Corruption as a Last Resort

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The idea for this book came from discussions at kitchen tables in the former Soviet Union. While conducting earlier research, I lived with families who regularly described the struggles they faced as a result of the demise of the Soviet welfare state and, in many countries, the smaller economic roles that their new, market-oriented governments played. No longer did their governments guarantee them employment, housing, higher education, and other necessities. While the families celebrated the political freedoms that the collapse of the Soviet Union brought, they lamented the loss of economic guarantees. After researching the political changes brought about by the collapse, I turned to an examination of how people were coping with the economic transformation. I am grateful to these dear friends and welcoming families for sharing their daily experiences with me.

I also extend my thanks to the 266 individuals who shared their experiences more formally through interviews and observational studies that I conducted, and to the 4,500 Central Asians who participated in mass surveys that a team and I completed.

The coleader of that survey team was Pauline Jones Luong. I am grateful that she too was concerned about the paucity of data about Central Asia and enthusiastic about conducting surveys to help rectify that. We both appreciate the assistance of the Kazakhstani research firm BRIF in administering the surveys.

Two additional colleagues were instrumental in this project. Henry Hale suggested corruption as a frame when he read a conference paper I wrote early on. As the title of the book indicates, this was a recommendation that stuck. I am indebted to Andrew Barnes for many suggestions about different parts of the project over time and for comments on an early version of the complete manuscript.

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Note on Transliteration

I transliterated Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Uzbek names and words from their Russified forms using the Library of Congress system of Russian transliteration. I also relied on the Library of Congress system for transliterating Russian names and words. For all of the languages I used a more common spelling, if one existed, for well-known names and words (for example, oblast instead of oblast’).