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# For Better or Worse: Aspirations and Expectations of Central Asia's Youth

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# Central Asia's youth has a problem

- Youth is more likely to be unemployed or underemployed
  - 20% of youth in Eastern Europe and Central Asia are NEET (Davalos et al, 2016)
  - TAJ: 40% are NEET (Strakova and Ajwad 2017); KGZ: 55% of youth underutilized (Kirmse 2010)
- Situation exacerbated in countries with youth bulge...
  - 18% of population in Central Asia is between 15 and 24 years old (UNDP 2017)
- ... and countries with high poverty rates
  - TAJ and KGZ: poverty rate > 30%; UZB: 14%; KAZ: 3% (World Bank)
- Returns to education are relatively low, except KAZ (Peet 2015; Sondergaard et al. 2012)
- Girls have an even larger problem
  - More likely to drop out from school; work in unpaid family business; less autonomy; exposure to unsafe sex; physical abuse; marriage at early age (Kirmse 2010)



# The youth is important for the future of any society

- Negative social and economic perspectives can lead to disillusionment
  - Not finding a job that matches qualifications can be frustrating
  - Not having work or being able to live independently can lead to feelings of social exclusion
- These unmet expectations can result in low aspirations for the future
- Youth in Central Asia has received little attention from academic research
  - Aim of this paper: better understand aspirations and expectations of young adults in Central Asia



# Aspirations and expectations

- Aspiration
  - *“steadfast desire or longing for something above one”* (Oxford English Dictionary)
  - aim as well as desire to achieve a goal (Bernard and Taffesse 2012)
  - *“ability to set future goals while being inspired in the present to work towards these goals”* (Quaglia and Cob 1996)
- ...what individuals expect to achieve in the future (Boxer et al. 2011; Leavy and Smith 2010)
  - Beyond hopes and dreams
  - Recognizes reality within which individuals live and take decisions



# Determinants of aspirations and expectations

## Individual characteristics

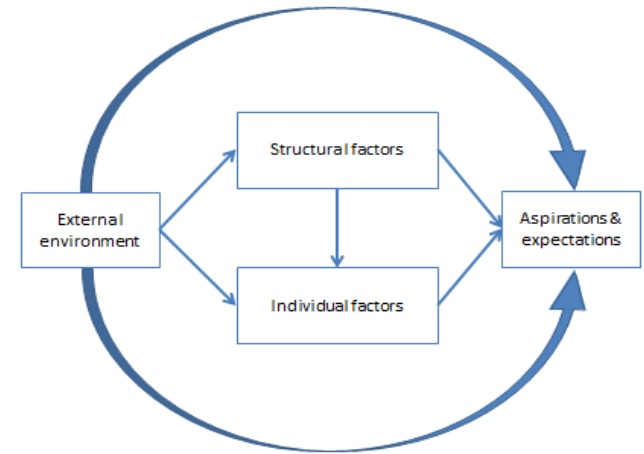
- Gender (Leavy and Smith 2010; Gutman and Akerman 2008; Hartas 2016)
- Age (Gutman and Akerman 2008)
- Ethnicity (Strand 2007; Kao and Tienda 1998)
- Attitudes, personal opinions, wellbeing (Van Mol 2016; Hartas 2016; Weiner 1992; McGregor 2007)

## Structural factors

- Parental education, income (Gutman and Akerman 2008)
- Social class (Kintrea et al. 2015; Archer et al. 2010; McKendrick and Scott 2010)
- Social capital (Fuller 2014)

## External environment

- Employment opportunities
- Future economic perspectives



# Research questions

- What are the determinants of young adults having positive expectations about the future in Central Asia?
- To what extent do expectations and their determinants differ across the four Central Asian countries?
- Compared to other age groups, is the youth more positive about the future?



# Data

- Life in Transition Survey (LITS)
  - 34 countries
  - Ca. 1000 households per country, nationally representative
  - Three rounds (2006, 2010, 2016), but no panel
- Our focus:
  - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan
  - Youth: individuals 18-30 years old
  - Last wave (2016)
- Total sample: 6,021 individuals of which 1,485 are between 18-30



# Measuring positive expectations

- (3.15) Please imagine a ten-step ladder where on the bottom, the first step, stand the poorest 10% people in our country, and on the highest step, the tenth, stand the richest 10% people in our country. On which step of the ten is your household today?

**SINGLE CODE**

First Respondent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Second Respondent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**SHOW CARD 13**

Don't know -97; Refusal -99

- (3.16) Now, imagine the same ten-step ladder four years ago. On which step was your household at that time?

**SINGLE CODE**

First Respondent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Second Respondent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**SHOW CARD 13**

Don't know -97; Refusal -99

- (3.17) And where on the ladder do you believe your household will be four years from now?

**SINGLE CODE**

First Respondent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Second Respondent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**SHOW CARD 13**

Don't know -97; Refusal -99

Cantril Ladder as measure of future expectations (cf. Cojocaru 2014)

$$E = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } C_f - C_t > 0 \\ 0 & \text{if } C_f - C_t \leq 0 \end{cases}$$

- $E$  positive expectations
- $C_f$  step on ladder in future
- $C_t$  step on ladder today





	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Uzbekistan	Total
Male (%)	39.2	35.8	43.1	49.4	41.7
Married (%)	62.1	52.5	60.8	64.4	59.7
Lower secondary (%)	9.6	10.2	10.8	9.8	10.2
Upper secondary (%)	21.7	35.5	63.0	28.2	39.5
Post-secondary (%)	31.9	24.0	6.7	45.4	25.0
Higher education (%)	36.9	30.3	19.5	16.6	25.3
Worked in the last 7 days (%)	63.3	39.7	36.4	36.9	43.1
Actively looking for work (%)	6.9	7.0	13.0	14.3	10.4
Inactive (%)	29.8	53.4	50.7	48.7	46.5
Trust in people(%)	28.3	30.3	50.4	29.5	36.0
Trust in political parties (%)	45.4	26.5	62.8	63.4	49.8
Satisfied with life (%)	74.1	78.7	75.8	91.6	79.7
Satisfied with economy (%)	51.5	51.5	68.5	87.5	64.6
Willingness to take risks (average)	5.2	4.1	3.0	5.0	4.2
Voted in last election (%)	63.6	64.2	84.4	82.4	74.3
Household size (average)	3.4	3.9	5.5	5.3	4.6
Expenditure per capita (US\$ PPP)	239.9	158.3	82.2	204.8	161.5
Has internet at home (%)	81.9	66.3	25.8	32.8	49.7
Urban (%)	65.9	38.9	26.0	42.3	41.3
Father (post-secondary) (%)	54.0	34.6	40.7	56.8	45.3
Mother (post-secondary) (%)	53.6	33.5	13.6	44.5	34.0
Ladder today (%)					
1-4	42.4	44.8	47.2	26.2	40.9
5-6	49.0	44.0	47.6	62.9	50.4
7-10	8.6	11.1	5.2	10.9	8.7
Ladder future (%)					
1-4	23.8	15.4	21.8	9.4	18.0
5-6	36.7	38.6	43.9	24.0	36.8
7-10	39.5	46.0	34.3	66.7	45.2
High expectations (%) (ladder future-ladder today>0)	61.6	77.4	78.4	83.9	75.7
# of observations	314	383	462	326	1,485

# Summary statistics

## 18-30 yrs, 2016



# Methodology

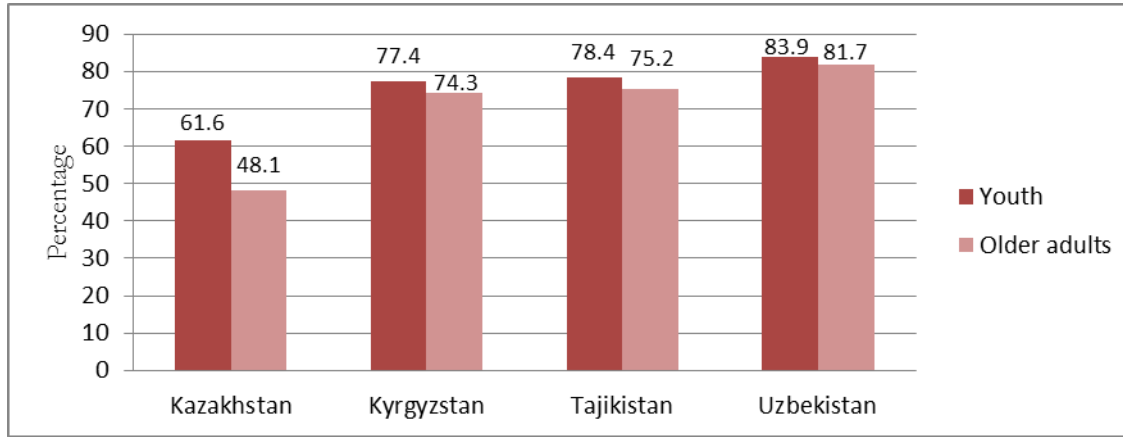
- Simple comparison of means
  - Differences between young adults and other age groups
  - Differences between young adults with high and low expectations
- Estimation of binary models
  - Identify factors correlated with high expectations
  - Probit regressions

$$\Pr(E_i = 1) = \theta(x_i\beta), \text{ with } i = 1, \dots, N$$

- $X_i$  includes variables for individual characteristics, economic and life satisfaction, trust, political participation, parental education, location, living conditions and current position on Cantril ladder



Percentage of the youth and adult population with high expectations, by country



## Results

Differences between youth and older adults are only statistically significant in KAZ.

Expectations overall lower in KAZ.

Benchmark when thinking about the economic situation, youth, 2016 (%)

	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Uzbekistan	Total
How your friends and neighbors live	65.3	41.5	28.6	22.7	38.4
How your parents lived at your age	13.7	18.8	24.9	26.4	21.3
How your family lived before 1991	5.7	15.1	14.7	9.2	11.7
How the domestic elites live	3.2	10.2	10.2	2.5	7.0
How people live in Western Europe	1.6	2.1	7.6	3.1	3.9
How people live in neighboring ex-communist countries	2.6	4.4	3.9	1.2	3.2
<i>Don't know</i>	8.0	7.8	10.2	35.0	14.6



*Selected individual characteristics by level of expectations, youth (%)*

	Kazakhstan		Kyrgyzstan		Tajikistan		Uzbekistan	
	<i>high</i>	<i>low</i>	<i>high</i>	<i>low</i>	<i>high</i>	<i>low</i>	<i>high</i>	<i>Low</i>
<b>Gender</b>								
Male	60.0	40.0	76.3	23.7	85.9	14.1	87.3	12.7
Female	62.6	37.4	77.9	22.1	72.6	27.4	80.6	19.4
<b>Marital status</b>		***						
Married	65.8	34.2	78.4	21.6	79.4	20.6	83.9	16.1
Not married	54.6	45.4	76.2	23.8	76.7	23.3	84.0	16.0
<b>Residence</b>								
Urban	62.4	37.6	79.7	20.3	62.1	37.9	76.5	23.5
Rural	60.0	40.0	75.9	24.1	83.3	16.7	89.2	10.8

Gender difference is only significant in TAJ, residence in TAJ and UZB, and marital status in KAZ

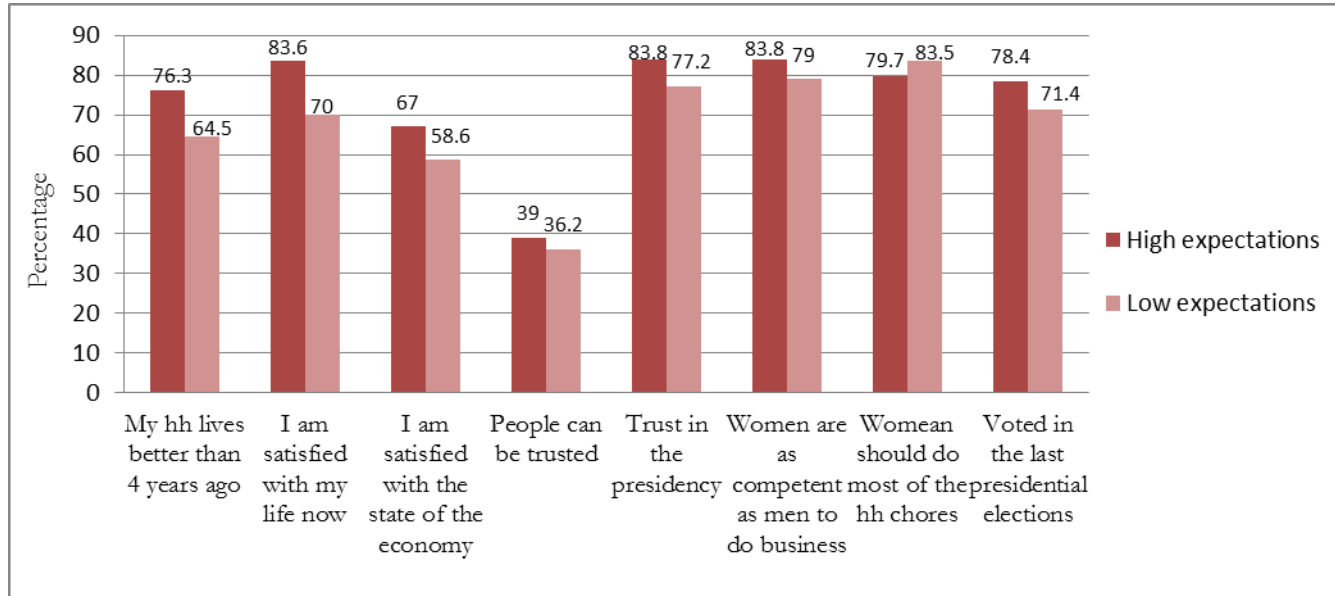
<i>Education</i>	Kazakhstan		Kyrgyzstan		Tajikistan		Uzbekistan	
	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
No degree/ Lower secondary	62.1	37.9	34.3	65.7	41.9	58.1	17.9	82.1
(Upper) secondary	35.0	65.0	24.0	66.0	21.5	78.5	16.7	83.3
Post-secondary non-tertiary	34.7	65.3	14.1	85.9	12.9	87.1	13.1	86.9
Higher education	37.3	62.7	24.1	75.9	15.1	84.9	22.0	78.0
		**		**		***		

Differences between education levels of the youth with high vs low expectations are statistically significant

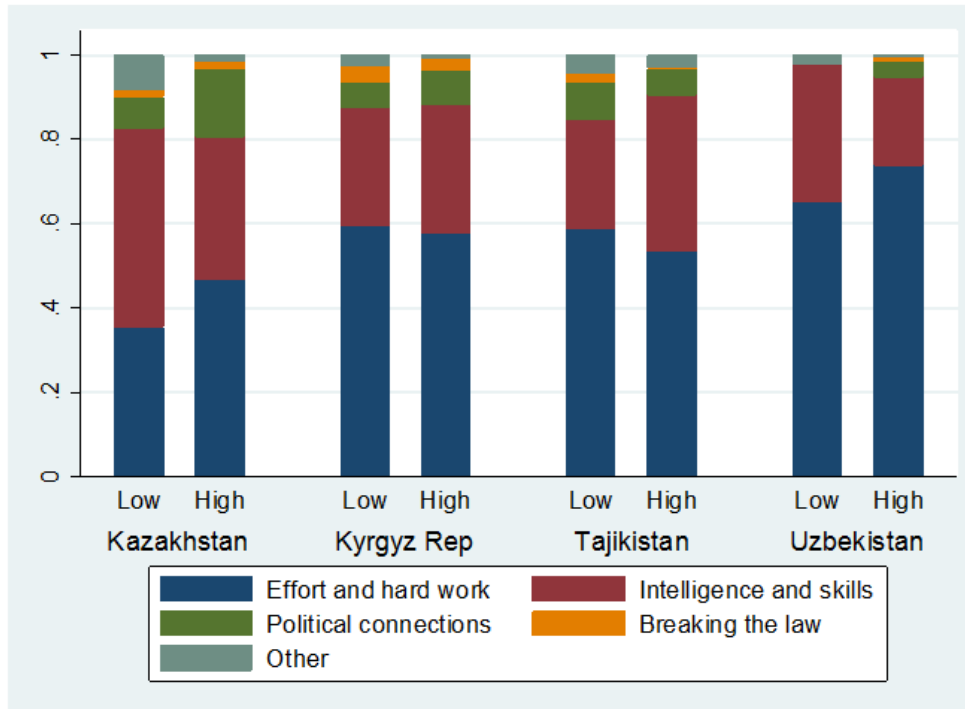
<i>Employment status</i>								
Worked in the last week	39.1	60.9	18.1	81.9	18.8	81.3	18.3	81.7
Looking for a job	36.8	63.2	25.0	75.0	23.6	76.4	13.2	86.8
Inactive	41.5	58.5	26.4	73.6	23.4	76.6	14.2	85.8



## Attitudes and personal opinions of the youth by level of aspirations (pooled)



*Most important factors to succeed in life by level of expectations- youth*



	Expectations (1)	Expectations (2)	Expectations (3)	Expectations (4)	Expectations (5)
<b>Youth</b>	<b>0.06**</b> <b>(0.01)</b>	<b>0.06**</b> <b>(0.01)</b>	<b>0.06**</b> <b>(0.01)</b>	<b>0.06**</b> <b>(0.01)</b>	<b>0.05**</b> <b>(0.02)</b>
Married	0.04** (0.01)	0.04** (0.01)	0.04* (0.01)	0.03* (0.01)	0.03* (0.02)
Worked	0.07** (0.01)	0.08** (0.01)	0.07** (0.01)	0.07** (0.01)	0.07** (0.01)
Urban	-0.10** (0.01)	-0.10** (0.01)	-0.09** (0.01)	-0.09** (0.01)	-0.09** (0.01)
Kyrgyzstan	0.19** (0.02)	0.19** (0.02)	0.18** (0.02)	0.18** (0.02)	0.19** (0.02)
Tajikistan	0.16** (0.02)	0.16** (0.02)	0.18** (0.02)	0.17** (0.02)	0.19** (0.02)
Uzbekistan	0.25** (0.02)	0.26** (0.02)	0.23** (0.02)	0.23** (0.02)	0.24** (0.02)
Ladder today		-0.01** (0.00)	-0.03** (0.00)	-0.03** (0.00)	-0.03** (0.00)
Satisfied with life			0.13** (0.02)	0.13** (0.02)	0.13** (0.02)
Risks			0.01** (0.00)	0.01** (0.00)	0.01** (0.00)
Factors to succeed: effort and hard work			0.05** (0.02)	0.05** (0.02)	0.04* (0.02)
		Other controls omitted			
Observations	5399	5399	5023	5023	4484
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.08	0.08	0.10	0.11	0.11

All adults



	Expectations (1)	Expectations (2)	Expectations (3)	Expectations (4)	Expectations (5)
<b>Male</b>	<b>0.06*</b>	<b>0.06*</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>0.05*</b>
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)
Controls for married, higher edu, work, age, hhsz	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
<b>Urban</b>	<b>-0.06*</b>	<b>-0.06*</b>	<b>-0.04*</b>	<b>-0.05*</b>	<b>-0.05*</b>
	<b>(0.02)</b>	<b>(0.02)</b>	<b>(0.03)</b>	<b>(0.03)</b>	<b>(0.03)</b>
<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	<b>0.13**</b>	<b>0.13**</b>	<b>0.12**</b>	<b>0.13**</b>	<b>0.16**</b>
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)
<b>Tajikistan</b>	<b>0.10**</b>	<b>0.10**</b>	<b>0.15**</b>	<b>0.14**</b>	<b>0.17**</b>
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	<b>0.18**</b>	<b>0.18**</b>	<b>0.20**</b>	<b>0.20**</b>	<b>0.21**</b>
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Ladder today		-0.01	-0.02**	-0.03**	-0.03**
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Life satisfaction			0.16**	0.15**	0.15**
			(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Controls for Economic satisfaction, trust in people, trust in parties, effort and hard work			yes	yes	yes
Risks			0.01*	0.01*	0.01
			(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
<b>Father: post- secondary education</b>				<b>0.11**</b>	<b>0.10**</b>
				(0.03)	(0.03)
Father: missing				0.16	0.24*
				(0.12)	(0.13)
<b>Mother: post-secondary education</b>				<b>-0.08**</b>	<b>-0.08*</b>
				(0.03)	(0.03)
Mother: missing				-0.17	-0.21*
				(0.12)	(0.12)
Log of exp pc					0.05*
					(0.02)
Observations	1368	1368	1260	1260	1120
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.05	0.05	0.07	0.08	0.09

Youth only



# Discussion

- Individual characteristics
  - Gender: male young adults have higher expectations → related to position of women in society
  - Age : youth has higher expectations
  - Attitudes, personal opinions, wellbeing: do seem to matter for the entire population, but not for the youth
- Structural factors
  - Parental education: father's education is positively correlated, but mother's education negatively – Why?
  - Social class: higher living standards positively correlated with high expectations
- External environment
  - Economic country context seems to matter, but why are expectations lower in KAZ?

