



Democracy and Modern Political Conditions in Post-Soviet Eurasia: A Case Study of Kazakhstan

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Abstract

This research article aims to focus on democracy and modern political conditions in post-Soviet Eurasia, specifically in the case of Kazakhstan. The objectives of this research article are: 1) to study the status of Kazakhstan as a state of the former Soviet Union; and 2) to analyze political and social change factors with the construction of Kazakhstan's democracy and state status of post-Soviet Eurasia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the problems of all post-Soviet states are their anarchic politics and institutional arrangements. Kazakhstan is similar, yet has different issues attributed to political and social change. In 2022, protests preceded the Ukraine crisis in Kazakhstan. Whether Russia was involved in the collapse of the Soviet Union or not, preferential treatment was offered to a specific group who had connections with the former Soviet government. This result found that the shifts in anti-Russian resistance had affected Kazakhstan's political and social character. The protesters intended to oust the authoritarian leader Nursultan Nazarbayev, the first president from 1990 to 2019. The protests erupted with the freedom movement of Kazakhs as Hordeism, including the phenomenon of Russophobia, which added another dimension to Kazakh politics. Everyone is concerned regarding the crisis in Kazakhstan being the same process in Ukraine. The trend of nationalism in Kazakhstan is becoming increasingly evident as well as attempts to create aspirations for an anarchist state based on Western political philosophy.

1. Introduction

Kazakhstan is a landlocked country in Central Asia, bordered by Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, the Aral Sea, and Turkmenistan. It is the world's largest landlocked country and the ninth-largest country by land. Despite its size, Kazakhstan's population is relatively small, with an estimated population of around 19 million. Regardless, Kazakhstan is an essential player in the region. Its strategic location between Russia and China has given it a unique position in the post-Soviet era. Kazakhstan has been working to position itself as a regional leader in Central Asia, focusing on economic development, trade, and investment. The country has abundant natural resources, including oil, gas, and minerals. It has been seeking to leverage these resources to promote economic growth and development. Kazakhstan has also pursued a policy of international engagement while seeking to establish itself as a critical player in regional and global affairs. The country has been working to build ties with various international partners, including the United States, Russia, China, and the European Union. Kazakhstan's position in the post-Soviet era is shaped by multiple factors, including its location, resources, and strategic interests. While the country faces various challenges, including political and social issues, it is well-positioned to play a significant role in the region and beyond (Picture 1).

Figure 1

Kazakhstan in the World Map



Initially, Kazakhstan was a dry country; thus, the main occupation of the ancient people was nomadic animal husbandry with raising horses rather than agriculture. During the 13th century, the Mongols arrived in the region and established a formal system of government. The administrative area was called the Khan-Kazakh state. The identity of the Kazakh people became evident in the 16th century when the Kazakh language and culture began to differ from other peoples. At the beginning of the 19th century, the Russians who led the land in this area did not pay any attention and started to expand their influence. Eventually, the Russians gained complete control over the place. In 1917, Soviet power in Kazakhstan began to form on October 3. The dual control later unfolded after the Revolution in February. The State Duma and the Provisional Government represented the authorities, on the other hand, by the Soviets. By the autumn, the Soviets increasingly fell under the influence of the Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin. On October 25 (November 7), during an armed uprising in Petrograd, the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet overthrew the Provisional Government. The Bolsheviks, following Lenin's slogan "All power to the Soviets!", began to construct power in the country's major cities. Finally, on October 30, in the municipality of Perovsk (Kyzylorda), after a mass rally of workers and soldiers of the local garrison, Soviet power was established in Kazakhstan for the first time in 1917. The Provisional Government sent an armed detachment to Tashkent, where the Bolshevik uprising lasted two days. Several days later, Aulie-Ata (Taraz) and Shymkent finally submitted to the Soviet power. In most areas of the Syrdarya, Akmola regions, and the Bukey Horde, the Soviet government won peacefully. Conversely, in Turgai, Ural, Semipalatinsk, and partially in Semirechensk regions, Cossack detachments and supporters of the Provisional Government chose to raise their active armed resistance.

In Kazakhstan, establishing Soviet power continued from late 1917 until March 1918. Consequently, it became part of the Soviet Union in 1920. Kazakhstan declared its independence in 1991 on 16 December. There was a dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics of fifteen former Soviet states, which had 5 Central Asian republics: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan (Святослав Антонов, 2017). Under the circumstances, the development of democracy post-Soviet had changed drastically underlying. The successful democratic states returned to various forms of totalitarianism. The collapse of the Soviet Union revealed many of the hidden problems arising in these transitional states, including economic turmoil and humanitarian and civil

crises, disclosing the inconsistency of societal, economic, and political developments in these countries. At the same time, there was also a vast leap forward in the political process and the extremes of reform efforts in these countries. Kazakhstan is the largest and wealthiest among the Central Asian countries that splintered from the former Soviet Union. The territory's status was formerly included with the Soviet Union and governed by a communist dictatorship using a socialist economy. Despite gaining independence and turning to a liberal economic system, the former system is deeply rooted. It caused the delay of changes in the region of Central Asia. Later, the territories of the Soviet Union countries in Europe and Central Asia were declared independent.

Historically, Kazakhstan has undergone significant political developments and movements aimed at achieving democratic governance. The country declared its independence from the Soviet Union and established its political system in 1991. Over the years, extensive discussions have revolved around Kazakhstan's political reforms, human rights issues, and its progress in democratization. What makes Kazakhstan particularly intriguing in the study of democracy is its uniqueness within the context of post-Soviet and communist Eurasian states. Kazakhstan, as the largest country in Central Asia, holds substantial historical and contemporary political significance, especially in its relations with Russia and influential nations such as China and the United States. It serves as both an economic and political hub in Central Asia. Moreover, Kazakhstan stands out as a culturally pluralistic society, comprising various ethnic groups, and it consistently ranks highest on the Human Development Index in the region. Kazakhstan actively engages in numerous international organizations, both regionally and globally, including the United Nations, World Trade Organization, Commonwealth of Independent States, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Eurasian Economic Union, Mutual Security Treaty Organization, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Turkish State Organization, and the International Ottoman Cultural Organization. These memberships showcase Kazakhstan's commitment to international cooperation and diplomacy.

Indeed, the distinctive aspects of Kazakhstan's democratic system, including its political regime, bureaucratic structures, tribalism, and associated challenges, offer valuable insights for scholarly exploration. Researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities and intricacies of democracy in a diverse and geopolitically important

nation like Kazakhstan within the broader context of post-Soviet and communist Eurasian states.

Research Objectives:

1. Study the status of Kazakhstan as a state of the former Soviet Union.
2. Analyze political and social change factors with the construction of Kazakhstan's democracy and state status of post-Soviet Eurasia.

Enhanced Scope of the Research:

The time scope of this research involves a comprehensive examination of political and social conditions both during and after the existence of the Soviet Union. The spatial extent corresponds to the temporal dimension by encompassing a detailed exploration of the political and societal dynamics in Eurasian countries that emerged as sovereign states following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The primary focus of this study will be on Kazakhstan, serving as a case study to draw pertinent insights and comparisons.

2. Scope of the Study in the Field of History between Kazakhstan and the Soviet Union

In the late 19th to early 20th centuries, Kazakhstan experienced significant social and economic changes as the Russian Empire introduced modern infrastructure, industries, and institutions. On one hand, Kazakhstan became a republic of the Soviet Union, which underwent significant industrialization and modernization under Soviet central planning. On the other hand, the Soviet era also brought policies of forced collectivization, purges, and deportations that had a lasting impact on Kazakh society. Kazakhstan declared independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Consequently, it began the transition to a market-oriented economy and a democratic system of government. In the modern period, Kazakhstan is a multicultural and multilingual country with a rich history and diverse population. Its economy is one of the largest in Central Asia, with significant natural resources such as oil, gas, and minerals. The country has also improved its human development indicators, including education, healthcare, and gender equality. Nevertheless, the challenges remain regarding political freedom, corruption, and social inequality (История РФ, 2013).

The accession of the Kazakh Zhuzh and the Central Asian states to Russia occurred under various domestic and foreign conditions. Strategic and economic interests, as well as a desire to counter British influence in the region, led to the expansion of the Russian Empire. The Tsarist government introduced administrative and political reforms that undermined traditional government systems and created a centralized bureaucracy to govern the region. It led to the displacement of nomadic populations and the settlement of Russian colonists in the area. The Russian government also pursued a colonialism policy, exploiting the region's resources and suppressing local cultures and traditions. The heritage of colonialization over the past continues to shape the political, social, and economic landscape of Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states until today (Qazaqstan Tarihi порталы, 2018).

The anti-Russian uprising is likely the 1916 Central Asian Revolt, also known as the Semirechye Revolt. It took place in several regions of the Russian Empire, including Kazakhstan. The conscription of Central Asian men sparked an uprising in the Russian army during World War I. The population's dissatisfaction with the Russian government's regional policies further intensified. Ultimately, the Russian army brutally suppressed the revolt, killing thousands of people, including civilians. Many Kazakhs and other Central Asians fled to China and Afghanistan to escape persecution by the Russian government. ("Kazakhstan profile," 2019). After the fall of the Russian Empire in 1917, the Soviet power started to set its roots in Kazakhstan. Soviet influence in Kazakhstan proceeded from the end of 1917 to March 1918. During the civil war, the warring parties divided the territory of Kazakhstan. The Red Army liberated the central part of Kazakhstan by the end of 1919. Later, during the last Kazakh civil war, the Northern Semirechensk Front was liquidated in March 1920. As a result, Soviet power was restored in the liberated territories. In July 1919, the Revolutionary Committee for the Management of the Kazakh Region (Kazrevk) was organized by the supporters of the Bolsheviks for the formation of the Kazakh Soviet Autonomy. It was necessary to resolve territorial disputes with the Siberian Revkom and the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSR). On August 26, 1920, under the authority of the Central Executive Committee and the Soviet Narodnykh Komissarov or Sovnarkom (SNK, or Council of People's Commissars), the government of the early Soviet Republic adopted a decree signed by Kalinin and Lenin on the formation of an Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic in Central Asia, Kazakhstan. It served as part of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). The territory of the country

acquired its modern outlines in 1924 after including the boundary of Central Asia, the Zhetysu, or Jeti-Suu (in Kazakh Жетісу) (Semirechensk region) and Syrdarya provinces in its composition. It took time to establish the city, and state institutions only moved to the new capital in 1929. In the next five years, pavements and sidewalks were laid in Alma-Ata, followed by theaters, canteens and restaurants, hotels, baths, and clubs. The city became an economic and cultural center (СВЯТОСЛАВ АНТОНОВ, 2017).

Notably, Soviet influence on Kazakhstan was intense in the late 1920s due to the integration policies pursued by the Soviet government. The purpose was to unite each household, ignoring the realities of Kazakh life, the forced immigration of the homeless population, and the ensuing drought from 1931 to 1932. As a result, it caused the worst famine in the country's history with 1.5 million deaths and approximately 200,000 emigrants to neighboring Iran, China, and Afghanistan (Bruckbauer, 1994). At the same time, the Soviet government's campaign to eradicate illiteracy across the country was a particular priority for Kazakhstan. Moreover, in the 1930s and 1940s, the vast but sparsely populated territory of Kazakhstan became the central refuge for all citizens deported by the Soviet authorities, including Poles and Ukrainians from Western Ukraine, China, and Korea, in the Russian Far East from Sakhalin and Primorye, Germans from the Volga region and many others. The acquittal and homecoming of the deportees began after the Soviet leader Stalin's death in 1953 (Rozin, 2022). In 1953, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev started the Virgin Lands project. It attempted to bring Kazakhstan's agriculture into an economic and industrial base. In the aftermath of World War II, the Kazakh SSR continued to develop as the significant financial center of the Soviet Union for these reasons:

1. The Virgin Lands campaign launched by Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev in the late 1950s aimed to cultivate millions of hectares of previously unused land in Kazakhstan and other regions of the Soviet Union. It involved the construction of dozens of new cities and the development of infrastructure such as roads, irrigation systems, and power plants.

2. Kazakhstan's geographic location and terrain made it an ideal site for the Baikonur Cosmodrome. The leading launch site for Soviet and Russian space missions was established in 1955 and launched from Baikonur. It was the first crewed spaceflight in history by Yuri Gagarin.

3. The testing of the first Soviet atomic bomb took place in Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan, in 1949. The experiment site was chosen in the country's northeastern part

due to its isolated location and sparse population. The experiment significantly impacted the environment and health of the locals, who were unaware of the potential dangers of radiation exposure.

4. Kazakhstan's culture developed during the early days of the Soviet Union but later declined. Thus, Nikita Khrushchev's efforts to promote internationalization and weaken Kazakh culture became controversial in the Kazakh SSR (Olcott, 2011). As a call for Russification, Russian doctrine was the rule of the Soviet Union.

3. The Soviet Rule and Russian Rule Approaches Affected Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan was the last of the Soviet republics to secede from the USSR, declaring independence on December 16, 1991. Russianism, or Sovettik, was replaced with Kazakh or Kenestik in 1992. Later, it was applied to historical names as a federal republic that was part of the USSR. It was the second-largest territory after the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). Many people of Kazakhstan still remember Soviet rule, and most people in the country are still directly linked to the past. For this reason, the citizens of that country, Kazakhstan, are inseparable from Russian interests in Central Asia.

The use of Russian national symbols in Soviet propaganda began to emerge in the late 1920s. Indeed, it took more work to mobilize illiterate peasants to defend the proletarian homeland solely based on the slogans of Marxism-Leninism. Many argue that Soviet rule was an ideology of the USSR, which referred to mass culture and the formation of Russian national identity from 1931 to 1956. Some Russian Historians utilize the term "Russocentrism" instead of nationalism. The idea emphasized the role of the Russian people in the creation of the Great Russian Empire. It gradually grew into the USSR since peasants absorbed the populist propaganda with three classes of education quickly. The strategy helped mobilize Russians for various constructive and defensive activities. The policy of Russocentrism was further adjusted after the war. Obviously, the propaganda of Russocentrism added to the cult of war in the end. In brief, in the mid-1940s, "Russification plus the cult of war." The Soviet leader, Stalin, who was not a Russian nationalist, cited that Russocentrism was used to mobilize peasants for labor and military exploits. Still, he crushed attempts at political self-organization in the interests of the Russian nation from the roots.

The Soviet Union was a multinational state with a complex and diverse set of cultures, languages, and identities. While the Russian language and culture dominated Soviet society and politics, it is inaccurate to say that the USSR was merely a continuation of Russian rule. In the case of Kazakhstan, the country has a rich and diverse cultural heritage that combines both Kazakh and Russian languages, culture, and traditions. While the Kazakh language has been recognized as the country's official language since its independence, Russian continues to be widely spoken and used in many spheres of public life, particularly in urban areas. There are debates and tensions around Russian language and culture use in Kazakhstan. The diverse opinion undermines the country's national identity and independence. However, it is essential to recognize that Kazakhstan has taken steps to promote and protect the use of its language through education, media, and government policies. It is crucial to approach the discussion of language and culture in Kazakhstan and the post-Soviet region with respect for the complex histories and identities (Olcott, 2011).

After gaining independence in 1991, Kazakhstan faced many challenges, including economic restructuring and political reforms. The country adopted a market economy and introduced various reforms to promote democracy and human rights. The government took measures to promote national identity and revive the Kazakh language and culture, which were suppressed during the Soviet era. Kazakhstan has also played a significant role in regional and international affairs. It has actively promoted peace and stability in the region, particularly in Afghanistan. The country has also worked to strengthen its relations with neighboring countries, including Russia and China, while maintaining ties with the West. Kazakhstan has made considerable progress since gaining independence but still faces many challenges. The government continues to work towards improving its economy, promoting democracy and human rights, and maintaining stability in a complex geopolitical environment (О государственной независимости Республики Казахстан, 1991).

The democratization of Kazakh society is a necessary condition to form an influential foreign policy doctrine to avoid Russian rule. Despite its short formation period, Kazakhstani society's democratization process has a precise stage of qualitative transformation. *"Building democracy in the new arena of Kazakhstan - the rapid development of a liberal democratic society."* The President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Abishuly Nazarbayev, gave a speech at a joint meeting of the Parliament of the Republic

of Kazakhstan on May 16, 2007, entitled *“Building democracy in the new arena of Kazakhstan - the rapid development of a liberal democratic society.”* During the period of the democratization process in the Republic of Kazakhstan, in the first period from 1991 to 1995, and from the period of genuine independence to the adoption of the sovereign Constitution of Kazakhstan, primary attention was paid to overcoming the process of decay, which overcoming is the basis of Kazakhstani statehood. The transition from a one-party dictatorship system to political pluralism laid the foundation for the development of democracy. The principles of economics and politics were fully justified. Henceforth, the core of political reform in Kazakhstan has been the fundamental elements of democratization and political liberalization.

4. Analysis of The Democratic Processes in Kazakhstan after the Soviet Union Era

Central Asian countries faced challenges in transitioning from the Soviet system to the new democratic system due to a lack of experience and infrastructure, as well as the influence of authoritarian leaders. Kazakhstan, for example, has been led by Nursultan Nazarbayev, who has been accused of suppressing political opposition and manipulating elections since 1991. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have also been criticized for their authoritarian regimes and human rights abuses. In addition, corruption is the prime contributor to business and political issues. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, all five Central Asian countries are poorly ranked, with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan among the most corrupt countries in the world. Despite these challenges, the region has made some efforts toward democratization and modernization. For instance, Kazakhstan has implemented reforms to improve transparency and reduce corruption. Uzbekistan's new leader, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the 2nd President of Uzbekistan in office in 2018, has implemented a policy to open the country and improve human rights. Nonetheless, there is still a long way toward achieving full democracy and addressing the issues of corruption and authoritarian rule in Central Asia (World Regional Geography, 2011).

Figure 2

Central Asia, Formerly Part of the Soviet Union



The situation of the relations of the former Soviet Union countries worsens every year, starting in Central Asia. The circumstances in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have constantly changed, especially on democratic or semi-democratic political developments. Despite this fact, the regime in each country has become increasingly authoritarian in the past few years. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan had strong rulers from the beginning. The only “clear example” is Tajikistan, in which part of the opposition has come to form the government. The role of non-governmental groups has expanded in recent years. The main reason democracy is not developing in Central Asia is the different leaders. As a result, one of the primary focuses of the movement by the people is activity related to cultural and religious expression. Even though this region was part of the Soviet Union, religious activity was not encouraged. Islam remains the dominant religion; the majority of Muslims in Central Asia are Sunnis (Алексей Малащенко, 2013) who have influenced the history, language, and culture of Kazakhstan. It has a great impact on social movements. The original people of Kazakhstan are part of the legacy of the Mongol and Turkic people who migrated to Central Asia around 1200 AD. The expansion of the Russian Empire under the tsar united Kazakhstan and its neighbors. It made their transition easier as the tsarist system of the Russian government opened the way for the Soviet Union. The influx of Russian people and culture had a massive impact on Kazakhstan. Democratization of Kazakhstan after the end of Soviet rule, the traditional division among the ethnic Kazakhs,

known as the Horde¹ or Hordeism², has added a new dimension to Kazakh politics. More people are migrating to the ancestral regions or the roots of the Horde in the democratic dynamics of Kazakhstan today.

Democratic transformations in the post-Soviet space at the turn of the century opened incomparably broader opportunities for the actual participation of the people in political processes. The number and political authority of parties and mass movements have increased in socio-political life. For the first time in many years, citizens began to have a real influence on power and management decision-making in several ways. The collapse of the USSR and the emergence of newly independent states actualized the study of the theory of democracy in political science, the main components of which are pluralism, participation (or participation democracy), markets, plebiscites, representation, et cetera. (Нурымбетова, 2014). The future stability of Kazakhstan depends on the success of its economic reforms and the fact that the government can help the most impoverished people meet the minimum standard of living. Unrest in neighboring countries will affect foreign investment opportunities in Kazakhstan. Thus, the country's diversified economy may depend more on oil, gas development, oil pipelines, and pipeline policies. Then again, economic development is the best recipe for Kazakhstan's success and eventual development of a civilian and pluralist society. (Olcott, 2000).

Kazakhstan has raised its democracy in the post-Soviet era. Kazakhstan's politics can offer valuable insights and knowledge about democratic studies in the context of post-Soviet/communist Eurasian states for several reasons. There are some key points to consider about Kazakhstan's democracy today and its uniqueness:

¹ The term "horde" was initially used to describe the military encampments of these nomadic empires. Still, it later came to refer more broadly to these societies' political and social organization. The political structure of the hordes was often highly centralized, with a powerful ruler or Khan at the top who held absolute power and made all significant decisions. The economy was primarily based on pastoralism, with the nomads raising and herding livestock. The legacy of hordes can still be shown in the cultural and political traditions of many Central Asian countries today, including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

² Hordeism generally refers to the political and social system of the nomadic empires in Central Asia and Eastern Europe, such as the Mongol Empire, Golden Horde, and Timurid Empire. These empires were characterized by their highly mobile, cavalry-based armies and their ability to conquer and control vast territories.

1. Unique Historical Background: Kazakhstan's historical background sets it apart from other post-Soviet states. It was the last of the Soviet republics to declare independence in 1991. This delay in independence provides a distinct perspective on the transition from a communist regime to a democratic system, offering insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by states with different timelines of independence.

2. Presidential System: Kazakhstan is known for its robust presidential system of governance. Nursultan Nazarbayev, the first President of Kazakhstan, held power for nearly three decades. His leadership style and power consolidation shaped the country's political landscape. Likewise, it is the legacy of leadership power from the Soviet Union period.

3. Transition of Power: Nursultan Nazarbayev resigned as President in 2019, and Kassym-Jomart Tokayev became his successor. Nazarbayev gave up his remaining powers as the head of the Security Council and the leader of the ruling party during the violent disruption in early January 2022. Consequently, his relatives lost many influential positions in government and state companies. It marked a significant step in de-Nazarbayevification by introducing new leadership.

4. Managed Democracy: Kazakhstan is often described as a form of “managed democracy”. This term suggests that while there are elections and some democratic institutions, the government retains control over political processes. Critics argue that the power limits genuine political competition and pluralism.

5. Political Dominance of Nur Otan: The Nur Otan party, led by President Nursultan Nazarbayev, has maintained a dominant position in Kazakhstan's political landscape. It has raised questions about how opposition parties can effectively challenge the ruling party. There is a rebranding of the Nur Otan party in Kazakhstan. It is currently known

as the “Amanat” party³. Rebranding of political parties can affect the country’s political landscape and democratic processes. Significant development could reflect party platform changes, leadership, or goals.

6. International Relations: Kazakhstan's foreign policy is marked by a balance between East and West, maintaining ties with both Russia and China and Western countries. Its approach to international relations and diplomacy in a turbulent region can offer lessons on the role of external actors in shaping democratic transitions.

7. Economic Growth and Stability: Since gaining independence, Kazakhstan has achieved significant economic growth and stability. This economic progress has influenced the country's political dynamics and its approach to democracy. The government's ability to provide economic development has often been a factor in maintaining its legitimacy.

8. Media and Freedom of Expression: The media environment in Kazakhstan has been a subject of debate, with concerns about press freedom and independent journalism. Media outlets are often criticized for their alignment with government interests.

9. Ethnic and Cultural Diversity: Kazakhstan is ethnically and culturally diverse, with a significant population of ethnic Russians, Kazakhs, and various minority groups. Studying how the government manages ethnic relations and promotes inclusivity can be instructive for understanding the complexities of democracy in multi-ethnic states.

10. Modernization Efforts: The Kazakh government has committed to modernization and political reform. It includes enhancing the rule of law, improving human rights conditions, and strengthening democratic institutions. Political developments can change

³ Kazakhstan’s ruling Nur Otan party voted to rename itself Amanat. The change shifts the party name from “Light of the Fatherland” to “Legacy” and underscores the ongoing trend of de-Nazarbayevification that began in earnest after the January unrest. “De-Nazarbayevification” refers to reducing or removing the influence, legacy, and political dominance of Nursultan Nazarbayev, the long-serving first President of Kazakhstan, from the country’s political landscape. This term is often used to describe efforts to transition Kazakhstan from a solid presidential system that had been established during Nazarbayev’s rule, to creating a more balanced and pluralistic political environment. The concept of “De-Nazarbayevification” encompasses a range of political, institutional, and symbolic changes that aim to lessen the concentration of power associated with Nazarbayev’s presidency. Limited Opposition: Opposition parties in Kazakhstan have faced challenges, including restrictions on their activities, access to media, and participation in elections. It has led to concerns about political pluralism and freedom of expression.

quickly. The unique situation of Kazakhstan has largely determined the direction of the democratic journey.

There are adjustments and additions. Kazakhstan's political evolution offers a rich array of experiences and challenges that can deepen our understanding of democratic studies in the context of post-Soviet/communist Eurasian states. By examining its unique historical trajectory, political institutions, economic development, and multicultural society, researchers and scholars can gain valuable insights into the complexities of democratization in this region.

According to anti-government protests in Kazakhstan from 2018 to 2022, the Common Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) promised to send peacekeeping troops to Kazakhstan to ensure its stability. Yet, the citizens of Kazakhstan are dissatisfied with their government because they wanted Kazakhstan out of Russia and Putin's influence. Coupled with Kazakhstan's dictatorial government, they encourage people to demand real democracy and political reform (Libman, 2012). In 2022, the largest protests in history were among the Central Asian states. Most of Kazakhstan avoids the instability of other neighboring states. The former Soviet areas, such as Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, underwent with economic reforms and a repressive dictatorship led by President Nazarbayev. Despite the post-Soviet economic uncertainty, ethnic segregation, and Islamic extremism, the government of Nazarbayev and its successors did not tolerate conflict. Human rights groups have consequently accused them of not being democratic. In addition, many of the country's economic interests are concentrated in the hands of a small elite. Overcoming these problems alone is not easy. Nevertheless, the significant threat to the Kazakh protesters may come from the northern border.

Tokaev, the new president of Kazakhstan, has announced a rapid transition - a transition to a "new" political regime. Previously, the political power of Kazakhstan in the Nazarbayev era provided a different kind of democracy and various types of dictatorships. The Nazarbayev regime was a modern authoritarian regime accepting some formal democratic institutions. With openness to markets and simultaneous integration into the international economic sphere, this informal regime contributed to the so-called new patronage system (Rozin, 2022). In other words, the political elite and the economy were connected in a single hierarchy. Tokayev will not tolerate the cult of a similar model. However, the system will not be patronized or economically diversified. With the financial and industrial groups losing power over the political machine, it is impossible. Currently,

the protests in Kazakhstan pose another challenge to Putin's network of allies in the former Soviet Union. It is a part of the more significant trend challenging Russian regional influence. Euromaidan protests in Ukraine, Belarus and the Armenian-Azerbaijan War are all examples of this trend. Putin's political system is facing increasing pressure while countries in the region try to assert their independence and resist Russian influence. These developments significantly impacted Russia's foreign policy and relations with its neighbors in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Various international organizations are constantly criticizing Kazakhstan regarding promoting democratic values. It states the country's greatest weakness. The representative branch of government is compared to the executive: a low-authority parliament, inactive deputies, restrictions on elections, and weak competition between parties. The opportunities for a civil activist and a deputy are slightly different. There is usually the same alternative within a political party. These are all interesting points about the role of direct democracy, civil society, and political parties in Kazakhstan. Here are some possible further elaborations or explanations for each issue:

1. The rise of direct democracy can challenge the authority of elected representatives and traditional political parties, allowing citizens to participate directly in decision-making. It leads to polarization and division among the population, since different groups have divergent interests and opinions.

2. Direct democracy tools comprise referendums, citizen initiatives, public hearings, and online platforms for feedback and petitions. These strategies allow citizens to express their views, hold officials accountable, and influence policies. However, they also require adequate resources, expertise, and coordination and only reflect the broader public interest.

3. Civil society activists, such as NGOs, media, and experts, serve as bridges between citizens and politicians. For instance, they can provide information, advocacy, and feedback on public issues. Moreover, it is possible to mobilize public opinion, monitor government performance, and provide alternative policy proposals. Likewise, they may face various constraints, such as legal restrictions, funding shortages, and political pressure.

4. Open government technologies, such as e-governance, open data, and transparency portals enhance citizen participation, accountability, and innovation in public services. They can reduce corruption, inefficiency, and bureaucracy in government.

Still, it requires digital skills, access, and trust among the users, which only addresses the needs and priorities of marginalized or vulnerable groups.

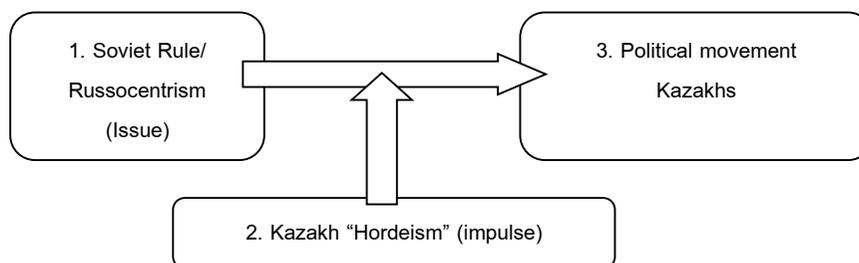
5. Deputies or elected representatives are mandated to represent their constituents by making collective decisions on their behalf. If they are actively responsive, they will be able to retain their legitimacy and trust among the public. Indeed, engaging with various stakeholders requires knowledge to balance competing interests and uphold democratic values.

6. Political parties can provide a platform for citizens to express their political preferences and compete for power. However, if they are weak, fragmented, or ideologically narrow, they may be unable to represent diverse social interests and perspectives effectively. It is necessary to promote internal democracy, transparency, and accountability and foster a culture of political participation and civic education.

7. Civil society can be critical in shaping public policy, monitoring government performance, and promoting democratic values and human rights. However, it requires active citizens committed to engaging, organizing, and participating in various forms of collective action. Creating an enabling environment that respects freedom of expression, association, and assembly and provides resources and support for civil society actors is necessary to promote civil society.

While direct democracy tools and civil society activism are practical, representative power and political parties still play a crucial role in shaping policy and governing the country. Direct democracy tools such as referendums or petitions are the solutions suitable for specific issues. However, they may only be ideal for some types of policymaking or decision-making (Жупарова, 2011). Additionally, political parties should provide a broader platform for representing various groups' interests and formulating policy platforms based on multiple issues. Representative power and political parties also provide a mechanism for accountability and oversight of government officials. Elected representatives are accountable to their constituents, and political parties hold representatives responsible for the party's platform and values. In addition, political parties should provide a mechanism for organizing and mobilizing citizens around a shared vision and goals.

Therefore, while direct democracy tools and civil society activism can be helpful for specific issues, they cannot replace the need for representative power and political parties as an essential component of governance and decision-making.

Figure 3*Conceptual framework of the research*

The conceptual framework of the research (Fig. 3) shows political expression in Kazakhstan in the present. It gives value to Kazakhstan's political and social building projects that were formerly within the framework of the Soviet Union. The so-called Soviet Rule was a Soviet-style state system established from 1917 to 1991. The mechanism created a satellite state with the Soviet-Russian concept at its core, including language and culture.

1. Soviet Rule or Russocentrism was imposed on Soviet satellite states and states associated with the Soviet system. As in Central Asia, Kazakhstan was a leader state in Central Asia that was annexed as the Kazakh Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic on 10 July 1919 and became the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic on 5 December 1936. The Soviet control method was introduced as a strict political and social control mechanism. It resulted in a gap between the Slavic leadership and the local Kazakh Turkic population. It included using the Central Committee of the Communist Party mechanism for administrative control. In this case, Russocentrism refers to a cultural, social, or political orientation that strongly emphasized Russian culture, language, and influence. Kazakhstan has a significant Russian-speaking population due to its history as a part of the Soviet Union. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, many ethnic Russians remained in Kazakhstan, contributing to the country's cultural diversity. The Russian doctrine is central to contemporary Kazakhstan, which aims to balance promoting one's own Kazakh cultural identity and ensuring the rights of different ethnic groups. Russian policies have been developed to support the use of the Kazakh language and promote Kazakh culture while acknowledging the linguistic and cultural diversity within the country.

However, there is discussion and debate on issues related to language, culture, and identity in Kazakhstan. These conversations address the concerns about the prominence of the Russian language and culture in the country, especially in areas with a large Russian-speaking population. It is essential to consider that these conversations are complex and multifaceted. While some individuals and communities may express concerns about Russian centralism, others appreciate Kazakhstan's multiculturalism and the participation of various ethnic groups in the country's development.

The collapse of the Soviet Union made more evident the traditional division between various ethnic groups known in Kazakhstan.

2. The “Kazakh Hordeism” (Kazakh Hordeism) influenced Kazakh politics with the restoration of Kazakh ethnicity to Kazakhstan. “Hordeism” refers to a concept related to the historical nomadic confederation known as the Golden Horde, a part of the Mongol Empire. It controlled a vast territory in the 13th and 14th centuries. If “Kazakh Hordeism” is the ideology of nationalism, is it the term coined more recently? It probably is related to a cultural or historical movement within Kazakhstan. The Great Horde has come to overshadow the others in Kazakh politics. Since independence, many Kazakhs have advocated “*Kazakhstan for the Kazakhs*”, generating complaints from the non-Kazakh population that there is a Kazakh nationalization of administrative structures. The relegation of Russian to a “language of interethnic communication”⁴ has generated the most tension between Russian and Kazakh speakers. According to Aleksandra Dokuchayeva, leader of the Democratic Progress Party, the language issue causes a split in Kazakhstan's society. Under Kazakh presidents Kunayev and later Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan eventually reached “ethnic equilibrium” through the gradual emigration and decline of Russian speakers, and higher birth rates among ethnic Kazakhs. (United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, 1994). The issue is connected to nationalist ideas in Kazakhstan, which are related to three different types of nationalist movements:

⁴ One legacy of Soviet (and tsarist) rule in Kazakhstan has been ethnic tensions wrought by the immigration (voluntary and involuntary) of non-Kazakhs into Kazakh territory. Coupled with Soviet policies, which caused mass starvation among Kazakhs, the immigration of Russian speakers to Kazakhstan caused the proportion of ethnic Kazakhs in the population to plummet, making them a minority in their own country. In the post-World War II years, Russians became the ethnic majority in Kazakhstan.

1) unity merges culturally similar lands; 2) separation splits off culturally distinct groups; and 3) state-building binds separate cultures into one.

3. The political movement of the Kazakhs. There is a process of demanding freedom. Indeed, the primary purpose is to defend the prior power system with Russian patronage. Nursultan Nazarbayev, Nursultan Nazarbayev, the long-standing president in power since the end of the Soviet Union there is increasing awareness of the movement of people regarding Kazakh identity and roots. The union of the Kazakh Hordeism with the Kazakh Democratic Movement (as in Fig. 3) is one of the political movements in Kazakhstan supported by opposition groups and civil society activists. It is driving the reformations in Kazakhstan's current political system. "Kazakh Hordeism" is not recognized or commonly discussed in mainstream historical or academic literature. The phrase has emerged and gained attention because it could be a specialized term used within a specific educational or research context. The movement was democratic and eventually led to Nazarbayev's resignation and the government's efforts to implement reforms that the public viewed as misguided and inadequate (Алексей Малашенко, 2013). The political activism events in Kazakhstan have been compared to the situation in Ukraine to remove Russian influence. It is interesting to see whether Kazakhstan needs Russia or not. Kazakhstan does not want to risk its relationship with Russia, but its development directly depends on the war's outcome in Ukraine. Over the past 15 years, Russia has countered its two neighbors, Georgia, and Ukraine. Now, Moscow wants to maintain its sphere of influence again to make its neighbors part of the Russian orbit as it did during the Soviet Warsaw Pact era. In conjunction with the Russian president's policy, relations between Kazakhstan and Russia are very close. There are also fears that the Russian reaction will undermine Kazakhstan's interests and economic impact.

The researcher views that parts of Kazakh society have increasingly turned against Russia since 2014. This was due to the Ukrainian crisis, and various provocative statements by Russian politicians fueled fears of a possible infringement of Kazakhstan's territorial sovereignty. Toqaev appears less inclined than his predecessor to praise the Eurasian Economic Union. Sinophobe sentiments are also widespread among the Kazakh population. Fearful that Chinese companies would take over large swathes of agricultural land, the controversial land reform project in 2016 was aborted, followed by widespread controversy and protests. In addition, due to its geographical location, Kazakhstan had no choice but to continue traveling between the neighboring countries, Russia, and China.

However, its relations with the two were declining regarding the situation. While the United States is mainly unrelated to the region, the EU plays an economic role. The EU will likely implant itself into a more assertive regional actor in the future, although this is still uncertain.

Meanwhile, tensions regarding land ownership in foreign investment, the Eurasian Economic Union, and many others still exist. Of course, there must be many pitfalls in Kazakhstan's leadership. Not to mention there is also growing dissatisfaction resulting from the pandemic during COVID-19. Endemic corruption limits reforms, and the economy heavily depends on petrochemical market prices. In comparison, political change continues to stall as the traditional elite holds power in the country, openly and behind the scenes. External relations become more complex and develop in ways the government does not intend. Notably, Kazakhstan does not benefit from Russian sanctions. There is no gain from the need to find a way to send gas and oil to Europe via Russia. Still, Kazakhstan cannot reject Russia's initiative at any time, primarily since it does not openly support Russia concerning Ukraine. It is the essence of Kazakhstan's multilateral foreign policy: friendship with world powers—critical international organizations in which the states are recognized as friends and partners. Kazakhstan has more than thirty years of experience with Russia since its independence. Due to war, the situation became more severe, and it is not new.

It is important to note that the path to democracy is unique to each country, and the specific steps needed for Kazakhstan will depend on its historical, cultural, and social context. A successful transition to democracy requires strong leadership, public support, and a commitment to democratic principles by all stakeholders. Additionally, the process may encounter challenges and setbacks that must be addressed with patience and determination. Here are some suggestions that could contribute to establishing democracy and modern political conditions in Kazakhstan:

Rule of Law and Human Rights: Strengthen the rule of law by ensuring an independent judiciary, transparent legal processes, and protection of human rights. Developing and enforcing ordinances will defend the citizens' rights, including freedom of speech, assembly, and media.

Political Participation: Encourage active political participation by creating an inclusive environment for political parties, civil society organizations, and independent

media. Promoting fair and free elections at all levels of government will encourage competitive campaigns and transparent voting processes.

Constitutional Reforms: Review and revise the Constitution to ensure that it guarantees the separation of powers, checks and balances, and the rights of citizens. Ensure that the constitution reflects the country's diverse cultural and ethnic composition.

Decentralization: Consider a system that allows for the devolution of power, empowering local governments, and communities to make decisions that affect their regions.

Transparency and Accountability: Implement mechanisms for transparency in government operations, including budget allocations and public policy decisions. Establish systems to hold elected officials and public servants accountable for their actions.

Civil Society Empowerment: Support the growth of civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, and advocacy groups that can hold the government accountable and voice citizens' concerns.

Education and Civic Engagement: Promote civic education that informs citizens about their rights, responsibilities, and the functioning of a democratic society. Encourage open debates and discussions on important social and political issues.

Economic Development and Diversification: Pursue economic policies that promote diversification and sustainable growth, reducing dependency on specific sectors. Financial stability can contribute to a more stable political environment and better living standards for citizens.

Ethnic and Cultural Harmony: Emphasize and promote interethnic and intercultural dialogue to build a sense of national unity and pride while respecting the diversity of Kazakhstan's population.

International Engagement: Collaborate with international organizations and partners to receive support, expertise, and best practices in building democratic institutions and practices.

Gradual Approach: Recognize that democratization is a gradual process and may require incremental changes to avoid destabilizing the country.

5. Conclusion

Kazakhstan is a multiethnic and multicultural country, and the government has been working to promote national unity and inclusiveness since its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. However, there have been tensions and challenges in the country's efforts to balance the interests and rights of different ethnic groups. The "Kazakhstan for Kazakhs" campaign is a controversial issue that has been debated and criticized by some for promoting ethnic nationalism and exclusionary policies. The government has emphasized that the campaign is not meant to discriminate against non-Kazakh citizens but rather to promote the rights and interests of Kazakh citizens. Regarding the increase in the number of Kazakh officials, it is essential to note that this may reflect the government's efforts to increase the representation of Kazakh citizens in leadership positions. Still, it is also vital to ensure that non-Kazakh citizens have equal opportunities for employment and advancement. Promoting diversity, inclusiveness, and equal opportunities for all citizens is essential for building Kazakhstan's stable and prosperous society. It is important to acknowledge that historical injustices and discrimination against ethnic Kazakhs have existed and may have contributed to the government's affirmative action policy. However, ensuring that such policies are implemented fairly and do not lead to discrimination against non-Kazakh citizens is also essential. The traditional division between ethnic Kazakhs known as "hordes" has been a factor in Kazakh politics, and the influence of the Great Horde in political employment and service has been reported. It is important to note that President Nazarbaev's membership in the Great Horde and reports of favoritism do not necessarily represent the views or practices of the entire government or society. The government must promote inclusiveness, equal opportunities, and fair representation of all ethnic groups in public office and politics to build Kazakhstan's harmonious and prosperous society.

Concerning democracy in Kazakhstan, despite the existence of a multi-party system, Kazakhstan has been criticized for lacking genuine political competition and freedom of expression. The ruling party, Nur Otan, dominates the political landscape, and opposition parties struggle to gain a foothold. Furthermore, media freedom is limited, and civil society needs to be stronger. The government has been accused of suppressing political dissent, including using force. Modern political conditions in Kazakhstan have seen significant advancements in economic development between 2000 and 2013, albeit

with a temporary slowdown in 2008-2009 attributable to the global financial crisis. The country has also pursued a diversification policy to reduce its reliance on its natural resources sector. However, corruption remains a significant challenge, with Kazakhstan ranking poorly in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. Regarding foreign policy, Kazakhstan has sought to establish itself as a regional leader, particularly in the Central Asian region. The country has played a significant role in mediating conflicts and promoting regional stability, including in Afghanistan. The current relationship between Russia and Kazakhstan has a long history of close political, economic, and cultural ties.

Furthermore, Kazakhstan is often seen as Russia's closest ally in Central Asia. During the conflict in Ukraine in 2022, Russia relied on support from Kazakhstan to prepare for an invasion. However, Kazakhstan has not directly criticized Russia. Furthermore, their relationship has mostly stayed the same. It is also true that Russia has a history of promoting friendly political regimes in Central Asia. Pressing Kazakhstan to support a war or break with the West could weaken its current leadership and strengthen nationalist or democratic movements. Relations between Russia and Kazakhstan are complex and multifaceted. Moreover, any changes or developments depend on numerous factors and events in the region.

The authors focus on the remaining significant challenges, especially regarding democracy and human rights at present that changed from the Soviet era after the 1990s. The Kazakhstan government has been criticized for cracking down on political opposition and restricting press freedom. However, the country's progress in decentralizing its economy and its efforts to promote stability in the region will likely see notable increases in the future.

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