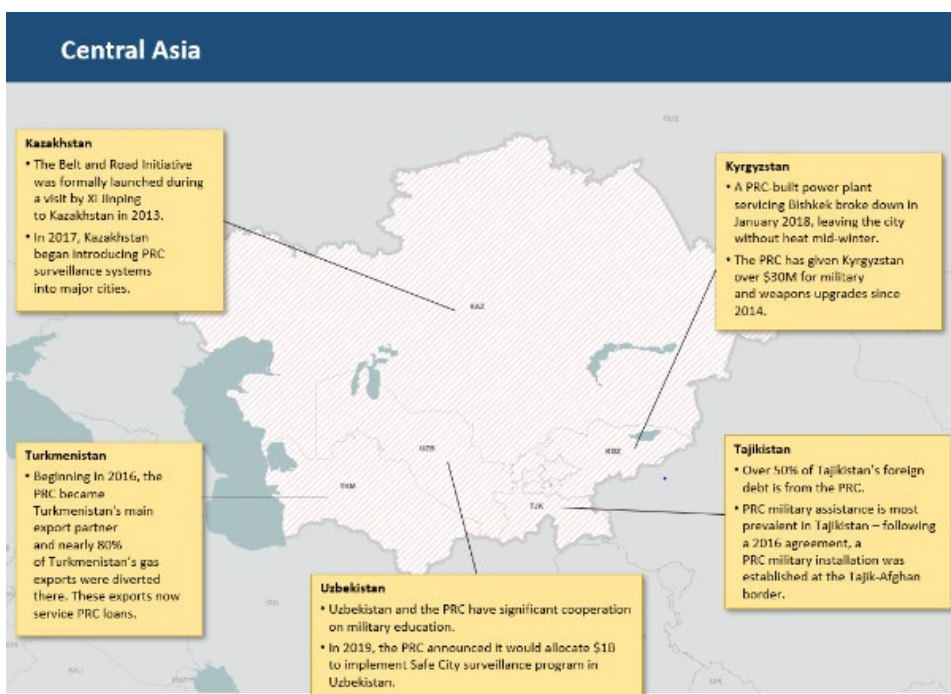


Note. Source: Rodrigue(2024) <https://transportgeography.org/contents/chapter7/transborder-crossborder-transportation/aurasian-landbridge/>

The Central Asia-China pipeline is a collection of pipelines that transport natural gas from Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. It has the capacity to transport 55 billion cubic meters to China's Uygur Xinjiang Autonomous Region. From there, the pipeline connects with the West-to-East Gas Pipeline in China (Donnellon-May, [2023](#)). China's contribution to constructing a 19.2 km tunnel that connects the Fergana Valley region of Uzbekistan to Tashkent has led it to complete the 124 km Angren Pap railway line. This line is an essential part of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway line. China is making all these efforts to reach Europe through Central Asia: Trans-Eurasian connectivity through railway is the vision of Chinese interest in the region (Rodrigue, [2024](#)). (See Figure. 1 and 2 for regional connectivity of CARs)

Figure.2

China Regional Snapshot - Central Asia



Note. Source: <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/china-snapshot-project-central-asia-2/>

China's entry into this game is through its geo-economically driven policy, which is why it wants to promote its trade links across the globe. For

this purpose, it needs trade routes. According to a report issued by the Aljazeera (2023), with the background of the Russia-Ukraine war and the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, China is committed to neutralizing Russia's influence in the region. In the China-Central Asia Summit held in 2023 in Xian, China pledged to provide Central Asian countries with \$3.8bn of financing support and grants for enhancing infrastructural development. China-Central Asia trade volume reached \$70bn by the year 2023. The summit concluded with the commitment to accelerate the building of Line D of the China-Central Asia natural gas pipeline. The increasing influence of China invites the US to neutralize the Chinese influence by enhancing its ties with CARs.

There are three important reasons behind the US engagement in Central Asia. First, Central Asia's logistical contribution to the war on terrorism can't be overlooked. Second, there is a growing risk of expansion of extremism that can trigger terrorism around the world, which is a core concern of the US to dismantle. The presence of huge energy reservoirs in the Caspian Basin is also crucial for the US energy security policy, particularly that can alternate the energy reserves of the Middle East (Ipek, 2007). Furthermore, the growing influence of Russia and China, along with the security of energy pipeline routes, is essential to neutralize. Hence, US interest in the region can't be undermined.

Most recently, the Biden administration expressed its deep interest by funding \$20 million to the Economic Resilience Initiative in Central Asia (ERICEN), with funding of \$30 million previously since the inauguration of the project in September 2022. ERICEN has three aspects: expansion of trade routes, investment by the private sector, and enhancement of ties targeting through softcore including civil society and education. According to the US state department, a \$31 billion investment has been made by the private sector in commercial areas in the region. This private sector investment could enhance Central Asian energy exports (Stoll, 2023). Moreover, in the US-CARs dialogue "C5+1" summit, the Biden administration is committed to exploring the region's mineral resources. This would enhance the development of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (also known as the Middle Corridor), a channel to connect China and Europe through the Central Asian region, with Turkey bypassing Russia (Kenderdine & Buesky, 2021). It will enhance the Euro-Central Asian collaboration as well. The European Union is already attempting to

diversify its ties with CARs to reduce the dependency on Russian imported gas and the supplement route from the Caspian Sea. The diversification of Central Asia and European Union ties will serve the purpose.

Not only with global powers, but CARs are also integrating with other global organizations like the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, which has enhanced energy and transport connectivity. Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program is connecting the region to global partners like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), USAID and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Islamic Development Bank (IDB). The WB is also venturing along with the European Investment Bank (EIB), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) and other regional and global partners to provide parallel financing for low-income Central Asian countries. The key areas of focus are renewable energy projects, including the construction of the Rogun hydropower station in Tajikistan and the significant regional infrastructure investment project with the partnership of international financial institutions (IFIs) (World Bank Group [WBG], [2023](#)).

Hence, CARs are benefitting from globalization in terms of economy by connecting with global and regional partners. These partners are assisting CARs not only in improving infrastructure but also in exploring oil and gas. Energy connectivity has enhanced the electricity outrange of people in Central Asia, but the impacts of globalization on the political convictions of CARs are yet to be determined.

Impacts of Globalization on Political Convictions in Central Asia

As already mentioned, Central Asia was subject to the influence of greater powers. These greater powers and empires transformed the region in their distinct ways in terms of political aspects. It was only after the collapse of the Soviet Union that the world became increasingly aware of the region's geopolitical significance and its abundance of mineral resources. The presence of rare metals has also led the region to greater global engagement. All this prompted the region to political transformation, though at a low pace. Due to the communist experience in the past, analyzing the political dynamics of Central Asia reveals a complex set of analyses.

Kazakhstan is the largest state of the Central Asian region in terms of area and economy. Still, Nursultan Abishuly Nazarbayev, the first president of Kazakhstan who remained in power till 2021 since the independence of the state in 1991, widely admitted the quest of the state for political autonomy instead of outright independence (Hiro, [2010](#)). However, the Nursultan's authoritarian policies never paved the way for a democratic structure in the state to flourish. This happened at the cost of a strong parliament, good governance and a democratic civil society. Eventually, the second decade of the 21st century witnessed a public demand for transformation in the political structure that led to legislative changes, but unfortunately, constitutional reforms adopted in 2017 to strengthen the parliament were never implemented with true letter and spirit. On the departure of Nursultan on account of civil riots in 2022, Tokayev, the head of state, initiated a more robust reform agenda through legislative and electoral reforms. However, despite Tokayev's substantial commitments to transform both the political and economic structure of the state from authoritarianism to republican, no considerable changes are expected in the political convictions of Kazakhstan (Abishev, [2023](#)) neither as a society nor as a state.

During the 1990s, Kyrgyzstan was known as an island of democracy in Central Asia due to its lively political opposition, dynamic civil society, and independent media houses (Pannier, [2024](#)). It was due to Askar Akayev's unconventional policies to convert Kyrgyzstan into a pluralistic society along with a free market economy, but drastic transformation towards autocratic policies led the state to the Tulip Revolution. After the April Revolution in 2010, the second half of the 21st century is characterized by corruption, the absence of accountability, a declining economy, poor law and order with social decline and judicial activism, and marginalization of civil society through violent governance. The current government of Saydr Japarov is committed to attacking the three distinctive features of the state discussed above. Opposition leaders have been imprisoned, civil society is striving to be vibrant, and media houses are under attack through judicial trials. According to Bruce Pannier, an analyst of Foreign Policy Research Institute, the Central Asian Island of democracy is ready to sink in authoritarianism (Pannier, [2024](#)). Hence, Kyrgyzstan is currently under political turbulence.

Turkmenistan remained under the huge influence of Russia both in economic and political terms even after independence, but comparatively unlike Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan remained stable mainly because of the state's control of civilian life through intelligence and media. Turkmenistan significantly transformed its political system on paper, but in practice, it is one of the most restrictive political systems in the world with a poor human rights track record and worse civilian marginalization. The state has been looking to liberalize its economic and political outlook since 2007, but dynastic politics and personality cults are not letting democratic values flourish (Bohr, [2016](#)). Moreover, the establishment of Halk Maslahaty, being the country's "supreme representative body" is legitimate to overshadow the performance of all three branches of the government. More recently, Serdar Gurbangulyýewiç Berdimuhamedow, the chairman of Halk Maslahaty, is the chief architect of state and society's pivotal policies. With distorted reporting of governmental authorities in Turkmenistan, it is challenging for the international community to assess its real political and economic outlook. Furthermore, civilian life is extremely marginalized due to the state policy of Turkmenization promoting nationalistic trends in all spheres of life. The main beneficiary of this policy include the national leader of Turkmen people and his allies (Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index [BTI], [2024](#)).

Uzbekistan's political outlook is characterized by a high degree of autocracy. The first president, Karimov, had resumed the Soviet-style political system. According to a report by BTI ([2024](#)) President Mirziyoyev is not pushing for rapid democratization, nor is he content with maintaining the status quo established by his predecessor, Karimov. His new course has achieved moderate success but remains contentious. The Uzbekistan 2.0 reform agenda emphasizes expanding social networks, increasing public awareness of issues and enhancing the roles of NGOs and independent journalism. Additionally, there is a focus on reforms in education, healthcare, youth affairs and economic liberalization. However, political reforms have lagged, with only a slight increase in parliamentary visibility since the December 2019 elections. Uzbekistan continues to face significant challenges, including inefficient state management, a shortage of qualified civil servants, pervasive corruption and abuses of power by local authorities.

Tajikistan was the poorest republic under the Soviet regime and unfortunately, it still retains this status. After the disintegration of the USSR, the republic faced significant political and economic turmoil due to a five-year civil war from 1992-1997 between the government's loyalist commanders and the commanders who pledged their allegiance to the United Tajik Opposition (UTO). It was only in 1997 that both sides reached a peace accord under the supervision of the United Nations. This accord also settled a National Reconciliation Commission to supervise the peace process (Metveeva, [2009](#)). According to the report of Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) ([2024](#)) the state drastically transformed itself from a war-torn state to a stable state with a functioning government without any liberal agenda. Since 2010, Tajikistan has become a consolidated autocratic state where opposition figures are imprisoned, forced to exile, or killed. Patronage networks, personal loyalties and governance through informal channels are common features of Tajik politics under the cover of so-called electoral democracy. Minorities are marginalized by the state policy of exclusive Tajik nationalism. Moreover, Tajikistan is increasingly moving towards dynastic politics. President Emomali Rahmon and his family are monopolizing both the political and economic spheres of the state. He appointed his eldest son, Rustam Emomali, born in 1987, as chairman of the Upper House in 2020. Furthermore, Tajikistan's human rights track record is also a subject of discussion globally, particularly atrocities against the Pamiri-Ismaili community.

Hence, the features of politics in Central Asian States are almost identical. The composition and nature of the political systems in CARs are authoritarian, clientelistic and patriarchal under the disguise of so-called democracy. The past Soviet experience is still very evident in the political sphere of CARs, though governments are committed to introducing liberal, political and economic policies. The political impacts of globalization are very limited so far. The Russian-Ukrainian war has reduced Russia's political influence on CARs. Nevertheless, Russia still has noteworthy political, economic and military influence over the regimes in the regions. No significant transition or transformation can be expected in political dynamics within the CARs. (See Table 2)

Table 2
Comparison of Stability Index Among CARs

	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan
Stability Index/Status Pol.	4.96/76	4.98/73	3.16/121	2.67/125	4.24/99
Stability Index/Status Economic	3.73/95	4.57/75	2.82/122	2.70/125	3.70/97
Stability Index/Status Governance	6.14/39	5.39/66	3.05/ 116	2.64/123	4.79/85
Stability Index/Status	4.56/77	4.06/92	3.02/ 115	2.18/128	3.92/98

Note. Source: The researchers have constructed the table by collecting the data from BTI country profiles 2024 of Central Asian States. <https://www.bti-project.org>. Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2024 is a project of Bertelsmann Stiftung's Germany.

BTI evaluates the quality of governance in 137 countries along with the process of social and economic transformation to more liberal and democratic values. The table above indicates that Kazakhstan is the most successful state in Central Asia in terms of stability and transformation towards democracy and market economy. Turkmenistan is the least stable country in terms of its transformation with regard to democracy and market economy. The rest of the Central Asian States are also yet to look forward a lot in this regard.

Conclusion

The prospects of globalization in Central Asia are dependent upon the states' exploration of interacted bond of political and economic dynamics domestically, regionally and globally. Effective governance, transparent policies and efforts to diversify economies are essential for maximizing the benefits of globalization. Enhancing regional cooperation and developing resilient economic structures will also be crucial in mitigating external shocks and ensuring sustainable growth. All this depends upon the internal stability in terms of their political aspects. No doubt, globalization unfolds both significant opportunities and challenges for Central Asia. Addressing these challenges and grabbing opportunities requires transformation both in

political and economic policies. Only then can Central Asian States better position themselves to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

Conflict of Interest

The author of the manuscript has no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

Data availability is not applicable as no new data was created.

Funding Details

No funding has been received for this research.

References

- Abishev, G. (2023, April 12). *Has Kazakhstan become more democratic following recent elections?* Carnegie Politika. <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2023/03/has-kazakhstan-become-more-democratic-following-recent-elections?lang=en¢er=russia-eurasia>
- Adnan, M., & Fatima, B. (2015). Globalization of Central Asia. *Journal of Political Studies*, 22(2), 237–254.
- Aljazeera. (2023, May 19). *China's Xi presents development plans for Central Asia.* <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/19/chinas-xi-presents-development-plans-for-central-asia>
- Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI). (2024). *Turkmenistan country report 2024.* <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/TKM>
- Bloor, K. (2022). *Understanging global politics.* E-International Relations.
- Bohr, A. (2016, March 8). *Turkmenistan: Power, politics and petro-authoritarianism.* Chatham House. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2016-03-08-turkmenistan-bohr-summary.pdf>
- British Petroleum. (2018). *BP statistical review of world energy.* <https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/en/corporate/pdf/energy-economics/statistical-review/bp-stats-review-2018-full-report.pdf>
- Cash, J. (2023, October 31). *China to develop Xinjiang free trade zone despite Western sanctions.* Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/>

[china/china-develop-xinjiang-free-trade-zone-despite-western-sanctions-2023-10-31/](#)

- Chowdhury, S. K., & Kafi, A. H. (2015). The heartland theory of Sir Halford John Mackinder: Justification of foreign policy of the United States and Russia in Central Asia. *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs*, 1(2), 58–70.
- Donnellon-May, G. (2023, December 10). *Beijing digs in for the Central Asia-China gas pipeline*. Lowy Institute. <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpretor/beijing-digs-central-asia-china-gas-pipeline>
- Elma, F., & Gurbanov, S. (2012, May 24–26). *Central Asia in the globalization process: Comparative analysis of human development and socio-economic situation* [Paper presentation]. Proceedings of 7th Silk Road International Conference “Challenges and Opportunities of Sustainable Economic Development in Eurasian Countries”. Batumi, Georgia.
- European Countries. (2014, May 28). *Communication from the commission to the European parliament and the council: European Energy Security Strategy*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014DC0330&from=EN>
- Firdous, M., Rahim, N., & Alam, M. (2022). China’s engagement with Central Asia and dynamics of new great game. *Multicultural Education*, 8(2), 19–27. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5952026>
- Hettne, B. (2003). Globalization and the new regionalism: The second great transformation. *New Political Economy*, 8(3), 355–372.
- Hill, F. (2002). *The United States and Russia in Central Asia: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran*. Brookings Institution: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-united-states-and-russia-in-central-asia-uzbekistan-tajikistan-afghanistan-pakistan-and-iran/>
- Hiro, D. (1994). *Between Marx and Muhammad: The changing face of Central Asia*. Harper Collins
- Hiro, D. (2010). *Inside Central Asia*. Harper Collins.
- Hynek, O. (2021). Geopolitics of Central Asia: Between the Russian bear and the Chinese dragon. *Central European Journal of Politics*, 6(2), 73–93.

- Ipek, P. (2007). Challenges for democartization in Central Asia: What can the United States do? *Middle East Policy*, 14(1), 95–1106.
- Ismailov, E., & Papava, V. (2010). *Rethinking Central Asia*. Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2196485>
- Jafalian, A. (2019). Globalization through oil and gas: Central Asia's predicament. *Tla-Melaua*, 13(47), 368–392.
- Kenderdine, T. & Bucsky, P. (2021). *Middle corridor—policy development and trade potential of the trans-caspian international transport route* (Working Paper No. 1268). Asian Development Bank Insituite. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/705226/adb-wp1268.pdf>
- Kubaik, M. (2018). *Caspain summit: Consequences for the region*. Warsaw Institute.
- Laurrelle, M., & Peyrouse, S. (2012). *The 'Chinese question' in Central Asia: Domestic order, social changes and the Chinese factor*. Hurst & Company.
- Lechner, F. J., & Boli, J. (2003). *The global readers*. Blackwell Publishing.
- Lerrson, T. (2001). *The race to the top: The real story of globalization*. Cato Institute.
- Metveeva, A. (2009). *The perils of emerging statehood: Civil war and state reconstruction in Tajikistan*. Crisis States Research Center. <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/98292/wp46.2.pdf>
- Niquet, V. (2015). China and Central Asia. *China Prespective*, 67, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.1045>
- Nurgaliyeva, L. (2019). Kazakhstan economic soft balancing policy vis-a-vis Russia: From the Eurasian Union to economic cooperation with Turkey. *Journal Of Eurasian Studies*, 7(1), 92–105. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euras.2015.10.008>
- Olmos, F. (2023). *China in the heart of Eurasia*. Retrieved from CIDOB: Barcelona Centre for International Affairs. <https://www.cidob.org/en/publication/china-heart-eurasia>

- Pannier, B. (2024, April 12). *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of democracy sinks into authoritarianism*. Foreign Policy Research Institute. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2024/04/kyrgyzstan-central-asias-island-of-democracy-sinks-into-authoritarianism/>
- Rodrigue, D. J.-P. (2024). *The trans-Asian railway (Eurasian Landbridge)*. The Geography of Transport Systems. <https://transportgeography.org/contents/chapter7/transborder-crossborder-transportation/aurasian-landbridge/>
- Stoll, H. (2023, September 11). *A case for greater U.S. engagement in Central Asia*. Rand Corporation. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2023/09/a-case-for-greater-us-engagement-in-central-asia.html>
- Takchenko, S. (2024, May 15). *Russia and Central Asia: Bilateral and multilateral relations*. Valdai Club Foundation. <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/russia-and-central-asia-bilateral-and-multilateral/>
- Tomar, G. (2023, September 19). *Impact of globalization in Central Asia: A case study of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan*. Center For European, Russian and Eurasian Studies, Michigan State University. https://ceres.isp.msu.edu/files/2617/0749/2245/2023.09.19_Garima_Tomar.pdf
- Usman, D. (2023, May 29). *The path to peace and Russia's engagement with Central Asia*. Stratheia. <https://stratheia.com/the-path-to-peace-and-russias-engagement-with-central-asia/>
- World Bank Group. (2023, December 6). *Regional cooperation reduces poverty and builds resilience in Central Asia*. World Bank Group. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2023/12/06/regional-cooperation-reduces-poverty-and-builds-resilience-in-central-asia>
- Yoshino, N., Huang, B., Azhgaliyeva, D., & Abbas, Q. (2021). *Developing infrastructure in Central Asia: Impacts and financing mechanisms*. Asian Development Bank Institute. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/688061/adbi-book-developing-infrastructure-central-asia.pdf>