

Protest Mobilisation and Democratisation in Kazakhstan (1992 – 2009)

Nurseit Niyazbekov

St. Antony's College

University of Oxford

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Abstract

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This thesis consists of two objectives which divide it into two parts. Thus, part one explores the cyclicity of protest mobilisation in post-Soviet Kazakhstan in the 1992–2009 period and part two investigates the relationship between protest mobilisation and democratisation in the 1990s, a decade marked by early progress in democratisation followed by an abrupt reversal to authoritarianism.

Acknowledging the existence of numerous competing explanations of protest cyclicity, the first part of this study utilises four major social movement perspectives – relative deprivation (RD), resource mobilisation (RMT), political opportunity structures (POS) and collective action frames (CAF) – to explain variances in protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan over time and four issue areas. Adopting a small-N case study and process-tracing technique, the thesis's first research question enquires into which of these four theoretical perspectives has the best fit when seeking to explain protest cyclicity over time. It is hypothesised that the 'waxing and waning' of protest activity can best be attributed to the difficulties surrounding the identification and construction of resonant CAFs. However, the study's findings lead to a rejection of the first hypothesis by deemphasising the role of CAFs in predicting protest cyclicity, and instead support the theoretical predictions of the POS perspective, suggesting the prevalence of structural factors such as the regime's capacity for repression and shifts in elite alignments. The second research question revolves around variations in protest mobilisation across four issue areas and explores the reasons why socioeconomic grievances mobilised more people to protest than environmental, political and interethnic ones. According to the second hypothesis, people more readily protest around socioeconomic rather than political and other types of grievances due to the lower costs of participation in socioeconomic protests. While the regime's propensity for repressing political protests could explain the prevalence of socioeconomic protests in the 2000s, the POS perspective's key explanatory variable failed to account for the prevalence of socioeconomic protests in the early 1990s, resulting in the rejection of the second hypothesis.

The second part of the thesis attempts to answer the third research question: How does protest mobilisation account for the stalled transition to democracy in Kazakhstan in the 1990s? Based on the theoretical assumption that instances of extensive protest mobilisation foster democratic transitions, the study's third research hypothesis posits that transition to democracy in Kazakhstan stalled in the mid-1990s due to the failure of social movement organisations to effectively mobilise the masses for various acts of protest. This assumption receives strong empirical support, suggesting that protest mobilisation is an important facilitative factor in the democratisation process.

The thesis is the first to attempt to employ classical social movement theories in the context of post-communist Central Asian societies. Additionally, the study aims to contribute to the large pool of democratisation literature which, until recently (following the colour revolutions), seemed to underplay the role of popular protest mobilisation in advancing transitions to democracy. Finally, the research is based on the author's primary elite-interview data and content analysis of five weekly independent newspapers.

Acknowledgements

My inspiration for writing this thesis stems from an earlier work that I submitted in 2005 in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Sociology at the University of Oxford. Exploring ‘Voting Behaviour in Kazakhstan’ it focused on factors influencing citizens’ decision to vote or abstain in parliamentary and presidential elections. Being a citizen of Kazakhstan, I was not surprised to find that one of the major reasons explaining voter absenteeism was related to voters’ distrust of elections and a popularly shared belief in the public’s inability to influence power and politics. Witnessing a series of social upheavals in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005), it was then that I – like many other political observers and scholars – came to be puzzled by a question: if stolen elections in these countries mobilised thousands of people for non-violent protests that ultimately toppled authoritarian regimes, why is it that the citizens of Kazakhstan were so indifferent to the regime’s rigging of elections and consequent violation of individuals’ civil rights? The answer to this question was not a simple one. It required an exploration of the ‘nuts and bolts’ of citizens’ protest behaviour as well as its relation to the lack of democracy in Kazakhstan. The product of this years’ long exploration is this thesis.

During my doctorate I was often asked by foreigners, my compatriots and even my elite interviewees: “Why are you studying such a sensitive topic? Aren’t you afraid of repercussions?” I soon got used to tackling this type of question by saying: “those *doing* politics should be afraid; I am just *studying* it”. In emphasising my purely scholarly interest in the topic of my research, by no means do I intend to stay away from everything political and turn a blind eye to the deficit of democracy in Kazakhstan. As Alan Moore, author of *V for Vendetta*, wrote: “People shouldn’t be afraid of their government. Governments should be afraid of their people”. Thus, I believe in the people’s power to hold politicians accountable and ensure observance of human and civil rights. I teach my undergraduate Political Science students that democracy is not a single culminating event but a process and a journey (Rausch 2012), and one which cannot be imagined without citizens’ active involvement in politics.

Several years ago, I found it hard to imagine ever completing this thesis. Many tens of thousands of words, numerous travels between Oxford and Almaty and weeks of procrastination later, I am finally able to thank those who helped me finish. It goes without saying that the most important person in this is my supervisor, Professor Stephen Whitefield, who I sincerely thank for the many insightful comments along the way as well as for being extremely supportive in general.

Another very important person is my wife, Aigerim. Words really cannot express all the loving support that I have been given and the gratitude that I feel. I owe a lot to her patience, understanding and invigoration, which kept me going throughout all these years. My daughter, Sameera, who is younger than this thesis, does not yet understand how she inspired her father to complete this work. I sincerely hope, however, that one day she will choose to study at her dad’s *alma mater*.

It is hard to overestimate the heartfelt support and encouragement that I received from my parents, which has made everything so easy for me. I am deeply grateful to them for their moral support, guidance and inspiration, and I proudly dedicate this thesis to them.

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I would also like to thank my examiners at Oxford, Dr Paul Chaisty, Dr Petra Schleiter, Dr Alex Pravda and Professor Jan Zielonka, for their helpful suggestions and encouraging comments. I also wish to acknowledge the valuable feedback I have received at a number of seminars, workshops and conferences.

Turning to Kazakhstan, my fieldwork benefited a lot from a number of individuals who devoted their time and effort to helping me gain access to data. Thus, I am very grateful to Ainur Usanova and Dimash Alzhanov for sharing their elite contacts. My unique protest database is indebted to the librarians in the National Library of Kazakhstan in Almaty, who were always very friendly and willing to help. Special thanks go to Kyrmyzy Yertysova at the National Archive in Almaty who found me issues of newspapers that were missing in the catalogues of the National Library.

Last but certainly not least, I want to thank my friends and colleagues at KIMEP University in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Dr Golam Mostafa, Dr Alex Danilovich and Aigerim Ibrayeva provided me with the motivation, energy and advice that stimulated me in my academic endeavours.

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TRANSLITERATION

Thesis employs a system of transliteration of Cyrillic adopted by the British Standards Institute (BSI).

Russian		English	
<i>Capital</i>	<i>Small</i>	<i>Capital</i>	<i>Small</i>
А	а	A	a
Б	б	B	b
В	в	V	v
Г	г	G	g
Д	д	D	d
Е	е	E	e
Ё	ё	E	e
Ж	ж	Zh	zh
З	з	Z	z
И	и	I	i
Й	й	I	i
К	к	K	k
Л	л	L	l
М	м	M	m
Н	н	N	n
О	о	O	o
П	п	P	p
Р	р	R	r
С	с	S	s
Т	т	T	t
У	у	U	u
Ф	ф	F	f
Х	х	Kh	kh
Ц	ц	Ts	ts
Ч	ч	Ch	ch
Ш	ш	Sh	sh
Щ	щ	Shch	shch
Ъ	ъ	"	"
Ы	ы	Y	y
Ь	ь	'	'
Э	э	E	e
Ю	ю	Yu	yu
Я	я	Ya	ya

ABBREVIATIONS

CAF	Collective Action Frames
CPSU	Communist Party of Soviet Union
DCK	Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan
EU	European Union
FSU	Former Soviet Union
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
IGO	Inter-Governmental Organisation
IRI	International Republican Institute
KGB	<i>Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti</i> (Committee of National Security)
KNB	<i>Komitet Natsional'noi Bezopasnosti</i> (Committee of National Security)
KSSR	Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIS	Newly Independent States
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OSDP	<i>Obshchenatsional'naya Sotsial-Demokraticeskaya Partiya</i> (National Socio-Democratic Party)
POS	Political Opportunity Structures
RD	Relative Deprivation
RMT	Resource Mobilisation Theory
RNPK	<i>Respublikanskaya Narodnaya Partiya Kazakhstana</i> (Republican People's Party of Kazakhstan)
SCM	Structural-Cognitive Model
SMO	Social Movement Organisation
SU	Soviet Union
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The dissolution of the Soviet Union (SU) and the consecutive emergence of newly independent states (NIS) attracted the attention of the global community to the economic and political transformations of the post-Soviet world. There was widespread speculation among observers in the early 1990s as to what political trajectories these countries would take – toward establishing liberal democracies or maintaining authoritarian regimes. Some predicted bright democratic futures, while others remained sceptical about the old Soviet *nomenklatura* taking any steps to democratise their countries. The almost two decades after the collapse of the SU have shown that some states have indeed successfully consolidated democracies, some built façade democracies, and others did not democratise at all (Clark 2002; Gill 2006; Kopstein and Reilly 2000).

A series of popular demonstrations aimed at annulling election results first in Serbia (2000) and then Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005) undoubtedly took some post-Soviet authoritarian regimes by surprise. Scholars soon labelled them the ‘colour revolutions’, referring to them as a single phenomenon in the form of ‘a number of non-violent protests that succeeded in overthrowing authoritarian regimes during the first decade of the twenty-first century’ (O’Beachain and Polese 2010: 1). Others such as Bunce and Wolchik (2006) call these upheavals ‘electoral revolutions’ because protests were organised in the framework of elections that were crudely falsified by authoritarian leaders. Highlighting the emulative character of these ‘bottom-up’ revolutions, Beissinger (2007) claims that ‘most social science theories of revolutions treat [these

colour revolutions] as if they were entirely independent of one another' (260). However, the reality is that they are all interconnected. Thus, the success of the Serbian Otpor dissident group in bringing down Milosevic in 2000 acted as a stimulus for exporting revolutions to other post-communist states. The Georgian *Kmara*, Ukrainian *Pora* and Kyrgyz *Kelkel* youth movements were modelled on Serbian movements whose activists not only inspired local movements but also trained them in the techniques of non-violent resistance (Herd 2005). The transnational linkages connecting these movements confirm an argument made by O'Beachain and Polese (2010), who suggested that scholars treat these cases as a single phenomenon. At this point, White and Bryce (2010) wonder: while sharing a common past, what could facilitate the possibility of revolutions in the abovementioned countries and yet the endurance of authoritarian regimes in countries such as Russia, Belarus, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan?

While there could be many different factors contributing to possibility of revolutions in the post-communist world (such as democracy promotion efforts by external actors and structural as well as institutional factors), the colour revolutions underline the significance of popular protest mobilisation in contemporary politics (Bunce and Wolchik 2007; Tordjman 2008). Consequently, one could argue that the reason why some revolutions failed and some regimes appear immune to democratic movements is related to the low instances of protest mobilisation and underdeveloped civic activism. While in countries such as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan there have been absolutely no protests, countries such as Russia, Belarus, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan do experience a cyclicity of protest mobilisation. Without understanding the nuts and bolts of protest mobilisation in the latter groups of countries, it is hard to predict the rise of protest mobilisation, which appears so crucial for the possibility of colour revolutions in these stubborn authoritarian regimes.

The purpose of this thesis is two-fold: 1) to explain the cyclicity of protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan; and 2) to analyse the effects of these cycles of protest on democratisation. There are numerous theories of protest that address the waxing and waning of protest activity. They include theories approaching protests from the macro (Tarrow 1994) and micro (Snow and Benford 1988a) perspectives, theories focusing on the presence or absence of violence in protests (Della Porta 1995), theories that look at the diffusion of protests (Andrews and Biggs 2006) and, as we saw earlier, theories that explore the effects of protest mobilisation on regime change (Sharp 2011). It is hardly possible to incorporate all these theories in an explanation of protest cyclicity in Kazakhstan between 1992 and 2009. Therefore, since the primary focus of this thesis is protest cyclicity in Kazakhstan, I choose to test the major social movement theories (McAdam et al. 1996) – relative deprivation, resource mobilisation, political opportunity and collective action frames. All of them provide competing explanations of protest dynamics and none has ever been applied to the Central Asian context before.

The secondary focus of this study is democratisation in the Republic of Kazakhstan, which, according to Gill (2006) and many civil society Inter-Governmental Organisations (IGOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)¹, is one of the former SU (FSU) Central Asian states that failed to build effective democratic institutions. Olcott (2002) maintains that all Central Asian leaders, including the President of Kazakhstan, ‘claim that the tradition and temperament of the Asian people make them little suited to democracy’ (8). Since the mid-1990s this vision of President Nazarbayev has dominated the regime’s agenda of stalling Kazakhstan’s transition to

¹ Since its independence, a number of IGOs, NGOs and several foreign governments have expressed their deep concern about the state of democracy in Kazakhstan. Some of those are: European Union, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Transparency International, Reporters without Borders, Freedom House, and the US Department of State.

democracy. However, the purpose of my research is *not* to test democracy's suitability for the local political context; instead I will explore the link between public's protest mobilisation and the course of democratisation in Kazakhstan. There is a vast amount of literature on this link debating the preconditions, consequences and effectiveness of bottom-up democratisation on the quality and stability of democracy. Due to space constraints and the research's primary focus on addressing the cyclicity of protests, in this thesis I do not endeavour to cover all of the theories explaining democratisation from below in the analysis of democratisation in Kazakhstan. In addition, this thesis does not aim to claim the exclusive validity of bottom-up democratisation over competing structural and institutional perspectives of democratisation. What it does attempt, however, by highlighting the example of the colour revolutions, is to underline the growing significance of protest mobilisation in facilitating democratic reforms.

This way I plan to contribute to the literature on stalled transitions to democracy, which in its current shape seems to underplay the role of mass mobilisation in advancing democratic transitions. I am interested in how the public's perceptions and reactions to the lack of democracy in Kazakhstan translate into its protest mobilisation outcomes addressing the void of political freedoms. When I speak of protest mobilisation I mean the emergence of popular social movements and protest activities formed around four main issues areas – socioeconomic, interethnic, environmental and political – respectively represented by grievances about low wages, ethnic discrimination, air pollution and, most importantly, violation of democratic freedoms, with the latter being directly connected to the country's stalled transition to democracy.

My research agenda is in line with Tilly's (2004) argument which holds that states that successfully organise social movements and mass mobilisation eventually experience successful democratisation. While acknowledging the causality debate surrounding the

two phenomena, Tilly argues that increases in the number and connections of people available for participation in public politics, equalisation of resources and connections among these people, and integration of interpersonal trust networks into public politics will eventually promote both democracy and social movements (143). Furthermore, a prominent Sovietologist, Archie Brown (2001) agrees with O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) in claiming that mass publics are crucial at the start of transitions in forcing elites to go beyond their limited intentions of liberalisation (A. Brown 2001: 489). Thus, I believe that the public's active involvement in social movements and protest activities can challenge the current authoritarian regime and open up channels of democratisation in Kazakhstan.

Literature Review

The nature of the proposed research requires me to look at the social movements and democratisation literature, which have gained more attention considering recent political developments in the post-Soviet countries.

Social Movements

While a relatively new subject in the social sciences, within the last 50 years 'the study of social movements and revolutions has clearly emerged as one of the scholarly "growth industries"... in both Europe and the United States' (McAdam et al. 1996: 2). As I mentioned before, from the large pool of theoretical perspectives within social movement literature, this study picks four major theories dominant in social movement research – political opportunity structures (POS), resource mobilisation (RMT), collective action frames (CAF) and relative deprivation (RD). Although all having various inherent strengths and weaknesses, each of those perspectives aims to explain various puzzles such as 1) why is it that, out of the large number of people concerned with a certain issue,

only a few take to the streets to protest?; 2) what motivates people to participate in a protest that is likely to have very harmful consequences to protesters?; and 3) why are some protests violent and others peaceful? (Opp 2009). In addressing these questions, structural theories of social movements – political opportunity and resource mobilisation – emphasise the role of changing political context and availability of resources respectively. Thus, the POS perspective relates the birth of social movements to factors such as the state's lessening of repression and the defection of elites from the government to the opposition (Meyer 2004). The RMT approach instead posits that the formation and dynamics of a social movement depends on the social movement organisations' (SMOs) ability to mobilise human and financial resources (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Unlike structural theories, a psychological or micro-perspective adopted by the theory of CAFs stresses the importance of 'action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization' (Benford and Snow 2000: 614). Finally, RD perspective posits that for protest activity to take off individuals must develop frustration with deprivation and nourish belief in the worthiness of protest in addressing their grievances (Smelser 1962).

Leading scholars in the field of social movement theory attest to a widespread underestimation of the role of ideas and beliefs in the shaping of collective action (Benford and Snow 2000; Morris and Mueller 1992; Snow and Benford 1992; Tarrow 1992). Until recently, the RMT perspective, for instance, tended to minimise ideological factors – values, beliefs and meanings – in relation to the course and character of movements (Snow and Benford 1992). A wide array of literature has since been published to address this gap. In spite of the growing consensus in the social movement literature about the role of ideological factors in linking a society and the leaders of a movement, Tarrow (1994) points to a lack of studies of how meanings and beliefs are

derived and constructed from the national political cultures, which represent a toolkit of cultural symbols that are creatively converted by movement entrepreneurs into CAFs. It is envisaged that this thesis will contribute to the social movements literature by giving due credit to the role of CAFs in the dynamics of social movement.

Before the upsurge of conventional theories of social movements which resulted from a global wave of contentious politics of 1960s there was Mancur Olson's (1971) influential theory of collective action that inspired and set the direction for future research. Olson's theory is interested in when individuals act jointly in order to achieve some common goal. It is worth noting that, unlike conventional theories of social movements which look at why individuals join movements and protests, Olson's theory is focused on why individuals refrain from collective action (Tarrow 1998). Based on the assumption that individuals are rational and self-interested, theory implies that they will not contribute to attain a group's common goals. The only exception to this rule is the group's size and the presence of selective incentives. Olson summarises his theory as follows: 'Indeed, unless the number of individuals in a group is quite small, or unless there is coercion or some other special device to make individuals act in their common interest, *rational, self interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interests*' (1971: 2). Ever since its publication, his *Logic of Collective Action* book has been widely criticised on various grounds. Opp's (2009) critical assessment of Olson's theory outlined a number of such criticisms regarding its limited range of application (Udehn 1993), neglect of causal incentives' interdependence, and underestimation of non-economic incentives (Fireman and Gamson 1979). However, these and other shortcomings of

Olson's theory of collective action did not prevent social movement scholars from using it to explain popular mobilisation².

While my thesis explains protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan solely from the perspective of classical theories of social movements, I nevertheless address one of the shortcomings of Olson's theory. According to it, in order to constrain individuals to contribute to the group's common interest (which is provision of public goods), groups have to enforce certain costs and benefits of contribution. Such costs and benefits are selective incentives which may be positive or negative depending on the individuals' participation in collective action. Thus, if one decides to contribute to the common interest he/she is rewarded with positive incentives; on the contrary, if he/she decides not to contribute then he/she is 'punished' by negative incentives. In reference to incentives, Olson talks mainly about economic incentives such as material rewards or fines and social incentives such as the chance to 'win prestige, respect, friendship, and other social or psychological objectives' (1971: 60). However, in line with Fireman and Gamson's (1979), Tarrow's (1998) and Opp's (2009) criticism, Olson ignores what he calls moral incentives in his theory by claiming that such incentives are hard to measure, thus rendering the theory untestable. Moreover, these incentives are not appropriate for the types of groups he analyses. Moral incentives might indeed be hard to measure empirically, but how could one disregard moral incentives when faced with 'thousands of people who struck, marched, rioted, and demonstrated on behalf of interests other than their own in the 1960s' (Tarrow 1998: 16)? Just as with the structural theories of social movements I discussed earlier, Olson's micro-model of collective action mistreats ideological factors by underestimating the role of moral incentives in predicting collective action. Certainly there are individuals who take part in political protests in Kazakhstan and who do so not

² For examples of studies on social movements and protest mobilisation utilising Olson's collective action theory, see Linares (2004), Oberschall (1980), and Goldstone (1994).

for the sake of obtaining material benefit but for belief in the universality of democratic principles and values – a factor which does not figure much in the collective action literature.

Democratisation

The growth of authoritarianism and stalled democratic transitions on the one hand and mass mobilisation resulting in the post-communist colour revolutions on the other have served as an impetus for the revival of literature on post-Soviet transitions. However, there is still an imbalance in the size of the democratisation literature allocated to post-Soviet republics. Thus, transitions literature is rich in works on Eastern and Central European states (Evans and Whitefield 1995; Linz and Stepan 1996b) and Russia (A. Brown 2001; Eckstein et al. 1998; White et al. 1993; Whitefield and Brown 2005), whereas Central Asian (Collins 2006; Dave 2007b; Dawisha and Parrott 1994; Hansen 2005) and the Caucasus (Gill 2006; Sahakyan and Atanesyan 2006) regions are noticeably understudied. To address this imbalance in the literature, instead of studying the whole Central Asian and Caucasus regions, the present research picks Kazakhstan for an in-depth analysis; however, this does not mean that the research findings and implications are not applicable to neighbouring states.

The Central Asian transitions literature is biased in highlighting the crucial role in democratisation played by formal institutions such as elites, political parties, political alliances and pacts (Collins 2006; Doorenspleet 2005; Murphy 2006). Yet the role of grassroots-level mass mobilisation, clan-politics, nationalism and ethnic pluralism has not received wide application. To illustrate, Doorenspleet maintains that the ‘democratization process is dominated by the political elites while mass mobilization plays an unimportant role’ (4). Speaking of the Central Asian context, Collins claims

that, ‘whatever their utility elsewhere, conventional theories about what shapes political transitions are not of much help in this part of the world’ (150). According to her, to understand the complexities of local politics, the focus should be on informal politics based on clan-politics, kinship-networks and their internal cleavages. While clan-politics (Collins 2006; Schatz 2004), ethnic pluralism (Radnitz 2004) and nationalism (Gill 2006) entered the realm of democratisation in the Central Asia literature, the role of popular mobilisation is somewhat overlooked. This gap is further exacerbated by the absence of empirical works on the influence of such local-specific variables as clan-politics on society’s protest mobilisation potential. Hence, I plan to fill this literature gap by studying the Kazakhstani public’s protest mobilisation against the deficit of democracy, while accounting for the local specifics mentioned above.

Scholars who subscribe to a structural perspective on the prospects of democratisation might object to my attempt to explain democratisation from a mass mobilisation perspective. Indeed, when viewed from a structural perspective, it appears that the failure of democratisation in Kazakhstan is heavily over-determined by structural variables such as high levels of income inequality (Pomfret 2005; UNDP 2005), a relatively small middle class (Daly 2008), and a wealth of natural resources subjecting Kazakhstan to the ‘resource curse’ (Weinthal and Luong 2006). According to Muller (1995), income inequality is negatively associated with democratisation. His comparative study of 58 countries aimed at addressing the failure of Lipset’s (1959) modernisation theory in explaining the 1960s and 1970s collapse of democracy in some of Latin America’s economically advanced countries. He explains this anomaly by asserting that the income inequality–democratisation relationship ‘often counteracts the positive influence of economic development on democratization’ (1995: 966). As we shall see further in the thesis, Kazakhstan is the perfect example for such an anomaly. Its per capita GDP rate

constantly rose from \$168 in 1992 to \$5,362 in 2006. Thanks to such rapid growth in its economy, in 2005 the World Bank classified Kazakhstan as a middle-income country whose economic development rates are on average two times faster than those of other middle-income countries (UNDP 2005). Unfortunately, progress in macroeconomic development has not been matched by the progress in alleviating a large gap between the country's richest and poorest: according to UNDP's 2005 Human Development Report, the Gini coefficient – a statistical measure of income inequality – has only slightly decreased in Kazakhstan from 0.33 in 1999 to 0.29 in 2004. Such figures raised concerns regarding the fairness of the government's distribution of the country's revenues, which as mentioned above are mostly generated from extraction of natural resources³.

In regard to the middle class, the important relationship between the class system and democratisation was emphasised in the classical works by Moore (1967) and Skocpol (1979). First of all, Moore (1967) argues that democracy is one of the three 'paths to the modern world', the other two being fascism and communism. It is achieved via 'bourgeois revolution' represented by a modern-day middle class which 'insists upon limiting the state and political elites in order to secure its own economic interests' (Clark 2002). In Lipset's vision, a country's economic growth is reflected by growing industrialisation and per capita income, which contributes to urbanisation and in turn leads to better-educated citizens supportive of democratic norms and beliefs. Such citizens form a middle-class cornerstone which 'plays a mitigating role in moderating conflict since it is able to reward moderate and democratic parties and penalize extremist groups' (Seymour Martin Lipset 1959: 83). Hence, the larger the number of people interested in securing their economic interests and holding the government accountable, the more democratic a country would be. Of the many indicators used to calculate the

³ For studies on the relationship between income inequality and economic growth in Kazakhstan, see Verme (2006); Sukiassyan (2007); Hare and Naumov (2008).

percentage of middle class in relation to overall population, in its 2006 survey of urban population, Alvin Market, a Kazakh research company, used the following indicators: education level (higher than a university degree), a white-collar professional occupation, and a higher than average regional household income. The survey results show that the size of Kazakhstan's middle class is equal to 17% of the adult urban population (Alvin Market 2007; Daly 2008; Satpaev 2008).

Finally, as argued by Ross (2001), the democratising effect of a country's economic development either disappears or shrinks if such development is related to a country's oil wealth. In his quantitative enquiry into the oil-impedes-democracy claim, Ross concluded that, in addition to reducing economic growth and increasing the likelihood of civil war, the 'resource curse' also contributes to authoritarian rule. It does so through three main causal mechanisms found in the resource curse literature: a 'rentier effect' – where governments reduce their accountability by lessening taxation; a 'repression effect' – where governments funnel oil funds to increase repression; and a 'modernisation effect' – where oil boom revenues fail to deliver the socio-cultural change vital for democratisation (Morrison 2007; M. L. Ross 2001). Ranking in the top 10 countries in oil and gas reserves (Kaiser and Pulsipher 2007), Kazakhstan's economy is heavily dependent upon exports of oil and gas. According to Kalyuzhnova (2006), the share of oil and gas products in the country's exports increased from 50% in 2002 to 61% in 2005. Indicative of the resource curse, instead of strengthening political institutions and boosting socioeconomic development, Kazakhstan's natural resource revenues has contributed to the growth of corruption, rent-seeking, income inequality and authoritarianism. Had Kazakhstan not experienced its current wealth of natural resources, the fate of its political elite and authoritarian leadership would be highly uncertain. For example, let us presume Kazakhstan is a nondemocracy without abundant mineral

resources. According to the redistributional theory of democratisation advocated by Acemoglu and Robinson (2006) and Boix (2003), the rich elite in a non-democratic state would be interested in excluding the poor from power. The poor, in return, would seek power and advocate higher taxation for the rich, who are obviously unwilling to redistribute (share power and tolerate higher taxation). If elites fail to fulfil their promise of holding democratic reforms, they risk facing a revolutionary upheaval from the poor (Morrison 2007: 4). Based on a cost-benefit analysis, rational elites would agree to redistribute and thus prefer introducing democratisation to revolution. Similarly, the Kazakh political elite would have conceded ground to the challengers and carried out democratic reforms. However, endowed with huge stocks of natural resources, the Kazakh government is capable of maintaining its power monopoly and avoiding redistributive conflicts through the aforementioned rentier, repression and modernisation effects.

Overall, as we can see from the above, a structural perspective on democratisation seems to have a significant explanatory power when applied to the Kazakhstani context. Interestingly, its three variables are interrelated: resource-curse countries are known for generating high levels of corruption, poor economic performance and income inequality, which in turn contributes to a shrinking of the middle class and strengthening of authoritarian rule (Weinthal and Luong 2006). Two questions arise at this point. First, given the structural perspective's theoretical fit to the Kazakhstani case, what is the significance of studying grassroots protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan? Second, does the structural perspective really provide an all-encompassing explanation of why democratisation has broken down in Kazakhstan? I will answer these questions in reverse order.

As with any theoretical perspective, the structural explanation of democratisation has faults which have attracted heavy criticism from many scholars representing competing institutionalist, transition and cultural perspectives. By focusing on the collapse of democracy rather than on transition to it, Rustow (1970) and Linz (1978) criticised structuralists for being over-deterministic and apolitical (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006: 76). Likewise, O'Donnell (1973) argues that the failure of modernisation theory – part of the structuralist perspective – to explain collapse of democracy in the richest Latin American countries in the 1960s and 1970s ‘undermined confidence in the income–democracy relationship and the idea that modernization promoted democracy’ (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006). Additionally, the structural perspective’s sole focus on economic conditions overlooks the role of political actors’ strategic choices behind economic policy; it also ignores a country’s institutional design as well as the role of society and its values (Waisman 1989). Evidently, all of these factors contribute not only to the growth of democracy, but also to its decline. I will discuss structural as well as competing explanations of democratisation in Kazakhstan in more detail in Chapter 5.

The aim of studying mass mobilisation in Kazakhstan stems from the failure of structuralist perspective in explaining the collapse of democracy in some of the economically most advanced Latin American states in the 1960s and 1970s. Despite their economic achievements with a relatively well-functioning democracy, states such as Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay experienced military interventions that could have been prevented had there been higher levels of social mobilisation. According to Putnam’s quantitative study of Latin American military behaviour, countries characterised by low levels of social mobilisation are more likely to experience military intervention in politics (Putnam 1967). This widely accepted conclusion was soon challenged by Huntington (1968) and O'Donnell (1973, 1976), however, who cast considerable doubt on Putnam’s

assumptions (Ruhl 1982) by stating that high levels of social mobilisation on the contrary destabilises civilian governments and result in military intervention. Additionally, as argued by Ruhl, there are two deviant cases in relation to Putnam's propositions; both high economic development and social mobilisation could not avoid military coups in Chile and Uruguay in the 1970s. What this suggests is that by ignoring social mobilisation as well as other crucial variables mentioned earlier, structural explanations of democratisation are indeed over-deterministic. Based on Latin American experience and scholarly debate regarding the consequences of social mobilisation, I believe that studying mass mobilisation in Kazakhstan will not only protect from structuralists' over-deterministic conclusions, but also shed light on mobilisation's effects on democratic transition in Kazakhstan.

Just as is the case with the structuralist perspective, so the institutionalist and democratic diffusion perspectives are both pessimistic and over-deterministic in regard to the fate of democratisation in Kazakhstan. In this section I will highlight gaps in both of these perspectives and specify my contribution to the literature in both fields. While structuralist theories explain the effects of economic conditions on democracy, institutionalism is interested in the effects of political institutions such as the electoral system and form of government on stability (Linz 1996) and the consolidation of democracy (Stepan and Skach 1993). Institutionalists believe that, while countries' institutional choices are largely determined by geographic and cultural factors, countries operating along proportional representation (PR) and parliamentary forms of government 'almost invariably post the best records, particularly with respect to representation, protection of minority interests, voter participation, and control of unemployment' (Lijphart 1996: 171; Linz 1996; Mainwaring 1993). Of course, this does not necessarily render presidentialism and plurality method of elections incompatible with stability of

democracy; both ends of the spectrum have their own deficiencies (Horowitz 1996). In spite of that, Lijphart (1996) suggests that a PR/parliamentary institutional design is the one which post-communist democratising countries should follow. Reality, however, shows that – except for a few Baltic and East European states – the majority of post-communist states opted for presidentialism, thus significantly diminishing the prospects of democracy (Easter 1997; Pop-Eleches 2007). According to Roeder (1994), the presidents in these countries ‘have contributed to the emergence of a number of authoritarian regimes owing to their propensity to usurp legislative prerogatives and place themselves and their office outside of accountability’ (Clark 2002: 34).

This is exactly what happened in Kazakhstan soon after the SU’s collapse: contrary to the expectations of western countries, President Nazarbayev set up a presidential system which allowed him to claim authoritarian powers to the detriment of political parties, parliament and civil society (Cummings 2005; S. F. Starr 2006a). The preference for presidentialism in Kazakhstan was not determined by the formal rules of the game; instead, it was political actors – i.e. the old regime elite – who made that choice (Easter 1997). By focusing on elites during the post-communist transition period, Easter develops a revised institutional explanation of democratic transition. According to his view, political actors’ institutional choices are dependent on their access to power resources (ibid.: 187-88). Applied to Kazakhstan, this would mean that the choice of government type (presidential or parliamentary) depended on the old regime elite’s (*nomenklatura*) chances of retaining their monopoly over power resources in the transition phase. Hence, a presidential system adorned by authoritarian features was put in place in Kazakhstan due to the successful efforts of Soviet incumbents to weaken opposition forces and win the support of business elites (Efegil 2007; Matveeva 1999; S. F. Starr 2006a). A survey of the institutionalist literature yielded many studies similar to

Easter's on the structure of old regime elites and their institutional choices during post-communist transition. Yet the fact that elite structure depends not only on the elite's access to power resources but also on grassroots mass mobilisation has been somehow overlooked. As happened in Poland and Hungary at the end of the 1980s, popular mass mobilisation can not only deny incumbents' access to power resources but also constrain their institutional choices in favour of building pro-democratic political institutions. Considering this gap in the literature, my thesis will look at how early-1990s popular protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan affected the communist incumbent's institutional choices.

Like many of its competitor perspectives, the democratic diffusion perspective tries to explain the differences in the political and economic outcomes of FSU states that began their post-communist journey from similar starting points. However, unlike the majority of competing schools of thought that focus on internal factors promoting democratisation (such as economic development and institutional structures), the democratic diffusion approach is concerned with external ones (international pressure and interstate conflicts). There are different levels of analysis and forms of diffusion, defined by Welsh as 'the process by which institutions, practices, behaviours, or norms are transmitted between individuals and/or between social systems' (Welsh 1984: 3 cited in H. Starr 1991). Of the five prototypes of diffusion found in the democratisation literature – adaptive innovation, emulation, promotion, expansive communication, and local context (Huntington 1991; Modelski and Perry III 1991; H. Starr 1991) – the most prevalent one is democracy promotion by outside forces (i.e. international organisations, private foundations and individual governments) through either offering incentives, the threat of sanctions or the use of force (O'Loughlin et al. 1998). While it is hard to question the active involvement of the United States and the European Union in democracy promotion efforts in FSU

countries (Allison Jr. and Beschel Jr. 1992; Schimmelfennig 2008), one should not discard other types of democratic diffusion. Thus, by utilising a spatial-dependency explanation, Kopstein and Reilly (2000) argue that the reason why some Baltic and Eastern European FSU states democratised and some non-European post-communist states did not is related to the former's geographical proximity to the West (in this case, Western Europe). Western European countries acted as a model whose behaviour patterns were emulated by neighbouring communist countries (H. Starr 1991). For emulation to work, though, Kopstein and Reilly (2000) maintain that countries not only have to be geographically closer to the non-communist country but also have to be receptive and open to interaction with their neighbours⁴.

When we look at Kazakhstan, we observe that it is more than 2,000 miles away from Vienna⁵, and its policies – despite the president-pronounced state programme of a 'Path to Europe'⁶ in 2008 – are heavily affected by its immediate non-democratic neighbouring states. Indeed, according to Kopstein and Reilly's findings, being in a neighbourhood with highly authoritarian Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan makes the prospects of democracy in Kazakhstan rather remote⁷. This is because spatial flow of information, ideas and culture is more effective between countries that are closer to each other. To illustrate, numerous studies confirm the Kazakh population's close attachment to Russia in terms of potential provision of geopolitical security and long-standing friendship ties (Ablyazov et al. 1998; Zhusupov 2004; Zhusupova 2010). That is not surprising

⁴ Kopstein and Reilly (2000) call a country's external environment its *stocks*, and a country's openness to outside influences as its *flows*.

⁵ In their comparative work on democratic diffusion, Kopstein and Reilly (2000) measure distance between post-communist countries and Vienna because Vienna is considered an important economic and cultural referent for FSU states.

⁶ Adopted on the eve of Kazakhstan's chairmanship of the OSCE in 2010, this programme is aimed at further facilitation of cooperation between Kazakhstan and European countries. (Kazakhstan Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2008)

⁷ In debating the spatial diffusion explanation, Pop-Eleches (2007) argues that post-communist transformations are better understood by countries' historical legacies. In this case, Kazakhstan's poor democratic performance is attributed to its lack of prior experience with democracy, and its membership of the SU, rather than to its geographical location.

considering that the majority of Kazakhstanis follow and trust the Russian media more than local ones (IRI 2010). Furthermore, elites' domestic decision-making is also affected by Kazakhstan's membership of regional organisations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, with hardly any of its fellow member states being a full-fledged democracy. Membership in these organisations compels Kazakhstan to act in accordance with the expectations of fellow members, who would not be willing to deal with a democratic state. As we can see from the above, Kazakhstan's geographic location is unfavourable to democratic diffusion, yet its proximity to countries which experienced so-called colour revolutions raises concerns regarding its vulnerability to the diffusion of revolutions. Fortunately, at least for the current authoritarian leadership, the revolutions in neighbouring countries did not have a spillover effect on Kazakhstan. Studying protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan is important for it will explain why those revolutions across the border did not diffuse to Kazakhstan. In this way then, my thesis will contribute to literature on diffusion of revolutions – a social phenomenon that has been largely neglected in the field of social movements (McAdam and Rucht 1993; Way 2008) until recent studies on colour revolutions.

My review of the literature on the link between protest mobilisation and democratisation in FSU countries revealed that the majority of this literature was published by foreign scholars who at times fail at taking into account the socio-cultural specifics of the region. Thus, instances of extensive popular protest mobilisation in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005 and 2010) attracted enormous attention from both local (Nikolayenko 2007; Stepanenko 2005) and foreign (Gill 2006; International Crisis Group 2005; Schipani-Adúriz 2007) scholars; however, few existing studies on protest

mobilisation in Kazakhstan⁸ were carried out solely by foreign academics, with Fenger (2007) and Tilly (2004) being notable exceptions. Obviously, the failure to address country-specific features risks producing conclusions lacking credibility and being short-sighted. Being a national of Kazakhstan and thus closely familiar with the specifics of local politics and their socio-cultural underpinnings, as well as possessing fluency in Kazakh and Russian, will enable me to overcome the difficulties experienced by foreign field researchers such as access to data, fluency in the local languages and close acquaintance with the local setting. Unless properly addressed by researchers, all of these barriers are believed to influence the rigour and credibility of research findings. However, the researcher's proximity to data and cases entails various potential methodological problems such as selection bias. Nevertheless, in a case study analogous to mine, George and Bennett argue that preliminary knowledge of the cases and the setting in fact serve to strengthen the case study research design, as the researcher is able to select cases with a view toward whether 'they are most-likely, least-likely, or crucial for a theory [-ies], making the test of a theory [-ies under investigation] more severe' (2005: 24).

Concepts

Although I discuss the current thesis's theoretical framework in more detail in the second chapter, my introduction of the research questions here requires a brief overview of the study's terminology and concepts. I begin by presenting definitions of protest and its cyclicity, followed by a concise description of concepts representing my independent variables: grievances, framing processes, political opportunity and mobilising structures.

⁸ One reason for the underrepresentation of Kazakhstan in the social movement literature could be the absence of any major popular uprising, unlike has been the case in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine.

There is a whole plethora of definitions of ‘protest’ in the collective behaviour literature. Opp’s (2009) analysis of major definitions concluded that they are often unclear and refer to different phenomena. Despite differences in terminology and definitional precision, central to all definitions is a focus on *joint/collective action* and on *individuals who cannot achieve their goals by themselves* (ibid.: 38). The social movement literature understands collective action as an action on the part of several individuals regardless of whether there is coordination or not (organised or spontaneous action). Protesters are those individuals who either cannot or do not want to achieve their goals by themselves, who instead put pressure on third parties such as government and employers in order to influence their decisions. Considering these central pillars of protest behaviour, Opp suggests his own definition of protest which he defines as ‘joint (i.e. collective) action of individuals aimed at achieving their goals or goal by influencing decision of a target’ (ibid.: 38). He claims that there are many characteristics of protest behaviour, such as legal or illegal, violent or peaceful, political or non-political, which were omitted in his definition. He intentionally did so because he believes that adding additional dimensions to definition of protest would make it ambiguous and theoretically unfruitful.

In referring to the variance of protest activity, I use Tarrow’s concept of cycles of protest. According to Tarrow (1994), cycles of protests occur within a particular period of time and across different segments of society by rising and falling with some modifications to their CAFs, strategies of contention and changing interaction patterns between the challengers and authorities (153). There have been numerous scholarly attempts to relate the cyclicity of protests to either structural or ideational factors. This research is another such attempt aimed at explaining protest cyclicity in Kazakhstan. Having presented the study’s dependent variable, I now move on to introducing the four independent variables.

According to grievance or relative deprivation (RD) theory, the extent of collective action varies by the acuteness of the grievances involved in them. Klandermans et al (2001) define grievances as ‘feelings of dissatisfaction with important aspects of life such as housing, living standard, income, employment, health care, human rights, safety, and education’ (42). In the present research, I distinguish grievances according to four major issue areas which lead to different mobilisation outcomes: socioeconomic, interethnic, environmental and political. In his study of communal groups’ political protest and rebellion potential, Gurr (1993) argues that the acuteness of grievances can be ‘judged by the extent to which they do in fact lead to mobilization and collective action’ (173). Consequently, differentiation of grievances by issue areas lets me observe how each of them affects the public’s protest mobilisation outcome.

Benford and Snow (2000) view CAFs as ‘action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization’ (614). Frames are constructed through a framing process of rendering events or occurrences meaningful, and thereby function to organise experience and guide action (ibid.). The framing processes are usually possible and most effective when provided with open political opportunity and powerful mobilising structures.

Political process or POS theory has a long academic tradition (Kriesi 1989; McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1983), being widely employed in explaining the emergence of social movements and revolutions across different countries and political contexts. Thus, McAdam et al (1996) attribute the growth in the number of social movements to changes in the POS – *institutional structure or informal power relations of a given national political system* (3). Open political opportunities alone would not mobilise self-interested individuals; there must be mobilising structures present that react to the opening of POS by mobilising the masses around various grievances.

Mobilising structures, or RMT theory as it is usually referred to, is concerned with the organisational dynamics of collective behaviour – ‘*collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action*’ (ibid.). According to this theory, the emergence of either a social movement or a protest is linked to ‘whether insurgents have available to them “mobilizing structures” of sufficient strength to get the movement off the ground’ (ibid.: 13).

The four concepts that I use to explain the cyclicity of popular protest mobilisation as well as the stalled transition in Kazakhstan have some causal overlaps. Thus, strengthening of mobilising structures is dependent upon POS; alternatively, as suggested by Snow and Benford (1992), the opening up of POS depends on successful framing processes by movement entrepreneurs. Finally, frame construction would be impossible without the presence of a public aggrieved by unsatisfactory provision of housing or violations of human rights and the like. Such complex causal relationships require a special research method that seeks to trace the causal path between independent and dependent variables, shedding light on any intervening variables. The research methodology section will discuss the methods and procedures to be used in more detail.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

As was mentioned earlier, the thesis pursues two research objectives that divide it into two parts. The study’s first and second research questions, which are addressed in the first part, explore the cyclicity of protests across time and four issue areas, thus accomplishing the thesis’s first objective. The second objective is attained in the second part and is encapsulated in the study’s third research question, which addresses the relationship between protest mobilisation and democratisation in Kazakhstan in the 1990s. This section presents all three research questions and hypotheses in more detail.

The period between 1992 and 2009 illustrates a varying chain of social movements and cycles of protest activity. Numerous studies have characterised FSU Central Asian political cultures as a mixture of pessimism, cynicism and weak civic consciousness (Luong and Weinthal 1999; Matveeva 1999; Mustafin and Askeeva 1996). One would expect societies with such political cultures to be passive and apathetic toward politics. However, a closer look at the history of collective action in these societies reveals a range of social movements and protest activities which rise and fall with varying success. The first question I therefore pose is: *which of the four independent variables can best account for the cyclicity of popular protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan in the 1992-2009 period?* All four of these independent variables – RD, RMT, POS and CAF – offer competing explanations of protest activity; it is therefore interesting to attempt to reveal which one is central to understanding protest dynamics in Kazakhstan.

According to RD theory, the extent of protest mobilisation depends on the nature of deprivation that causes protests. Put differently, deprivation with different issue areas results in different protest mobilisation outcomes. Some issues – such as a deteriorating quality of living standards – are expected to have a larger protest mobilisation potential than issues pertaining to such things as preservation of wildlife or growing urban air pollution. Indeed, as we will see in Chapter 3 and 4, socioeconomic grievances in Kazakhstan result in more frequent instances of protests than environmental, political and interethnic grievances. Consequently, the second research puzzle this thesis is trying to address is: *why do socioeconomic grievances in Kazakhstan mobilise more people to protest than environmental, political and interethnic grievances?*

As was mentioned earlier, this research is interested in the relationship between popular protest mobilisation and the development of democracy in Kazakhstan. More specifically, I am looking at the role of popular protest mobilisation in the stalled

transition to democracy. Thus, the final research question is as follows: *how does popular protest mobilisation account for the stalled transition to democracy in Kazakhstan?* I am especially interested in the shape of protest mobilisation at the time when the transition to democracy slowed down and the state reverted to authoritarianism. Was the institutionalisation of authoritarian practices a response to a lack of protest mobilisation or rather to an abundance of mobilisation? Answers to these questions require a thorough historical analysis of protest mobilisation from when Kazakhstan gained independence in 1991 up to the present day.

Before introducing the study's research hypotheses, it is worth mentioning that I give a central role in the explanations of protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan to framing processes. During my work with several international democracy-promoting NGOs in Kazakhstan⁹ in the 2002–2006 period, I had to travel around the country organising various seminars and workshops on human rights, civic activism and election-related training. As a result, I had the chance to meet different people from various parts of the country and learn about their grievances and various pressing issues. I also learned that often people would not participate in protests unless there was an understandable, highly motivational and resonant collective action frame. My private conversations with some Kazakhstani political scientists and politicians¹⁰ also suggest that the public's protest mobilisation potential is conditional upon a construction of a frame that not only identifies a problem and its source (diagnostic frame) but that also offers a solution

⁹ I worked in the following international NGOs based in Almaty: the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), an American nonprofit organisation aiming to advance good governance and democratic rights in developing democracies across the world, and the International Republican Institute (IRI), an American nonprofit organisation striving to advance freedom and democracy worldwide by developing political parties, civic institutions, open elections, democratic governance and the rule of law.

¹⁰ Expert interviews: Mr Dosym Satpaev, a renowned political scientist (17 October 2008); Mr Pavel Shumkin, an ex-leader of the Labour Unions' Movement (4 November 2008); Dr Zhuldyzbek Abylkhozhin, a renowned historian and professor at the National Academy of Sciences (28 October 2010); Mr Andrey Sviridov, an independent journalist and civic activist (7 October 2009); Mr Ainur Kurmanov, a leader of the 'Talmas' Movement and civic activist (16 September 2009); and Mr Sergei Duvanov, an independent journalist and civic activist (30 September 2009).

(prognostic frame); above all, such frames must be extremely persuasive to mobilise the masses to protest. Despite my personal observations and expert interviews regarding the prevalence of the CAF-based explanation of protest cyclicity, I cannot disregard the importance of RD, POS and RMT in accounting for protest mobilisation. Indeed, had the disintegration of the SU not opened up POS and resulted in the growth of various social grievances and the formation of numerous public associations, a history of contentious collective action in Kazakhstan would not have emerged. At the same time, without the construction of resonant CAFs, social movements would have lacked the necessary popular support and, thus, remained weak and unheard. In order to avoid arriving at self-confirming hypotheses, George and Bennett (2005) warn that hypothesising in small-N case studies involving several competing theories should be done in such a manner that theories remain falsifiable and subject to scrutiny. Only by ensuring the falsifiability of the hypotheses can I assess the validity and scope of the study's competing theories.

Hypothesis 1: The cyclicity of popular protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan is related to the changes in the resonance of CAFs; highly resonant CAFs mobilise more people for protest than less resonant CAFs. The variance of protest activities in Kazakhstan can be better attributed to framing processes rather than to the favourability of structural conditions such as the open POS and viable mobilisation structures. This view is in line with Snow and Benford's (1992) argument that 'associated with the emergence of a cycle of protest is the development of an innovative master frame' (143). They add that even open POS and an abundance of mobilisation structures cannot mobilise the masses in the absence of a master frame.

Hypothesis 2: Socioeconomic grievances mobilise more people for protest than political and/or politicised grievances because the cost of participation in the former is lower than in the latter. Protest mobilisation outcomes vary across the four grievances due to the

regime's susceptibility¹¹ to the challenges posed by each of the four grievances. Thus, while a regime pays little regard to people protesting around socioeconomic issues, it does not tolerate protests staged around political and politicised issues. In order to prevent people from participating in political protests, the state's coercive apparatus increases the costs of participation by threatening citizens, activists and organisers of protests with imprisonment, dismissal from a job, prosecution, various forms of discrimination and even murder (Socialismkz.info 2012; Yuritsyn 2009). The risk of such repressive measures does not apply to people wishing to participate in protests about socioeconomic and/or non-politicised issues and these are, therefore, characterised by higher protest instances.

Hypothesis 3: The success and failure of early democratisation in Kazakhstan is related to the rise and decline of popular protest mobilisation in the period between the end of the 1980s and the mid-1990s. The collapse of the SU coupled with the growth of protest mobilisation fostered early democratisation processes when Kazakhstan gained independence in 1991. Waning mobilisation in the aftermath of independence was followed by the growth of authoritarian practices, resulting in the stalling of democratisation by 1995.

Methodology

In this thesis I employ a small-N case study methodology focusing on both a thorough within-case and an across-case analysis over time. Case studies allow for the testing of current theories and the development of new theories through a close examination of historical cases and their evolution (George and Bennett 2005: 75). Among their many advantages, case studies allow for an in-depth investigation of complex causal

¹¹ According to the democratisation literature, a regime's susceptibility to popular mobilisation is one of many factors challenging the robustness of an authoritarian government. See Bellin (2004).

mechanisms. Hence, in the context of my research, the case study approach allows me to explore the overlapping influence of four grievance types, POS, mobilising structures and CAFs on the variance of mass mobilisation in Kazakhstan. Process-tracing, one of the case study methods, will be used to ‘identify the intervening causal process – the causal chain and causal mechanism – between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable’ (ibid.: 206). This method helps to identify and trace the causal chain of events and key decisions within the causal mechanism. Often, as is suggested in George and Bennett’s book, ‘narrative accounts of a case can be supplemented by such devices as decision trees, sketches of the internal analytical structure of the explanation... to display the logic of the actors’ decisions or the sequence of internal developments within the case’ (94). The construction of causal diagrams highlights the most crucial connections between the variables. These must be coherent, clear and precise without being oversimplified or packed with unnecessary detail. Only causal steps relevant to the theories at hand should be represented in a causal diagram. I draw such diagrams in Chapter 4, providing comments on how a variable X or its interaction with variable Y causes a change in the outcome of variable Z.

By using within-case and across-case process-tracing, I am able to use a micro-perspective on the first and second hypotheses in regard to the factors – RD, POS, RMT and CAFs – that enable local SMOs to mobilise the general public. As for the third hypothesis, I approach the testing from the macro-perspective by looking at how protest mobilisation contributed to stalling democratic transition. While exploring the relationship between variables, process-tracing ‘can identify single or *different* paths to an outcome, point out variables that were otherwise left out in the initial comparison of cases, check for spuriousness, and permit causal inference on the basis of a few cases or even a single case’ (George and Bennett 2005: 215). The nature of my research questions

entails different causal paths leading to the same outcome – an occurrence referred to in the literature as a problem of equifinality. The process-tracing method deals with equifinality by ‘documenting alternative causal paths to the outcomes and alternative outcomes for the same causal factor’ (ibid.: 224).

The literature on case studies in general and process-tracing in particular suggests that researchers should account for alternative explanations of social phenomena. Although the use of a single theory in a case study would result in a higher level of rigour, formalisation and clarity, such a case study would likely generate self-confirming conclusions. Yet, in certain cases, it is simply inevitable that a researcher comes across several or many competing explanations of a case and/or an outcome. It is easier to reconcile rival explanations when there is a simple linear causal relationship involved; however, in the case of my study the task of testing rival theories becomes harder when theories posit complex causal relationships involving equifinality and interactions effects (George and Bennett 2005). Under such circumstances, questions such as ‘how can a researcher avoid too readily rejecting or narrowing the scope conditions of a theory that is in fact accurate, or accepting or broadening the scope condition of a theory that is in fact false or inapplicable?’ should be addressed by those scholars who test more than one competing theoretical approach.

It should be noted that the abovementioned question could be put differently: how would we empirically assess the merit of theory A over theory B in predicting an outcome in case Z? This is a question which is directly related to my research design because I employ competing theoretical explanations of protest behaviour in Kazakhstan. Hence, how would I know if, for example, CAF theory is stronger than RMT theory in explaining the waning of protests in the mid-1990s? George and Bennett (2005) maintain

that theoretical explanations of cases are best assessed by their uniqueness, or whether the outcome predicted ‘could not have been expected from the best rival theory available’ (Carrier 1988 cited in George and Bennett 2005: 117). The researcher’s goal here is to find instances where theoretical explanations make unique predictions about the process or an outcome of the case. To do that, first, he/she formulates theories’ predictions, i.e. what would be the process or an outcome of the case for theories A, B and C. Then, after collecting empirical data, the investigator compares it with the theoretical explanations. It is this process of tracing the evidence that tests whether the observed processes in the case match those predicted by the theories. The theory that better predicts what happened and why it happened as well as the one which leads to the discovery of more novel facts and insights should become a better guide to understanding the phenomenon in question. Hence, in my own research I would be inclined to regard the CAF theory as a better explanation for the waning of mass mobilisation in the mid-1990s, provided that its predictions match the empirical evidence better than the predictions made by the competing RMT, RD and POS perspectives.

Research Procedures

For the sake of hypothesising, I divide the 1992 to 2009 period into three time phases. Each of these phases is characterised by events which had large effects on protest mobilisation in that period. I list the most significant of those events below:

- 1) 1992 – 1997: declaration of independence, presidential and parliamentary elections, government’s privatisation campaign, dissolution of 1994 unicameral parliament, two constitutional referenda, growth of unemployment and poverty.
- 2) 1998 – 2003: presidential and parliamentary elections, political crisis, closure of oppositional media.

- 3) 2004 – 2009: housing crisis, presidential elections, economic crisis, interethnic conflicts, adoption of Law on Internet, politically motivated trials.

Then, I select three cases per each of the four issue areas – environmental, interethnic, political and socioeconomic – with the cases being represented by Kazakhstan’s SMOs. It is important that they must be representative of every time phase. In other words, I ensure that there is at least one case operating around a certain issue area in each time phase. The following table outlines the selected cases tabulated across four issue areas and three time phases. Appendix D provides a brief overview of these SMOs’ profiles.

Issue areas	1 st time phase 1992–1997	2 nd time phase 1998–2003	3 rd time phase 2004–2009
Environmental			
<i>Nevada-Semei</i>	x	x	x
<i>Green Salvation</i>	x	x	x
<i>Tabigat</i>	x	x	x
Interethnic			
<i>Ult Tagdyry</i>			x
<i>Vainakh</i>	x	x	x
<i>Lad</i>	x	x	x
Political			
<i>RNPK</i>		x	
<i>Alga</i>		x	x
<i>Azat</i>	x		
Socioeconomic			
<i>Workers’ Movement</i>	x		
<i>Pokoleniye</i>	x	x	x
<i>Shanyrak</i>			x

Table 1-1: Cases selected for thesis’s small-N case study

As we can see from Table 1.1, some of the cases such as Nevada-Semei and Pokoleniye exist for more than five years (the duration of each time phase), whereas some have a much shorter lifespan (e.g. Alga and Workers’ Movement). Ideally I was looking for cases that existed throughout the whole period 1992–2009, as such a long life span would enable me to trace their organisational dynamics as well as the evolution of strategic choices and mobilisation tactics. Cases that existed only during one phase would reveal the reasons behind organisations’ closures. With an expectation of exposing theories to a

‘tough test’, which means picking cases that are most-likely and least-likely crucial for a theory, I picked cases independent of whether they were successful in mobilisation or not. I define success in regard to mobilisation not by whether SMOs achieved their protest objective (e.g. an increase of wages), but by whether they managed to mobilise people for protest or not. By making sure that selected cases include the whole variation of the dependent variable, I safeguarded myself against confirmation bias which often mars small-N case studies that exclude deviant cases.

Within-case process-tracing was used to track the full circle of the mobilisation process, starting from the case’s emergence until its mobilisation outcomes¹². Any renaming or restructuring of SMOs is of theoretical interest to my research. To illustrate, according to RMT theory, SMOs would intentionally change their title or restructure their leadership by attracting prominent and powerful elites in order to improve their appeal and expand their target audience by attracting new members. Across-case process-tracing let me test the second hypothesis regarding any differences in the mobilisation outcomes achieved by SMOs representing the four types of issues. Thanks to this technique, I was able to see why and how the nature of public grievances affects the cyclicity of protests.

Data Sources

There are two main sources of data: semi-structured elite interviews and five weekly newspapers. The former was necessary to collect primary data from SMOs’ leaders and activists regarding the explanatory power of the study’s independent variables, whereas the latter was used to illustrate the cyclicity of protests – the dependent variable. In this section I will discuss the rationale for choosing these particular sources.

¹² By mobilisation outcomes, I mean the frequency and size of a protest activity staged by either of the cases.

Elite Interviews

Interview data is frequently used in case studies to gather basic information about the case, filling in gaps in the existing historical accounts and studying the interviewees' logic behind certain decisions. Depending on the research topic, the investigator may be interviewing the general public or elites. Since in my research I interviewed elites, I will briefly comment on the utility of semi-structured elite interviewing in case study research.

Oisín Tansey (2006) outlines several uses of elite interviewing in case studies in general, and in process-tracing in particular. He argues that the role of elite interviewing in process-tracing has been somewhat underestimated by George and Bennett (2005), who are biased toward advancing documental and archival research. Thus, Tansey lists the following primary uses of interview data:

- Corroboration of what has been established from other sources;
- Establishing what a set of people think;
- Making inferences about a larger population's characteristics/decisions; and
- Reconstruct historically an event or set of events.

While other data collection methods can be used to attain the abovementioned goals, interviews in general, and specifically elite interviews, have certain advantages over other methods. First of all, elite interviews enable researchers to interview first-hand participants who directly participated in or witnessed an event. More importantly, those are the people who stood behind the decision-making and played key roles. Moreover, while documents and archives may provide a wealth of historical data, the nature of interviewing allows the researcher to move beyond written accounts (Tansey 2006). This is especially crucial when official documents do not necessarily objectively portray past events. Written information may be incomplete and reflect mainly the official version of

events; for various reasons, documents may conceal the informal processes preceding decision-making, and blur disagreements on certain issues. In this case, without interviewing elites a researcher risks obtaining misleading data. Another advantage of elite interviewing stems from the surplus of primary and secondary data such as documents, reports and mass media references. Here, elite interviewees can help the researcher to prioritise incoming data 'as respondents can distinguish for the researcher the most significant or accurate documents from those that may be marginal or may present a selective account of events' (Seldon and Pappworth 1983 cited in Tansey 2006: 7).

By interviewing the organisers of protest activities, I am able to historically trace the decision-making processes behind the planning and organisation of particular protests. It also enables me to historically reconstruct the events and complement the documentary evidence. Interviewing the leaders and participants of past protests sheds light on what was happening within groups, including the framing processes, repertoires of action and strategy-framing. I can thus ask questions about why a particular political party or a social movement stopped existing. What caused the reorganisation or renaming of a party? What caused the formulation of a new framing strategy? Why did the radicalness of a group's activities change? What segments of the population does the group aim at mobilising? What are the common problems associated with planning and running a protest?

Since process-tracing focuses on the tracing of key events and decisions in the causal chain, its reliance on elite interviewing is very appropriate. Applied to my study, interviewing those SMO leaders directly involved in the planning, organisation and implementation of SMOs' mobilisation efforts increases the credibility of the empirical

evidence. In addition, as mentioned earlier, studying the logic behind elites' decisions reveals the background context of such decisions as well as alternative decisions that were rejected. This will let me identify the issues and factors – some of which may be absent in the secondary sources – that were at stake at the time of making a decision. In turn, newly discovered facts and details may reveal additional variables to be added to the causal mechanism. All in all, in the words of Tansey, the 'goal when applying the process-tracing method [is] to use testimony of those who were most closely involved to construct a theoretically-informed narrative of the process of interest' (2006: 10-11). Thus, at the times when the interviewees are important players, when their memories are strong and when they are eager to share impartially their recollections of the past, elite interviewing is inarguably one of the most useful instruments in the process-tracing methodology.

However, the elite interviewing method is not without potential flaws that may lead to misleading research conclusions. Two of the major flaws worth mentioning are interviewees' failure to accurately remember events and occurrences from the past and interviewees' susceptibility to social desirability bias. Undoubtedly, interviewing leaders or ex-leaders of SMOs about events that occurred some 20 years ago puts a certain amount of strain on interviewees' memories, resulting in sometimes inaccurate data. In such cases, I consulted with SMOs' internal publications such as brochures, reports and documents in order to check and obtain accurate data on past events. When such publications were missing, I relied on existing secondary sources such as newspaper articles and history textbooks covering the activities of particular SMOs. In regard to social desirability bias, the leaders of oppositional SMOs often exaggerate their movement's achievements in protest mobilisation by over-reporting instances of organised protest and turnout rates. Understanding that by doing so they want to over-

emphasise the significance of their SMO in a certain phase, my familiarity with the profile and background of all selected SMOs prevented me from drawing inaccurate conclusions about movements' protest mobilisation activities. All in all, good elite interviewing skills¹³ as well as preliminary knowledge of the cases selected for a study can generate credible and reliable interview data.

In September and October 2009 I interviewed the leaders of 12 selected SMOs in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Each interview lasted for approximately one hour. With prior permission, all interviews were tape recorded. To meet ethical requirements, interviewees were asked to sign an interview consent form. Interview tapes were transcribed and electronically password-protected so as to ensure the interviewees' confidentiality. Despite guarantees of confidentiality, many interviewees did not mind disclosing their identities. Indeed, some of them asked whether I could publicise their names in this thesis. By doing so they wanted to show that they are transparent and open to the mass media and academic community. The electronic transcripts were coded and analysed in the QSR Nvivo7/9 qualitative data analysis software package. An interview schedule is attached as Appendix A. Interview descriptions as well as a short overview of SMOs' profiles is provided in Appendix D.

Newspapers

The importance of newspapers' protest event data in the studies of social movements and collective action is hard to understate. Both the classical and recent studies of collective action extensively rely on newspapers' coverage of protest events. Indeed, sometimes newspaper event data was the only source of protest data and, thus, remained the only source of research evidence (McCarthy et al. 2008). However, the growth of scholarly

¹³ In May 2008 I attended an advanced postgraduate Elite Interviewing course offered by the Department of Politics and International Relations (University of Oxford).

work based on newspaper event data has been proportional to the growth of literature criticising this method. Among some of the major criticisms of relying on newspaper protest event data have been: a) the potential data inaccuracies introduced by the researcher during the collection of data ('researcher bias'); b) a newspaper's selective approach to protest event coverage ('selection bias'); and c) deficiencies on the part of the newspaper in reporting a protest ('description bias') (Earl et al. 2004; McCarthy et al. 2008). Clearly, newspaper data is far from being flawless, but it has contributed enormously to the wealth of knowledge on social movements. Proponents of newspaper data argue that considering its limitations it does not deviate much from accepted standards of data quality in the social sciences. In fact, McCarthy et al (2008) argue that 'when considering selection bias, newspaper data compare favourably to bias from nonresponses in surveys' (77). However, only if the researcher considers the factors affecting the quality of newspaper data can he/she avoid faulty interpretations and false research conclusions.

For the purpose of my research I am interested in the number and cyclicity of protest events in Kazakhstan since 1992 till the end of 2009. I was not able to pick at random a newspaper from the pool of print media in Kazakhstan because not every newspaper would report on protest events regularly. Therefore, I devised following criteria for selecting newspapers:

- *Ideological stance:* A newspaper has to be in opposition to the current government. Practice has shown that pro-governmental print media avoid publicising issues hurting the government, its policy, reputation, or state officials. Because protests usually target state organs, they do not appear on the pages of the pro-governmental press. In contrast, pro-oppositional newspapers are more

interested in covering issues, including protest events that portray the current government in an unfavourable way.

- *Sponsorship or ownership of newspaper:* Independent non-state newspapers which belong to individuals, groups or commercial entities with pro-oppositional views are more likely to cover protest events than state-owned newspapers, or newspapers belonging to owners with pro-governmental views.
- *Continuity and regularity:* For the sake of data consistency, newspaper issues had to be continuous and regular over the 1992–2009 period. I will discuss this criterion in more detail further in the section.

Before I proceed to the presentation of the selected newspapers, I will discuss the way I addressed the issues of researcher, selection and description biases related to the use of newspaper event data in the studies of social movements and collective action. Researcher bias relates to investigators' use of inconclusive, non-thorough newspaper indexing systems, and researcher fatigue resulting from time-consuming scanning of a massive amount of newspapers. In my research I did not use newspaper indexes. Instead, I read all of the issues of the selected newspapers. To manage and organise my time and workload efficiently, I used one assistant whom I trained on newspaper scans. In the early inception phase of newspaper scans I checked the assistant's coding technique to avoid possible omissions of protest events and their details. To ensure inter-coder reliability we scanned about five to 10 issues from each selected newspaper and compared the results, which matched 95% of the time. Approximately 25% of the coding work was carried out by the assistant.

In general, the adopted coding strategy involved reading a whole newspaper and scanning stories for any mention of public protest events with two or more participants,

such as demonstrations, sit-ins, pickets, hunger-strikes, marches, rallies and other protest events. For a protest event to be coded it had to be directed at a local governmental agency, officials, or any other institutions, such as private companies, NGOs, etc. Protest data excludes public gatherings that lacked a clear protest quality as well as routine institutional actions such as conferences, press releases and meetings. For instance, a demonstration organised by the ruling party – *Nur Otan* (Light Native Land) – is not coded because it does not constitute a protest but rather a public relations campaign promoting the government's, the party's and/or the President's achievements. Moreover, I coded 'discrete events, treating multiday protests as a single event unless reported as distinct events with different actors and initiation' (Jenkins et al. 2003: 286).

While I do take into account the factors that cause selection and description biases I do not possess an objective and credible record on the population of protests in Kazakhstan for the period of interest. Police and protest permit records represent such source of objective records of protest in Kazakhstan; however, as I mentioned earlier in the essay, in some post-Soviet countries like Kazakhstan obtaining access to such records is virtually impossible because they are labelled as classified data and available only for internal use¹⁴. Nevertheless, in order to assess the credibility of my protest event data I triangulated multiple sources: a) interviews with key organisers and participants of protests; and b) protest statistics for 2006–2008, which appeared in two *Svoboda Slova* newspaper articles (Svoboda Slova 2008, 2009)¹⁵ on protests in Kazakhstan. The comparison of newspaper event data with the recollections of interviewees and protest statistics found in the mentioned newspaper resulted in three closely matching figures, which support the credibility of the newspaper event data.

¹⁴ I learned this from a private informal conversation with an anonymous police officer in Almaty city.

¹⁵ The authors of these articles on protest behaviour in Kazakhstan told me that they used a protest coding technique which did not differ much from my method.

According to the three criteria mentioned above, I selected five newspapers (Table 1.2): *Birlesu* (1991–1993), *Karavan* (1991–present), *Karavan-Blitz* (June 1994–December 1997), *Vremya* (May 1999–present) and *Svoboda Slova* (March 2005–present). All of them except *Karavan-Blitz* were issued on a weekly basis; *Karavan-Blitz* used to be a daily newspaper. I then divided the 1992–2009 time periods into three parts, each represented by one or three of the selected newspapers. For a detailed discussion of the selected newspapers’ profiles, please see Appendix B.

Time Period	Newspapers
January 1992 – May 1999	Birlesu, Karavan, Karavan-Blitz
May 1999 – March 2005	Vremya
March 2005 – December 2009	Svoboda Slova

Table 1-2: Newspapers selected for coding protest event data and their representation of time periods

I divided the time periods according to the dates of establishment of the *Vremya* and *Svoboda Slova* newspapers¹⁶. I started coding protest events from the first issues of *Birlesu* and *Karavan* newspapers in January 1992 and finished the coding process at the last issue of *Svoboda Slova* in December 2009.

Since various patterns of selection and description biases can vary across time and media source, I decided to choose five different newspapers. To illustrate, if *Vremya* newspaper no longer favoured a specific oppositional party or no longer felt its protests to be newsworthy, it would skip the coverage of its protests in future issues and thus fall victim to selection and description biases. To avoid such potential omissions of protest events, I increased the sample of newspapers. Ideally, in order to arrive at the most credible protest statistics I would have read all the issues of *Karavan*, *Vremya* and *Svoboda Slova* newspapers since their foundation up to the present day, but with limited resources I had to assign each newspaper its time period. In addition, scanning of all newspapers throughout their existence would have shed light on the stability to be seen in the patterns

¹⁶ *Vremya* was first published on 21 May 1999 and *Svoboda Slova* on 2 March 2005.

of selection bias in newspaper coverage of protest in Kazakhstan – this endeavour, however, is beyond the scope of this research.

There are two reasons why I selected three newspapers for the 1992–1999 period. The first is related to newspapers' numerous omissions of protest coverage in the first half of the 1990s. Considering the many factors affecting the selection bias, I believe that high instances of protest events omission were linked to their newsworthiness, i.e. protest demonstrations and labour strikes were so common in the early 1990s that newspapers did not consider them newsworthy enough to be covered. Protest event overlaps caused by simultaneous scanning of two different newspapers were taken into account and duplicate entries were deleted from the final protest database. To illustrate, protests in 1993 were coded from the Birlesu and Karavan newspapers, whereas the protests of 1994 were coded from the Karavan and Karavan-Blitz because the Birlesu newspaper was no longer published in that year.

Second, one of the newspapers in the 1992–1999 period – Birlesu – had problems affecting the regularity of its appearances. Moreover, both Birlesu and Karavan-Blitz were published for only two years. To account for potential gaps in the coverage of protest events, I collated the two sources with the Karavan newspapers that had neither the continuity nor regularity problems. Like Karavan, Vremya and Svoboda Slova newspapers have been in print since their foundation and were always released on time.

Five newspapers picked for coding of protest data resulted in a credible portrayal of protest events' cyclical nature in Kazakhstan since 1992, a finding which was confirmed in the course of data triangulation. Interviewees' recollections of the past and present evolution of protest activity in Kazakhstan seem to support the newspaper data. More empirical support is derived from the aforementioned 2007–2009 protest statistics which

appeared in two newspaper articles on protest activity in Kazakhstan in Svoboda Slova. All in all, having secured the credibility of my protest data, I was able to widely use it as a point of reference for the cyclicity of protest in Kazakhstan.

Thesis Structure

The main body of this thesis consists of five chapters and a conclusion. Having introduced a research subject, outlined the relevant literature and presented the research questions along with the methodology, the second chapter will set out the study's theoretical background. In it, I present four theoretical perspectives accounting for popular protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan. Furthermore, the chapter will shed light on scholarly debates about the prevalence of a particular theory in predicting either the emergence or cyclicity of protests and social movements. Through critical assessment of these debates I will identify gaps and note areas requiring further research.

The third chapter will lay out the historical background and context for popular protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan. It is organised around a description of the study's independent and dependent variables. By dividing the 1992–2009 time period into three phases, I trace the developments in the emergence, rise and fall of protest activity. Chapter 3 will start with a discussion of mass politics in Soviet Kazakhstan. Next, a discussion of dependent variable followed by a historical overview of the most notable mobilisation instances will be given. Then, I will explore the factors influencing the cyclicity of popular protest mobilisation. The chapter will close by establishing some basic causal associations between the variables and laying the groundwork for the empirical chapters.

Chapter 4 examines the 'nuts and bolts' of protest activity in Kazakhstan. Using primary interview data as well as secondary sources I describe the what, when, why and how of

protests. As a result of in-depth analysis of contentious politics I establish causal relationships between the variables and test my first two hypotheses. A causal diagram accompanied by a narrative description will be created in order to portray these relationships. Within-case and cross-case comparisons will highlight the theory most relevant in explaining changes in protest activity. Tentatively speaking, I argue that it is the SMOs' skills in frame construction and articulation that characterise the periodic changes in popular mobilisation for protests. As for the variation of protest mobilisation across issue areas, I argue that this is related to regime's toleration of non-political and non-politicised protests and repressions of political and politicised protests that are perceived as a threat to regime's survival.

Since my third research question deals with the role of popular protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan's stalled transition to democracy, Chapter 5 aims to support the fact that the transition did indeed stall and the country reverted back to authoritarianism. No hypothesising can take place without first ensuring that the explained phenomena did or did not occur. Chapter 5 begins by defining the terms 'democracy' and 'democratisation'. Next, it presents three major democratisation perspectives – modernisation, transition and culture. After that I spell out the difficulties surrounding the regime classification of transition countries. Using three democratisation perspectives I evaluate Kazakhstan's early transition to democracy and conclude that the early democratic progress which followed declaration of independence in 1991 was soon jeopardised by growing authoritarian tendencies in the mid-1990s. Respect for some democratic principles and a total disregard of others has afforded Kazakhstan the title of a hybrid regime with a dominant-power syndrome.

Chapter 6 discusses the relationship between popular protest mobilisation and the stalled transition to democracy. We will see if protest mobilisation led to early democratisation in Kazakhstan and most importantly find out if democratisation stalled in reaction to waning of protests in mid-1990s. Adopting Bermeo's (1997) 'cost of suppression' axiom I explain the effects of post-communist incumbents' calculations of costs of repressing and costs of tolerating radical protests in early 1990s on incumbents' decisions to democratise. By emphasising the significance of protest mobilisation, this chapter aims to contribute to recurring scholarly debates about the controversial effects of protest radicalism on states' transition to democracy.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by recapping the research questions and outlining the study's theoretical and practical implications. The concluding chapter will begin by mentioning the gaps in the social movements and democratisation literature that this dissertation attempted to fill. Next, I will present study's thesis statements. Then, chapter will discuss some of the study's limitations and recommendations for future inquiry. Finally, I end the thesis by indulging in some predictions regarding the future direction of democratisation in Kazakhstan from the perspective of popular protest mobilisation.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Background

As the thesis title suggests, the study of protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan demands a thorough examination of the literature on democratisation processes and social movements. While I focus on democratisation in Kazakhstan in Chapter 5, this chapter is devoted to discussion of the major theoretical perspectives found in the social movement literature. Unlike some areas of the social sciences, the field of social movement research is multidisciplinary and has competing explanations of collective behaviour offered by social psychologists (R. W. Brown 1966; 1908), economists (Marwell and Oliver 1993; Olson 1971), sociologists (Blumer 1951; Heberle 1951; Jenkins 1983) and political scientists (Gurr 1970; Zald and McCarthy 1979). These explanations vary from micro to macro and structural to psychological perspectives. This chapter does not aim to examine each of these explanations; it will instead discuss in detail four classical and influential theories of social movements which I use to explain popular protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan.

The chapter presents each of the four theories in chronological order, starting with relative deprivation (RD) theory and followed by the resource mobilisation (RMT), political opportunity structures (POS) and collective action frames (CAF) perspectives. Discussion of each theoretical perspective is structured around a presentation of its definition, variables and critique.

Relative Deprivation

Originating in the late 1950s, the theory of relative deprivation posits that for a social movement to emerge there must be present ‘shared grievances and generalized beliefs (loose ideologies) about the causes and possible means of reducing grievances’ (McCarthy and Zald 1977: 1214). This proposition represents the core assumption of the three most influential proponents of the relative deprivation approach – Gurr (1970), Turner and Killian (1957) and Smelser (1962). All of them agree that an increase in the scope and intensity of a grievance produced by certain structural conditions accompanied by the development of ideology is a sufficient condition for collective behaviour and, hence, for the social movement.

Traditional theories of collective behaviour, as they are usually called by RMT theorists (Jenkins 1983; McCarthy and Zald 1977), interchangeably use the terms ‘deprivation’ and ‘grievance’ to denote the public’s dissatisfaction with various important aspects of life, such as housing, living standards, income, employment, etc. By adopting Maslow’s (1943; Maslow and Murphy 1954) hierarchy of human needs, James Chowning Davies (1997) argues that the abovementioned aspects of life can be categorised into two major categories of human needs: substantive needs (food, self-affection, dignity and self-actualisation) and instrumental needs (security, knowledge and power). Dissatisfaction within each category of needs results in different patterns of political behaviour. Therefore, people who are discontent about the provision of food and poor living standards are expected to be more likely to revolt and resort to violence than those who are discontent about their access to knowledge and power.

Gurr’s theory of grievances introduced in his seminal book *Why Men Rebel* (1970) is regarded as one of the traditional collective behaviour theories that shaped future

scholarship on social movements. His own definition of deprivation distinguishes between absolute and relative deprivation. Thus, he defines relative deprivation as 'actors' perception of discrepancy between their value expectations and their value capabilities' (13), where value expectations are the things people believe they should have and value capabilities means the things they believe they are going to have. The key words of his definition are 'perception' and 'discrepancy'. People may subjectively feel deprived in relation to their expectations, but when judged objectively people may not be in want (ibid: 24); hence the distinction between absolute and relative deprivation. As for discrepancy, the larger the discrepancy or gap between the public's expectations and capabilities, the larger the chances of collective violence.

Like Davies, Gurr also distinguishes between various objects of discontent. By calling them values, he defines them as 'the desired events, objects, and conditions for which men strive' (1970: 25). Based on past scholarship on human needs, desires, and goals his theory has three categories of values: welfare, power, and interpersonal values. Welfare values represent humans' basic needs for food and shelter. Power values characterise people's desires to influence others' decision-making through voting or political representation. Finally, interpersonal values are people's psychological satisfactions, and are sought in occupancy of high status and participation in supportive groups such as family and community. The outbreak of collective violence – or, as Gurr calls it, the magnitude of civil strife – depends on the scope and intensity of relative deprivation of either of these values. The scope of relative deprivation can be said to be large if there is a large number of people aggrieved by a certain issue, such as deteriorating standards of living or fraudulent elections. The intensity of relative deprivation is illustrative of the acuteness of a grievance and of the 'anger to which it gives rise' (Gurr 1970: 29).

So far we have seen that grievance theorists view the presence of masses frustrated by relative deprivation as an essential requisite for collective behaviour. The question that remains unanswered though is *how* does relative deprivation lead to collective action? Gurr's cross-sectional study of 114 polities (1968) highlighted two mediating variables between relative deprivation and magnitude of civil strife: a psychological variable and social conditions. Thus, he cites numerous psychological theories and studies (Dollard et al. 1939; Lorenz 1966; Maier 1942) about the origins of human aggression in order to support his argument that the primary source of civil strife (including revolutions) is anger induced by frustration about deprivation. It is worth noting that, according to Gurr, in the majority of cases intense frustration with deprivation tends to get politicised because it involves political objects and is targeted at the political system. Frustration with politicised grievances leads to anger, which in its turn results in collective political violence. The public's resorting to collective political violence depends on the public's normative and utilitarian justification for such behaviour (Black 1972). Put in Gurr's words, people must believe 'that violence has utility in obtaining scarce values' (1970: 13). Only when such a belief is present can we talk of collective action. Smelser's (1962) theory of collective behaviour also highlights the significance of public belief for mass mobilisation. However, his definition of belief is different from that of Gurr; he calls it a generalised belief which 'identifies the source of strain, attributes certain characteristics to this source, and specifies certain responses to the strain as possible or appropriate' (1962: 16). The growth and spread of generalised belief, according to Smelser, is crucial for the start of collective action.

Despite its significance, frustration with deprivation and belief in the utility of violence in obtaining desired objectives is not the primary mediating variable between relative deprivation and magnitude of civil strife. In fact, as stated by Gurr, '[t]he belief that

violence has utility in obtaining scarce values can be an independent source of political violence, but within political communities it is most likely to provide a secondary, rationalizing, rather than primary, motivation' (1970: 13). Thus, the primary mediating role between frustration with deprivation and magnitude of civil strife is attributed to social conditions, as illustrated in Figure 2.1.

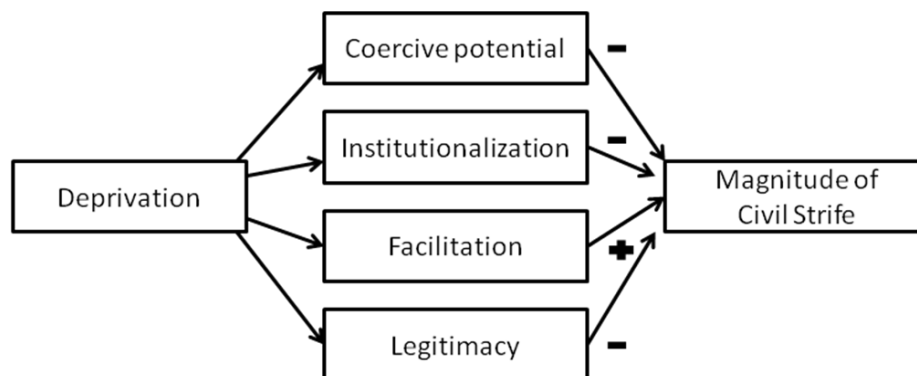


Figure 2-1: Social mediating variables between Deprivation and Magnitude of Civil Strife adapted from Gurr (1968)

Both Gurr (1968) and Smelser (1962) speak of the state's coercive potential to have an adverse effect on the outcome of deprivation. However, the relationship between state repressions and collective violence is not linear – people may respond to coercion or a threat of coercion by even larger escalation of collective violence. Moreover, evidence suggests that the level of coercion, be it moderate or high, influences the extent of civil strife (Bwy 1966; Gurr and Ruttenberg 1967). For instance, while the state's high level of coercion such as military participation thwarts protest mobilisation, moderate coercion such as imprisonment and threats of punishment increase the amount of civil strife. The second intervening social condition is the country's level of political institutionalisation – 'the extent to which societal structures beyond primary level are broad in scope, command substantial resources and/or personnel, and are stable and persisting' (Gurr 1968: 1105). The presence and effective functioning of political organisations and procedures are essential for securing political stability (Huntington 1965). Without associations such as labour unions and political parties aimed at expression of public

discontent, aggrieved masses would seek violent means of attaining value satisfactions. Hence, greater levels of political institutionalisation discourage the masses from participating in civil strife. A third condition – facilitation – refers to the social and environmental conditions which facilitate the outbreak of civil strife. Gurr's (1968) analysis emphasised conditions such as past levels of civil strife, political party support and external assistance to protesters as having a positive effect on the extent of strife. Finally, according to the legitimacy factor, regimes that enjoy popular support are less likely to be challenged by outbursts of public protest activity than regimes which are not considered legitimate by the general public.

Gurr warns that the model sketched in Figure 2.1 is simplified with no hierarchical or causal interactions among the mediating variables. They are assumed to have an independent effect on the relationship between deprivation and civil strife (ibid.: 1105). However, as a result of multiple regression analyses he produced a much more complex casual model of civil strife where some variables such as legitimacy did not have any consequential mediating effect on deprivation, but rather acted as deprivation itself (e.g. dissatisfaction with illegitimacy motivating men for protest); levels of institutionalisation did not have a direct effect on deprivation but determined the coercive potential and social facilitation, which in turn crucially affected the outcome of short-term deprivation.

Having introduced the relative deprivation theory and its key variables, I now turn to discussing the various criticisms that it attracted. Most critical of relative deprivation theory were scholars representing RMT theory, which by the end of the 1970s became the dominant perspective of collective behaviour by 'deemphasiz[ing] grievances and focus[ing] upon societal supports and constraints of movements, tactical dilemmas, social control, media usage, and the interplay of external supports and elites' (Zald and

McCarthy 1979: vii). In their seminal work on the RMT perspective, McCarthy and Zald argue that ‘sociologists with their emphasis upon structural strain, generalized belief, and deprivation, largely have ignored the ongoing problems and strategic dilemmas of social movements’ (McCarthy and Zald 1977: 1212).

The most widespread criticism of psychological theories of collective behaviour is related to their treatment of collective behaviour as non-institutionalised group behaviour (Jenkins 1983; Marx and Wood 1975; Weller and Quarantelli 1973). Thus, according to Piven and Cloward (1977) there is no need for formal organisation in order for acute discontent to cause disruptions. By claiming that movements form as a result of sudden increases in short-term grievances created by the ‘structural strains’ of rapid social change, Gusfield (1968) also emphasises the primary role of grievances and denies the importance of formal organisations (Jenkins 1983: 530). Opponents instead argue that grievances are relatively constant and structurally given (Jenkins and Perrow 1977; Tilly 1973, 1978), and therefore are secondary to mass mobilisation because they ‘may be defined, created, and manipulated by issue entrepreneurs and organizations’ (McCarthy and Zald 1977: 1215). In contrast to the traditional opinion that movement participation is relatively rare, discontent is transitory, and movement actors are irrational (Currie and Skolnick 1970; Jenkins 1983), RMT theorists underline the central role of institutionalised movement organisations, organisational facilities and resources in the movement formation.

Other important criticisms touch upon a link between relative deprivation and collective action, and methodology of studies on collective behaviour. Thus, by adopting some of Huntington’s (1968) conclusions, Tilly (1973) argues that revolutions and collective violence are a result of central political processes such as modernisation’s consequences

for structures of power rather than discontent with various structural strains. Furthermore, the link between deprivation and collective action as well as the crucial role of Smelser's concept of generalised beliefs in mass mobilisation was attacked by Marx (1970), who claims that there are cases when neither public discontent nor generalised beliefs were necessary conditions for the occurrence of a riot¹⁷. Currie and Skolnick (1970) agree with Marx by stating that Smelser's concept of generalised beliefs is quite problematic as it lacks conceptual clarity. Moreover, in their *Critical Note on Conceptions of Collective Behavior* they also raise doubts regarding the empirical evidence behind Smelser's conclusions. Hence, they argue that 'the *a priori* attitude that Smelser's model brings to the analysis of collective behavior makes for an absence of consistent concern for the empirical evidence' (ibid.: 41). Moreover, Gurr's (1970) research methodology has also received widespread criticism. The strongest of all criticisms referred to Gurr's measurement of discontent. Acknowledging difficulties surrounding quantitative measurement of the public's state of mind, Gurr uses aggregate statistical data such as employment and school enrollment rates to infer psychological states of relative deprivation (Marx and Wood 1975). By arguing that such a method creates misleading and inaccurate results, Davies (1997) claims that Gurr should have directly interviewed people regarding their grievances as this method would yield more accurate conclusions¹⁸. Finally, Tilly (1971) lists reasons why the conclusions of Gurr's quantitative analysis should remain tentative: Gurr's data is confined to a short-span of time (1961–1965), deals with whole states rather than variations within them, and comes from sources rather distant from studied events. Additionally, Tilly maintains that there is

¹⁷ In calling such riots 'issueless' he lists two types of them: riots during police strikes and riots in victory and celebration. In both types of riots, it was very difficult to identify the source of strain such as unemployment or some sort of discrimination. Nor was a collectively shared generalised belief regarding the source of the strain and the ways of redressing it present.

¹⁸ Davies cites the study of Free (1997) as the best example of measuring frustration with deprivation. Free and his associates devised the Self-Anchoring Striving Scale to gauge survey respondents' subjective evaluation of their past, present and future well-being.

a serious risk that Gurr's variables 'have been calibrated, adjusted, nudged, and reshaped to fit the particular body of data at hand' (ibid.: 418).

Disillusioned with traditional theories of collective behaviour, McCarthy and Zald stated that '[t]he ambiguous evidence of some of the research on deprivation, relative deprivation, and generalized belief has led us to search for a perspective and a set of assumptions that lessen the prevailing emphasis upon grievances' (1977: 1215). At the time when they wrote that, social movement literature was no longer dominated by traditional theories of collective action. The civil rights movements of the 1960s had shown that collective action is not just about frustrated publics; it is also about mobilising resources and establishing formal organisations aimed at mobilising people to attain certain collective objectives.

Resource Mobilisation

Highlighting the inability of traditional explanations of collective behaviour to address numerous instances of protest activity during the 1960s civil rights movements, RMT theory emerged as a social movement theory that provided the best possible explanation of the 1960s social movements. The theory's major foundations were laid down by the works of Oberschall (1973), Gamson (1975) and McCarthy and Zald (1973, 1977). Unlike grievance theory, McCarthy and Zald write, the RMT approach 'depends more upon political sociological and economic theories than upon social psychology of collective behavior' (1977: 1213). They further define it by saying that it 'emphasizes both societal support and constraint of social movement phenomena. It examines the variety of resources that must be mobilized, the linkages of social movements to other groups, the dependence of movements upon external support for success, and the tactics used by authorities to control or incorporate movements' (ibid.). All these factors are

believed to influence ‘the dynamics and tactics of social movement growth, decline, and change’ (ibid.), which are the main subjects of RMT theory. Hence, the theory’s dependent variables are the emergence, growth (or decline), and success of social movement organisations (SMOs). It is worth mentioning that the term ‘success’ refers to organisations’ achievement of their movement goals. Before I move on to presenting this theory’s variables in detail, it is worth introducing its key concepts.

Aware of the lack of consensus on a definition of a social movement concept, McCarthy and Zald (1977) offer a very broad definition because they want it to link to previous works on social movements. Thus, a social movement is a ‘set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society’ (ibid.: 1217-18). The authors do not refer to any type of preferences, but only those which must be mobilised for social change to take effect (Opp 2009: 131). The preference mobilisation function is performed by an SMO, which is ‘a complex, or formal, organization which identifies its goals with the preference of a social movement or a countermovement and attempts to implement those goals’ (McCarthy and Zald 1977: 1218). A sum of ‘all SMOs that have as their goal the attainment of the broadest preferences of a social movement constitute a *social movement industry (SMI)*’ (ibid.: 1219). Finally, a ‘*social movement sector (SMS)*’ consists of all SMIs in a society no matter to which social movement they are attached’ (ibid.: 1220).

According to the RMT perspective, there are four types of individuals or groups in the society categorised by their relationship to SMOs: adherents, constituents, bystander publics and opponents. *Adherents* are people who support the goals of a social movement or SMO, whereas *constituents* are individuals or organisations that provide resources to

the SMO. *Bystander publics* are ‘non-adherents who are not opponents of the social movement or its SMOs but who merely witness social movement activity’ (ibid.: 1221). Finally, people or groups who both oppose the goals and do not contribute resources to SMOs are labelled as *opponents*.

Individuals and groups are also distinguished by whether they will directly benefit from the SMO’s goals accomplishment. Hence, parties that directly benefit from the SMO’s goal accomplishment are called *potential beneficiaries*. Adherents of social movements who do not benefit from the SMO’s success are *conscience adherents*. Finally, those who directly support the SMO but do not extract direct benefit from its success in goal accomplishment are *conscience constituents*.

Having introduced the key concepts of the RMT perspective, I now turn to discussing its key explanatory variables. Central to this perspective is the pool of resources which have to be mobilised by SMOs to achieve their target goals (Gamson 1975; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Oberschall 1973). Despite there being little agreement on the type of resources that are significant (Jenkins 1983: 533), most of them can be categorised into tangible and intangible resources (Freeman 1988). Among tangible resources are money, facilities and means of publicising the movement’s existence and ideas. Freeman (1988) warns that ‘it is a mistake to judge the affluence of a movement from its monetary contributions’ (170). To illustrate, one SMO may have an abundance of funds and facilities but less access to the media, whereas another SMO, on the contrary, may suffer from lack of funds and office space but have access to a large network of newspapers and hold frequent conferences. Thanks to achieving better press coverage, the latter SMO would perform as well if not better than the former¹⁹. Intangible resources ‘include both

¹⁹ According to Molotch (1988), social movements and the media have a mutual interest in cooperation. Movements need the media to communicate with movement followers, whereas the media needs

specialized resources such as organizing and legal skills, and the unspecialized labor of supporters' (Jenkins 1983: 533; Tilly 1978). SMOs usually have some participants with specialised resources that allow them to reach networks through which other resources can be mobilised and thus gain access to decision-makers relevant to the movement (Freeman 1988). Critical to SMOs' success is also a stock of a large number of supporters willing to contribute their time and commitment to expose themselves to risks of arrest or entertain inconvenience (ibid.).

The abovementioned resources are mobilised from both within and outside social movements. Within-movement resources are mobilised by SMOs from the beneficiary constituency and any conscience constituencies (Freeman 1988). In line with one of McCarthy and Zald's (1977) illustrative hypotheses, 'regardless of the resources available to potential beneficiary adherents, the larger the amount of resources available to conscience adherents the more likely is the development of SMOs and SMIs that respond to preferences for change' (1225). Hence, SMOs strive to expand their support base by converting adherents into constituents, and bystander publics who are potential beneficiaries into adherents. At this point, it is worth asking where SMOs locate potential supporters. According to McCarthy (1996), there are two types of structural social locations – mobilising structures – where mobilisation can be generated: formal and informal. Formal mobilising structures are churches, unions and professional associations. More important for movement mobilisation are informal structures of everyday life such as families, friendship networks, neighbourhoods and work networks, 'where informal and less formal ties between people can serve as solidarity and communication facilitating structures when and if they choose to go into dissent together' (ibid.: 143). For example, the early 1950s Montgomery bus boycotts in the United States

movements to fill the daily news hole and aid the medium in its key business of selling attentive audiences to advertisers.

were organised through churches, while the idea of student sit-ins in the 1960s civil rights movements largely spread through informal student communication networks (Freeman 1988: 170).

In addition to resources mobilised from within the movement, a social movement's success or failure also depends on resources supplied by 'individuals and organizations from outside the collectivity which a social movement represents' (McCarthy and Zald 1977: 1216; Zald and McCarthy 1979). A widely cited example of this type of RMT found in the social movements literature is the experience of the United Farm Workers movement in the late 1960s. As Jenkins and Perrow (1977) argue, the movement was successful not due to a sharp increases of discontent but due to an injection of resources from outside. More importantly, it was the provision of critical organisational and financial resources by external groups such as organised labour and liberal organisations rather than mobilisation of internal resources that brought about change to agricultural policy. The authors associate external support to aggrieved groups with changes in the political environment at the end of 1960s; due to the divisions in the national political elite over an agricultural policy, some of the elites 'fended for farmers' insurgency, providing them with additional resources and applying leverage to movement targets' (250). The role of elites in supporting social movements and SMOs has also been emphasised by other proponents of the RMT perspective (Haines 1984; Jenkins and Eckert 1986; Zald and McCarthy 1979). All in all, according to Jenkins (1983), this emphasis on the significance of outside contributions to social movements and their coopting of institutional resources from private foundations, government agencies, political parties and even business corporations has been the most distinctive contribution of the RMT theory (533).

Finally, one last explanatory variable of the RMT theory is related to the ‘tactics used by authorities to control or incorporate movements’ (McCarthy and Zald 1977: 1213). The activities of SMOs are constrained by governments, police and other agents of social control. By threatening SMO members with repression, authorities raise the costs of supporting SMOs (Zald 1992)²⁰. According to Marx (1988), authorities can also damage social movements by inhibiting the supply of money and facilities, damaging morale and even destroying or displacing leaders. Moreover, the authorities are also known for their movement-facilitative actions, such as encouraging solidarity, giving information to movements, facilitating capacity for corporate action, etc. (ibid.).

It is worth noting here that a number of authors attribute authorities’ efforts aimed at constraining movement phenomena to the second variant of the RMT perspective (McAdam 1982; Perrow 1988; Tilly 1984), which focuses ‘upon political opportunities and the relationship of social movements to the state’ (Zald 1992: 333). The first variant of the theory instead emphasises the importance of resources, especially cadres and organising facilities, in the study of social movements (Opp 2009). Otherwise termed as ‘political process’ or a ‘macro’ model of RMT, the second variant of RMT theory became popular at the end of the 1970s and soon gave way to POS theory, which I will discuss later in the chapter. Indeed, scholarly interest in the influence of state political structures on social movements became so popular that Marx (1974) suggested it had to be analysed separately from the RMT perspective.

Like its predecessor – relative deprivation theory – RMT theory has been heavily criticised on various important grounds. For example, Piven and Cloward (1991) criticise McCarthy and Zald for ‘blurring the distinction between normative and non-normative

²⁰ By mentioning the costs and rewards of individual behaviour, McCarthy and Zald refer to Olson’s (1971) theory of collective action; however, ‘they never show how exactly a cost–benefit approach fits into their macro propositions’ (Opp 2009: 129).

forms of collective action... as if rule-conforming and rule-violating collective action are of a piece' (435). To illustrate, in a study of a movement against drunken driving McCarthy and Wolfson (1996) view protest behaviour as an extension of normal interest group politics, thus equating violent riots with conventional political action such as petitions, marches and demonstrations. By doing so, Opp argues, RMT theorists fail to distinguish between different types of protest behaviour (Mueller 1992; Opp 2009: 140). We are left questioning when movements choose to stage a peaceful and not a violent demonstration (ibid.). Another problem identified with the RMT theory is its underestimation of the role of grievances and ideological factors – i.e. the values, beliefs, and meanings behind mass mobilisation – instead taking them as givens (Ferree and Miller 1985; Mueller 1992; Perrow 1988). Hence, according to McCarthy and Zald (1977) ideology, which legitimates and makes collective action meaningful, almost naturally flows from the movement's underlying grievances (Buechler 1993; Snow and Benford 1992). However, citing the example of the United States women's movement, Buechler's (1990) shows that grievances cannot be assumed to be a constant background factor and are as important as access to resources. Moreover, it is thanks to the long-standing history of feminist ideology that grievances got politicised and collective action became possible. Eventually, the role of ideas and culture in the development of social movements attracted more scholarly attention, and thanks to the works of David Snow and various of his colleagues (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988a) it soon evolved into the theory of collective action frames (CAFs), which I will present later in the chapter.

By far the most cited criticism of the RMT theory touches upon its missing explanation of social movement phenomena at a micro-to-macro level of analysis. By labelling it a macro perspective, Opp (2009) claims that the RMT theory is good at explaining social

movements from the perspective of organisations (SMOs) aiming at mobilising resources. Speaking of the micro perspective, McCarthy and Zald (1977) explain individuals' movement participation by borrowing Olson's (1971) concepts of selective incentives and cost–benefit calculations. In his attempt to connect the perspective's micro and macro models, Opp questions how the individual costs and benefits are related to macro-level factors such as societal resources (2009: 142). McCarthy and Zald's answer is that, 'costs and rewards are centrally affected by the structure of society and the activities of authorities' (1977: 1216). Unsatisfied with their answer, Opp maintains that RMT proponents have to be clear as to which costs and benefits are exactly affected by which macro-level factors. Furthermore, the perspective's reliance on rational choice theory has been criticised by a number of scholars (Buechler 1993; Fireman and Gamson 1979; Jenkins 1983; Klandermans 1984), one of whom even called the model of rationality a Trojan horse for the 'superficial attractiveness of its empirically testable incentive formulations' (Ferree 1992: 30).

Political Opportunity Structures

As was mentioned earlier, the POS theory evolved out of the second variant of RMT theory, which focused on the constraints imposed by state authorities on social movements (Zald 1992). The theory's title and major foundations stem from a seminal paper by Peter Eisinger (1973), who 'used the term "structure of political opportunities" to help account for variation in "riot behavior" in forty-three American cities' (McAdam 1996: 23). Eisinger's findings were further elaborated by Tilly (1978), Gamson (1975), McAdam (1982) and Tarrow (1994), who 'saw the timing and fate of movements as largely dependent upon the opportunities afforded insurgents by the shifting institutional structure and ideological disposition of those in power' (McAdam 1996: 23). It is those

shifts in institutional structure or a political environment such as government responsiveness and the nature of the chief executive that make up what Eisinger (1973) calls a 'structure of political opportunities'. However, unlike his followers who focused on the dynamics of social movements, Eisinger used POS theory to explain protest activities. Hence, Eisinger's dependent variable is collective political behaviour – namely, protest – whereas that of Tarrow (1998) is the emergence of movements. Despite these differences in the explained variable, both Eisinger and his followers refer to common explanatory variables.

Since its foundation, the theory of POS has mostly been used as a set of independent variables (Jenkins and Perrow 1977; Jenkins et al. 2003; McAdam 1982); however, some scholars carrying out comparative cross-sectional studies use it as a carrier of intervening variables (Eisinger 1973; Kitschelt 1986; Kriesi et al. 1992). Moreover, some believe that movements can create POS (Burstein 1991; Button 1989; Freeman 1975), thus treating it as a dependent variable (Gamson and Meyer 1996: 275). Cautious about the dangers associated with widespread adoption and the general seductiveness of the concept, Gamson and Meyer state that, '[t]he concept of political opportunity structure is in trouble, in danger of becoming a sponge that soaks up virtually every aspect of the social movement environment – political institutions and culture, crises of various sorts, political alliances, and policy shifts...used to explain so much, it may ultimately explain nothing at all' (ibid.). Mindful of such dangers, McAdam (1996) reviewed POS theory in an attempt to clarify the concept. One section of his review touched upon one of the most controversial domains of POS – its set of independent variables (Opp 2009; Tarrow 1988). By reviewing the works of Brockett (1991), Kriesi et al (1992), Rucht (1996) and Tarrow (1994), McAdam (1996: 27) came up with the following highly consensual list of dimensions of POS:

1. The relative openness or closure of the institutionalised political system;
2. The stability or instability of that broad set of elite alignments that typically undergird a polity;
3. The presence or absence of elite allies; and
4. The state's capacity and propensity for repression.

These dimensions can be categorised into the formal institutional or legal structure of a given political system (item 1) and the informal structure of power relations (2–3). Furthermore, McAdam (1996) further expands his list of variables by adding state repression – a variable that previously only appeared in Brockett's work. I now turn to discussing each of these variables in addition to one relatively new dimension of POS – international context.

All POS theorists agree that the most important factor in explaining contentious politics is a country's formal institutional setup. It was Eisinger (1973) who first introduced the terms *open* and *closed* political system. Thus, he writes '[w]here the structure of government is potentially more responsive to an electorate by providing opportunities of formal representation for distinct segments of the population (blacks, for example) or where the government is demonstrably responsive to citizen needs and demands, the structure of opportunities is relatively open' (ibid.: 12). On the contrary, opportunities are closed 'when formal or informal power appears to be concentrated and where government is not responsive, the opportunities for people to get what they want or need through political action are limited' (ibid.). Convinced that political systems have multiple points at which people pursue their demands (Dahl 1967; Gamson 1975), Brockett's measure of POS is linked to assessing the meaningfulness²¹ of public access to 'interest aggregating institutions such as political parties to legislatures to

²¹ By *meaningful* Brockett presupposes institutionalised and power-wielding access.

bureaucracies and top-level executive decision makers' (1991: 260). According to Tarrow, elections are a good indicator of such access because they act as umbrellas 'under which new challengers are often formed'²² (1998: 78). Finally, Kriesi et al (1992) claim that access to interest-aggregating institutions is easier in *weak* states and harder in *strong* states. Basing their approach on state-centric theories (Badie and Birnbaum 1983; Zysman 1983), the authors define weak states by 'their openness on the input side and by their lack of a capacity to impose themselves on the output side' (Kriesi et al. 1992: 222).

The second dimension of POS is related to opportunities for contention offered by shifts in elite alignments. According to McAdam, polity members are interested in maintaining the stability of political alignments and hence they tend to resist any change in the makeup of the polity that could be destructive to the institutionalised status quo (McAdam 1999: 19). However, they not always succeed in doing so. Thus, electoral instability caused by close and highly competitive US presidential elections of the 1950s and 1960s led to relaxed repression and civil rights proposals that encouraged African-American protests (Jenkins et al. 2003: 280; Tarrow 1998; Valelly 1993). Like electoral instability, elite divisions in the US federal governments between racial 'inclusionists' and 'exclusionists' also contributed to greater protest events through inclusionists' growing support of the civil rights movements. Probably the best example of the opportunities created by shifts in elite alignments in the non-democratic context is the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. The emergence of a reform faction within the Communist Party ignited conflicts and divisions within and among elites. As Tarrow argues, '[t]his was seen by insurgent groups as a signal to organize and by many elite members as an inducement to defect... [and] seize the role of "tribunes of the people"' (1998: 79).

²² Tarrow exemplifies this by pointing to the 1994 elections in Italy which gave rise to Silvio Berlusconi's "Forza Italia" political movement.

The presence of elite allies is a mobilisation facilitative factor equally emphasised by RMT and POS theorists. Both perspectives agree that SMOs rely on the external support of influential elites 'who can act as friends in court, as guarantors against repression, or as acceptable negotiators on their behalf' (ibid.). To illustrate, the presence of elite patronage was a crucial factor in explaining the successful outcomes of some of 53 challenging groups in the US studied by Gamson (1990). The same conclusion regarding the importance of elite allies was reached by Brockett's (1991) study of Central American peasant movements in the period between the 1960s and 1980s. There, without the assistance of outside agents such as church workers, union organisers, political party activists and development workers the politically weak peasantry would have never taken the risk of protesting. By providing organisational skills and financial and legal support, the elites altered the structure of political opportunities and acted as 'catalysts for change' (ibid.: 257-8). It is worth mentioning the special relationship between leftist parties and social movements. A number of authors claim that left-wing parties are more favourable to challengers than conservative ones (Jenkins et al. 2003; Piven and Cloward 1977; Tarrow 1998). Thus, the new social movements in Western Europe were heavily supported by out-of-power left parties, which, by doing so, aimed at strengthening their electoral position (Koopmans and Rucht 1995; Kriesi 1995; Maguire 1995).

The last classical dimension of POS is the state's capacity for repressing challengers. This is the only dimension of POS whose significance is still debated (Opp 2009: 173). While reporting on the lack of consensus among authors regarding the inclusion of state repression in the POS theory, McAdam argues that there is 'considerable empirical evidence attesting to the significance of this factor in shaping the level and nature of movement activity' (1996: 28). Central to understanding the state's reaction to protest mobilisation is the work of Tilly, who defines political repression as government's

actions either suppressing collective action altogether or raising the costs of organising and mobilising opinion (Tilly 1978: 100-2). Governments' former strategy choices include arrests of movement leaders, forbidding assemblies and raising penalties. Interestingly, according to Tarrow (1998), a regime's softer repression strategies such as suspending newspapers and freezing necessary resources are more effective in curbing contention in the long run²³. A regime's choice of repression strategy depends on the nature of the regime, the strength of the insurgents, the extent of the challengers' posed threat, and the insurgents' tactics and demands (Gamson 1975; McAdam 1982; Tilly 1978). Unable to impose themselves on the output side, weak states are less repressive. Strong states, on the contrary, adopt an *exclusive* strategy (i.e. the opposite of the *integrative* one adopted by weak states) toward challengers (Kriesi et al. 1992; Tarrow 1998) and usually resort to harsh repression. Regimes are more repressive of weaker insurgent forces as the costs and risks of repressing them are much lower compared to repressing stronger movements (McAdam 1982; Tilly 1978). In regard to threats, in general the larger the challengers' posed threat to the regime's elite interests, the harsher the repression strategies. The regime's response to challengers also depends on the latter's choice of protest tactics. Thus, insurgents who adopt non-institutionalised tactics of contention are faced by greater repression via the regime. On the contrary, groups which advance their demands through institutionalised or 'proper' channels of conflict resolution are either tolerated or repressed to a much lesser extent (ibid.). Finally, the radicalness of insurgents' demands affects the scale of repression. As argued by Gamson, 'repression is a more likely fate for movements that demand fundamental changes and threaten elites than for groups that make modest demands' (Gamson 1990 in Tarrow 1998: 80).

²³ Tarrow cites the example of the US during the McCarthy era, when 'conservatives found it easier to increase the costs of membership in the Communist Party than to ban strikes and demonstration' (1998: 83).

It would be shortsighted to stick only to those four central dimensions of POS since the field has benefited a lot from recent scholarship. Other dimensions include Brockett's (1991) 'temporal location in the cycle of protest', Rucht's (1996) 'regime's policy implementation capacity' and Oberschall's (1996) account of 'international context'. Of these three additional dimensions I discuss the last one in more detail here, since it is one of the POS dimensions used in my study. According to McAdam (1996), 'movement scholars have, to date, grossly undervalued the impact of *global* political and economic processes in structuring the *domestic* possibilities for successful collective action' (34). The importance of international context for protest mobilisation was evident in the string of democratic revolutions that dismantled the Soviet bloc at the end of the 1980s (ibid.: 35). Thus, Oberschall argues that Gorbachev's reluctance to intervene militarily in the internal affairs of Warsaw Pact countries as well as signals he was sending about welcome reforms in Eastern Europe lessened the repressive capacities of communist incumbents, and thus opened POS for mass protests (1996: 94-5). Similarly, during the peak of an American-Soviet ideological struggle, the Soviet Union used American racism as an effective propaganda weapon against the US (Layton 1995; McAdam 1996). Determined to defuse this weapon, a succession of Cold War presidents were forced to embrace civil rights policies. As a result of this policy change, cracks in segregationist elite alignments started to occur, benefiting civil rights movements through access to new elite allies (Layton 1995).

Having introduced the major explanatory variables of POS theory, I now turn to discussing its shortcomings. Critics of POS theory have emphasised a number of issues. Here I deal with only two of them that pertain to the theory's conceptual clarity: the somewhat unwieldy number of POS dimensions and differentiating political opportunities from other mobilisation facilitative conditions.

Despite McAdam's attempt in 1996 to limit the dimensions of POS to the abovementioned four opportunity variables, scholars still debate how many factors of the political environment they consider to be components of POS (Meyer 2004: 134). Thus, some analysts extend POS theory to include dimensions such as the openness and ideological positions of political parties (Amenta and Zyglidopoulos 1991; Rucht 1996), changes in public policy (Costain 1992; Meyer 1993), the activities of countermovement opponents (Andrews 2002; Fetner 2001; Meyer and Staggenborg 1996) and international alliances and constraints on state policy (Meyer 2003). Referring to such an extensive list of explanatory variables, Tarrow notes that, 'political opportunity may be discerned along so many directions and in so many ways that it is less a variable than a cluster of variables – some more readily observable than others' (1988: 430). According to Meyer (2004), such a long list of variables is related to scholars' utmost desire to explain cases under examination rather than testing the theory. In their attempts at describing cases, most scholars inevitably add more opportunity variables, instead of disproving, refining or replacing existing variables (Meyer and Minkoff 2004). Furthermore, POS theorists are criticised for sampling cases on the dependent variable (political mobilisation), i.e. for defining POS through observation of political mobilisation. This, according to Meyer (2004), is unacceptable because scholars 'fail to identify opportunities in the absence of mobilization – "missed opportunities" – moments when mobilization is possible that activists do not, or for some reason cannot, use to their advantage' (Sawyers and Meyer 1999: 189).

According to Opp (2009: 171), the POS literature does not provide a clear answer regarding the difference of political opportunities from a range of other opportunities that either facilitate or constrain protest mobilisation. Examples of these proposed opportunities are 'organizational opportunities' (Kurzban 1998), 'discursive

opportunities'(Koopmans and Statham 1999) and 'cultural opportunities' (Gamson and Meyer 1996; McAdam 1996). Gamson and Meyer claim that 'opportunity has a strong cultural component and we miss something important when we limit our attention to variance in political institutions and the relationships among political actors' (1996: 279). Thus, they argue that movements do not have to wait for opening of POS; instead, they can create opportunities via framing processes (discussed in more detail in the next section), which are directly linked to cultural factors. Overall, the theory's many classifications of opportunities instead of informative propositions are suggestive of its weakness to Opp (2009). He claims that POS theory would not need any classifications had its concept of opportunity been defined precisely (ibid.: 172).

Collective Action Frames

The theory of CAFs is a part of framing studies; it emerged in the early 1980s and by the mid-1990s was widely recognised as one of the central approaches to understanding social movements (Johnston and Noakes 2005; McAdam et al. 1996). CAF theory follows the tradition of socio-psychological theories of the 1960s in emphasising ideational factors – values, beliefs and meanings – in relation to the course and character of mobilisation. To reiterate, collective behaviour theorists like Gurr (1970) and Smelser (1962) attributed the rise of social movements to socio-psychological phenomena such as frustration with relative deprivation and widely held generalised belief about the sources of structural strain and the ways of redressing it. The phenomenal growth of social movements in the 1960s showed traditional explanation of collective behaviour to be incomplete. Its opponents – i.e. the RMT and POS perspectives – deemphasised the role of grievances and ideology by stressing 'organizational and structural variables such as the control of resources, the capacity for strategic planning, and the changing political

context' (Johnston and Noakes 2005: 4). As a result, they overemphasised the rational calculations made by social movement activists, 'gloss[ing] over questions concerning the interpretation of events and experiences' (Snow et al. 1986: 465; Snow and Benford 1992) and minimising the role of human agency in the rise of social movements (Johnston and Noakes 2005; Westby 2005). It was not until 1982 that Gamson and his colleagues (1982) reincarnated the socio-psychological aspects of collective action by placing various forms of 'meaning work' at the heart of spontaneous collective action.

With further evolution of the CAF theory, social movements were no longer 'viewed merely as carriers of extant ideas and meanings that grow automatically out of structural arrangements, unanticipated events, or existing ideologies. Rather, movement actors are viewed as signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers' (Benford and Snow 2000: 613; Snow and Benford 1988b). Production of such meanings by movement actors is what Snow and Benford call 'framing' – 'an active, process-derived phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction' (1992: 136). The result of framing activity is a CAF, which, as defined by Erving Goffman (1974), denotes 'schemata of interpretation' that enable individuals 'to locate, perceive, identify, and label' occurrences within their life space and the world at large (p. 21 in Benford and Snow 2000: 614). Hence, by helping to render events and occurrences meaningful, 'frames offer strategic interpretation of issues with an intention of mobilizing people to act' (Johnston and Noakes 2005: 5). Consequently, the CAF theory's dependent variable is individuals' 'support for and participation in SMOs and their activities and campaigns' (Snow et al. 1986: 464). Having defined CAF theory and its dependent variable, I now turn to discussing its characteristics that are crucial for protest mobilisation.

There are certain criteria SMOs' framing activities and the resultant CAFs must meet in order to spur individuals into protest behaviour. First of all, according to Snow and Benford (1988b), movement activists must ensure their CAFs accomplish three framing tasks:

- *Diagnostic framing* offers a new interpretation of some problematic condition or a situation; it identifies the problem and its source.
- *Prognostic framing* presents a solution to the problem and ways of redressing a problematic situation.
- *Motivational framing* 'provides a "call to arms" or rationale for engaging in ameliorative collective action, including the construction of appropriate vocabulary of motive' (Benford and Snow 2000: 617). Since identifying a problem and offering a solution to it is rarely enough to mobilise people, CAFs also have to persuade people to act.

Second, movement entrepreneurs must be good at communicating CAFs to current and potential constituents through a two-step process of frame *articulation* and *amplification*. According to Swidler (1986), individuals' social experiences, strategies of action and interpretations of events are guided by their 'cultural tool kits'. The purpose of movement activists is to articulate frames by connecting and 'aligning' events and experiences with target audiences' cultural tool kits 'so they hang together in a relatively unified and compelling fashion' (Benford and Snow 2000: 623), thus offering a new perspective on events and situations (Kubal 1998; Snow et al. 1986; Tarrow 1998). This task is not an easy one because the cultural stock of society is full of alternative interpretative schemata, and movement entrepreneurs must therefore 'struggle for cultural supremacy' (Tarrow 1998) in order to label some acts or events as unjust, define opposition, and make the case for action (d'Anjou and Van Male 1998; Gamson 1988;

Johnston and Noakes 2005). In addition to frame articulation, SMO activists have to amplify them by ‘accenting and highlighting some issues, events, or beliefs as being more salient than others’ (Benford and Snow 2000: 623). The best example of frame amplification is the use of slogans which crystallise the central components of the frame in an easily recalled clip. Thus, slogans such as ‘Power to the People’, ‘Black Power’ and ‘Adam and Even’ (Flood 2002) emphasise core issues behind the frames in an emotional, thought-provoking and memorable way. Among other forms of frame amplification are references to historical examples, use of metaphors, visual images (Reed 2005; Ryan 1991), costumes and even theatrical performances (Cadena-Roa 2005).

The most important criterion for mobilising people is whether CAFs ‘ring true with an audience – or *resonate*’ (Johnston and Noakes 2005: 2). In Valocchi’s words, ‘the key to framing is finding evocative cultural symbols that resonate with potential constituents and are capable of motivating to collective action’ (Valocchi 2005: 54). Hence, movements which succeed in finding symbols that ‘appear natural and familiar’ (Gamson 1992: 135) to constituents are more successful in attaining their goals (Taylor and Van Dyke 2004). A number of authors provide various factors affecting frame resonance such as frame consistency and empirical credibility (Snow and Benford 1992), frame bridging, frame extension and transformation (Snow et al. 1986). By claiming that most of these factors overlap and that some even lack empirical support (Benford and Snow 2000), Johnston and Noakes suggest ‘a more straightforward way of organizing the terms – one that focuses on the most significant aspects of frame resonance’ (2005: 12). These are:

- *Frame makers*: resonance of frames depends on the target population’s perceptions of frame promoters – movement entrepreneurs. Undoubtedly, SMOs with great experience, expertise and professional credentials enjoy high levels of public credibility. Hence, the frames produced by such SMOs would be highly

resonant. Moreover, frames get more resonance if they are articulated and amplified by movements' charismatic leaders (Jamison and Eyerman 1994).

- *Frame receivers*: the beliefs and values of the target population influence whether potential constituents will embrace a frame. Hence, 'in the absence of references to one's own history and to the particular nature of one's roots, an appeal to something new risks seeming inconsistent and, in the end, lacking in legitimacy' (Della Porta and Diani 1999: 77). Unless frames touch upon people's cultural tool kits, they will not resonate, thus failing to mobilise.
- *Frame itself (its quality)*: there are certain qualities of frames that explain why some frames resonate and others do not. These are cultural compatibility, consistency and relevance. There is cultural compatibility when frames' beliefs, values and ideas are synchronised with society's cultural stock. Benford and Snow call this correspondence the frame's 'narrative fidelity' (Fisher 1984) and hypothesise that 'the greater narrative fidelity of framings, the greater their salience and the greater the prospect of mobilization' (2000: 622). Frame consistency refers to the congruence of SMOs' articulated beliefs, claims and actions. If contradictions are present between the movement's tactical actions and its claims, then its CAFs lose resonance (ibid.). Finally, for frames to resonate they have to be congruent with people's everyday experience, i.e. make sense of what is happening in the lives of the target audience. Frames which are too distant and abstract from the target population's lives and experiences are likely to fail at protest mobilisation (Babb 1996; Zuo and Benford 1995).

So far we have seen that movement entrepreneurs are involved in the framing process in order to mobilise people for contention. It is worth noting that SMOs' framing processes 'do not go uncontested in the political arena' (Johnston and Noakes 2005). As I

mentioned earlier, SMOs have to struggle for cultural supremacy with other movements, with media agents and with the state – competitors with immensely powerful resources at their disposal (Noakes 2005; Tarrow 1998: 110). This competitive struggle means that movement frames are challenged by what Benford and Snow call ‘counterframing’ – attempts to ‘rebut, undermine, or neutralize a person’s or group’s myths, versions of reality, or interpretive framework’ (Benford 1987: 75 in Benford and Snow 2000: 626). Below I briefly sketch out some counterframing strategies of the abovementioned movement opponents:

- *Countermovements*: it is natural for ideas and opinions to have critics and opponents. Just like as occurs in the realm of ideas, the social movements articulating them are challenged by countermovements. For instance, as illustrated by Staggenborg (1991), the pro-abortion movement in the US at the end of the 1980s was challenged by the pro-life movement in a number of ways. The pro-life movement made legal attacks on its opponents but, more importantly, it boosted the resonance of its frames by showing in its documentary film a foetus experiencing pain during an abortion, thereby shifting debate from legal to ethical domain. Thus, as a result of a fierce legal and ethical battle over abortion the latter was forced to change its tactics by emphasising lobbying over direct-action protest and limiting the range of pursued issues (Johnston and Noakes 2005).
- *Mass media*: the relationship between media and social movements is a complicated one (ibid.). As Gamson and Meyer put it, ‘on one hand, the media play a central role in the construction of meaning and the reproduction of culture...on the other hand, the media are also a site or arena in which symbolic contests are carried out among competing sponsors of meaning, including

movements' (Gamson and Meyer 1996: 287). In other words, while the media can be a friend of movements by communicating their frames and attracting supporters (Gamson and Modigliani 1989), it can also be a foe by voicing counterframes of movements' opponents. Moreover, according to Johnston and Noakes, social movements are subject to what communication scholars call the 'protest paradigm' (Ashley and Olson 1998; Chan and Lee 1984), a frame template applied by the media to social movement activity that, among other things, trivialises and demonises social movement activities and beliefs (2005: 19-20).

- *State agencies and institutions*: obviously, state agencies occupy a more advantageous position in the struggle for cultural supremacy than social movements. This is related to the state's legitimacy, which is boosted by the media's reliance on government officials 'for definition of problems and for information' (Olien et al. 1989: 198). Thanks to their having easy access to the media, state agencies dominate the information field by providing an official interpretation of events and issues. Provided the state is legitimate, frames produced by its organs afford great public resonance (Johnston and Noakes 2005; McCarthy et al. 1996). To illustrate, following the growth of the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement, the Communist Party responded by launching a massive counterframing effort in the state media by labelling 'student demonstrations "turmoil", "upheaval", "a violation of constitution"...' (Zuo and Benford 1995: 143). By doing so, it aimed at discrediting the movement and its claims; however,

due to the loss of legitimacy²⁴, the party's counterframes failed to prevent people from supporting the student movement.

Framing scholars' attempt to bring culture back to the forefront of social movement research was not welcomed without criticisms. According to Oliver and Johnston, one of the central problems of frame theory is 'its failure to address the relation between frames and the much older, more political concept of ideology' (Oliver and Johnston 2005: 186). Building on the literature on social movement ideology (Turner and Killian 1957; Wilson 1973), Snow and Benford (1988b) abandoned the term 'ideology' by substituting it with 'frame'. Such a shift generated confusion over defining frame and framing terms (Opp 2009), and diverted attention from further study of ideology. In claiming that the terms 'ideology' and 'frame' are not synonymous, Oliver and Johnston (2005) differentiate them by claiming that ideology refers to whole systems of beliefs which can be abstracted from the thought processes of individuals, whereas frames relate to 'cognitive process wherein people bring to bear background knowledge to interpret an event or circumstance and to locate it in a larger system of meaning' (193). For instance, 'liberalism' is an ideology, while 'the right to have an abortion' is a frame. Acknowledging overlaps between both terms, Johnston and Oliver call for more rigorous studies in order 'to rejuvenate both a non-pejorative use of ideology and the framing perspectives' (2005: 216).

Moreover, Opp's (2009) extensive overview of CAF theory revealed a number of problems, with some pertaining to the definition of CAF's concepts such as 'frame resonance' and 'interpretation' and some to methodological issues. Here I highlight only two problems that are relevant for the subject of my research: CAFs and forms of

²⁴ The Party's legitimacy was low due to the resonance of the student movement's frames blaming the Communist Party for corruption, profiteering and inequality. These frames tended to resonate because they were consistent with citizens' observations and experience (Zuo and Benford 1995: 139).

political action, and protest events without the participation of movements and CAFs. Opp argues that the framing literature fails to explain the implications of the approach in regard to the form of action that individuals choose (2009: 255). That is, we do not know whether individuals who adopted a movement's frames will resort to a peaceful demonstration or a violent riot. Turning to the second problem, according to CAF theory, there can be no mobilisation unless movement entrepreneurs align their frames with the target population (Snow et al. 1986). Opp attacks the validity of this proposition by referring to protests which took place without movements' involvement. He portrays a Leipzig demonstration of 9 October 1989 as an example of a protest activity which was held spontaneously without any frame alignment work being carried out by any movement. This suggests that frame alignment is not a necessary condition for protest, which is consistent with Snow et al's statement that 'participation in SMO activities is contingent *in part* on alignment of individuals and SMO interpretive frames' (1986: 476, *italics added*). That said, the question of what other conditions are necessary for protest activity is not addressed by authors (Opp 2009: 240).

Conclusion

To sum up, the chapter introduced four major social movement theories that contest explanation of protest cyclicity in Kazakhstan. As we have seen, there is an ongoing scholarly debate regarding the conceptual and methodological underpinnings of these theories. Variables that were introduced in this chapter will be operationalised for further process-tracing analysis in Chapter 4. The next chapter will place these theories in the context of protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan thus setting ground for in-depth testing of study's hypotheses in Chapter 4.

Chapter 3

Context to Protest Mobilisation in Kazakhstan (1992–2009)

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the background conditions leading to popular protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan between 1992 and 2009. By looking at the history of collective action in Kazakhstan, describing protest activities in the country since 1992, exploring various factors that cause protest mobilisation, this chapter contextualises the study's research questions for future testing of hypotheses.

To better understand the current logic behind people's decisions about participation in protests, one needs to trace the development of the public's feelings about involvement in protest activities since a particular moment in time; I pick the year 1992 as the point of departure for the start of contentious politics in post-Soviet Kazakhstan for two primary reasons. First one is rather practical in a way that it is related to study's focus on protest activity in independent Kazakhstan (independence declared on 16 December 1991). Second, there were almost no instances of previous protest activity in Soviet Kazakhstan except the Almaty Uprising of December 1986 which I will discuss in more details later in the chapter. It is worth saying here that many peculiarities of this event are still classified by authorities subjecting it to numerous scholarly and public speculations regarding the uprising's causes, human casualties and involved parties. One thing that is absolutely clear to many is the implications of this unprecedented uprising on boosting public's national and, most importantly, political consciousness (Satbayeva 2011; Taukina 2005a). The significance of December 1986 events in the history of modern Kazakhstan is so huge that they deserve to be studied on their own. However, by

acknowledging the positive effects of these events on the future growth of public's civic consciousness and deepening of interethnic and political grievances, I make references to it throughout the thesis.

The absence of any significant public protests on the territory of Soviet Kazakhstan requires a survey of the literature on the reasons for such an absence. Thus, the present chapter will begin by discussing the peculiarities of protest mobilisation in Soviet Kazakhstan. Then, I will present a graph depicting study's dependent variable - the cyclicity of protest mobilisation over the three time phases – and describe the major public protests that occurred in Kazakhstan after the declaration of independence in 1991. Next, I will move on to the study's independent variables, i.e. the factors that result in protest mobilisation in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. Since the abovementioned graph depicts protest events arranged by four issue areas, I begin with the investigation of people's relative deprivation (RD) in relation to these issue areas, which sets the agenda of public demonstrations. Next, the chapter will shed light on the role of political opportunity structures (POS) in the social mobilisation. Then, I will trace the evolution of mobilising structures in post-Soviet Kazakhstan, which will be followed by a discussion of collective action frames (CAFs). The chapter will close with a brief summary and synopsis of the next chapter.

Dissent in Soviet Kazakhstan

No discussion of dissent in Soviet Kazakhstan can be considered complete without mention of the early anti-Russian nationalist movements and resentment of Russian rule in Central Asia. The period between the official inclusion of Kazakh Khanate into the Russian Empire in the 1730s and the establishment of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (KSSR) in 1936 witnessed a gradual growth of Russian influence in the steppes

of Central Asia. The growth of Russian presence in the region occurred in conjunction with a growth of nationalistic sentiments on the parts of the Kazakh, Uzbek, Kirgiz and Turkmen people. The apogee of nationalist uprisings occurred after the collapse of Tsardom in 1917, which created an opportunity for nationalists to ‘press their claims to autonomy more strongly’ (Nove et al. 1967: 29). However, ‘[t]he Bolshevik successors of the Tsarist officials did not consider that they had come to power in order to preside over the winding up of Russian rule, and in ensuing confusion of the Civil War the nationalists were caught between two fires, and tended to *polarize* between the pro-Bolshevik modernist and the more conservative nationalists supporting the Whites [emphasis added]’ (Ibid.). The split between the Central Asian communities in the struggle against Russian rule resulted in the failure of collective action. For Kazakhstan, the nationalist rebellion (1837–1847) led by Kenesary Kasymov, anti-Bolshevik uprisings, and the founding of the Alash Orda nationalist party in 1917 are just a few examples of the nationalist-liberation movements on the cusp of the twentieth century (Malikov 2005). According to Nove et al (1967), all of these movements were led by Kazakh intellectuals, who emerged as a result of Kazakhstan’s growing contacts with Russia and Westernising trends in Turkey²⁵. Overall, the colonisation of Kazakh land, the famine and epidemics caused by the Civil War (1918–1922), the collectivisation campaign of 1930s and the Virgin Lands programme of the 1950s caused widespread resentment of Russian rule in Kazakhstan (Olcott 2002).

After successfully crushing the nationalist movements and uprisings of the early twentieth century, the Soviets began their all-encompassing quest for modernising the region (Sinor 2004). Starting with the rapid collectivisation and later on the industrialisation campaigns, the Soviet Communist Party strengthened its presence in

²⁵ Sinor (2004) argues that ‘Turkic intelligentsia all over Central Asia had strong attachment to Turkey somewhat similar to Jewish feelings for Israel’ (14).

Kazakhstan by building effective administrative bodies, educational institutions, communication systems and urban infrastructure. Additionally, skilful propaganda and rewriting of Kazakh history (Kozybayev 1996) quickly replaced active resentment with the public's resignation from protest and a 'considerable degree of co-operation with the new regime' (Wheeler 1964: 138). It was also the Soviet Nationalities Policy of *korenizatsiya* that silenced the indigenous populations by encouraging people to take government and party posts, supporting local languages and cultures, and promoting ethnic pluralism and cultural development (Gitelman 1992: 133). Besides, the Soviets realised that their domination in Kazakhstan as well as in other Central Asian states might eventually be threatened by the Islamic traditionalists and nationalist sentiments that were still alive in people's minds. To address that, the Communist Party initiated the enormous influx of non-Asian populations and put severe restraints on the practice of Islam (Gitelman 1992). The resulting policy of *sliyaniye* (a fusion/amalgamation of people into each other with an aim of erasing ethnic identities), massive 'Russification' of local communities and the cooptation of national political elites minimised the risks of nationalist movements in Kazakhstan.

The regime's growing repression of political activism among minority nationalities, politically motivated trials and infamous invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 opened the way for the emergence of the first dissident movements in the Soviet Union (SU). The most well-known example of those was the Democratic Movement established in the mid-1960s which, among other things, was affirming a pluralist conception of the right of political expression and the 'desirability of responsive government, whose authority is limited in scope and procedural operation and that operates according to an established tradition of the 'rule of law' (Biddulph 1975: 99). The core of the Democratic Movement

– Soviet scientists, writers and intellectuals – published their writings in *samizdat*²⁶ journals to disseminate knowledge about the regime’s violation of its own laws in the area of civil rights; moreover, activists used *samizdat* journals like *Khronika tekushchikh sobyitii* (Chronicles of Current Events) to mobilise the general public for mass protests (Alekseeva 1983; Biddulph 1975; Friedgut 1975; Hosking 1992). At first, the Democratic Movement was successful in organising public protests such as the Pushkin Square demonstration in Moscow (1967) against the arrest of dissident intelligentsia and the Red Square demonstration (1968) against the invasion of Czechoslovakia. However, despite minor successes in attracting the national and international community’s attention to the issue of political freedoms in the USSR, the activities of dissidents were harshly suppressed by the KGB through a series of arrests, nationwide purges of intelligentsia and protest participants. By the mid-1970s, most of the dissident elements in the SU were eliminated by silencing people, inducing extreme fear of reprisals and the imprisonment and internment of activists in psychiatric clinics.

Noteworthy is the fact that of the small number of protests and movements that eventually broke out in the aftermath of Stalin’s death, almost none²⁷ occurred in Kazakhstan. Most of the dissident movements were underway in Moscow, while some occurred in the Caucasus (Armenia – 1965; Georgia – 1956, 1978) and the Baltic states (Estonia, 1978; Lithuania, 1956, 1972) (Alekseeva 1983). While the dissent in Moscow was driven by political grievances such as dissatisfaction with the observance of civil rights, the popular unrest in the Caucasus, Eastern European and Baltic states was in most cases caused by the public’s aspirations for national autonomy. Interestingly,

²⁶ *Samizdat*, meaning ‘self-publication’, represents underground publication of journals with literary works, analytical articles, political manifestos, declarations, news and reports targeted at raising the awareness of a wider audience about the violation of human rights in the SU.

²⁷ Due to the censorship of the mass media and the secrecy of coercive operations, there is no reliable information on the number and nature of protests in Kazakhstan.

neither of these two grievances was strong enough to mobilise people for protest in Kazakhstan.

There are three hypotheses to explain that: first and foremost is the fear of active opposition to the state. Hence, people were well aware of the negative consequences associated with involvement in protests and demonstrations. According to this view, both of the grievances mentioned earlier were present among the Kazakh mass public and national intellectual elite; however, as I mentioned earlier, they were heavily suppressed by the totalitarian government, leaving no hope for protest mobilisation. A question arises here: if suppression of dissent and the fears connected with it happens everywhere across the SU, why would people protest in some Soviet republics and not in others? Do, for example, people in Estonia dread the aftermath of their participation in protests less than the citizens of Kazakhstan?

While some Kazakh historians and Sovietologists may argue that the coercive machine in Kazakhstan was much more ruthless and unforgiving of dissidents than in Armenia or Lithuania, I would not follow this line of thought. Neither would Wheeler (1964) and Gill (2006), who claim that there was no viable nationalism in Kazakhstan that would make people vociferously fight for their autonomy in the second half of the twentieth century. Wheeler's argument makes up the second hypothesis as to the reasons for Kazakhs' reluctance to participate in protests. According to Wheeler (1964), for nationalism to occur the community must have experience of existing as an autonomous nation-state. By comparing the Central Asian states to the Eastern European states, he maintains that the former did not have an opportunity to form a nation; the process of nation-forming there was disrupted by the intervention of Tsarist Government in the region.

Moreover, he draws a line between nationalism and national consciousness. By doing so, Wheeler claims that the 'national consciousness may and does exist strongly among national communities in many countries, including Great Britain and the United States, without there being any question of its developing into nationalism aiming at separation and independence' (1964: 151). Therefore, what was present in Kazakhstan is national consciousness rather than nationalism. However, if this is accepted as the case, how then can one explain the Kenesary rebellion of the nineteenth century and nationalist uprisings during the Civil War in Russia? Some scholars argue that those were not popular nationalist movements in a classical sense; instead they represented movements mostly formed of and led by the small circle of educated elite and intelligentsia without any significant support from the population. Thus, Rouland (2004) talks of a deep divide between the national intelligentsia and the peasantry or working class people in Kazakhstan. Like Olcott (1994) and Nove et al (1967), he argues that the nationalist rebellions would have been successful had the activists been more united and their messages more articulate when it came to organising the masses against the Bolsheviks.

The third hypothesis states that the public's apathy in regard to either initiating or joining a protest in the Soviet times has to do with the local political culture. Moreover, this hypothesis is valid not only for Kazakhstan but also for the whole SU. George Feifer's (1975) unique study of Soviet citizens' reluctance to participate in anti-regime protests distinguished the Soviet political culture by its backwardness. By calling it backward, he refers to the incongruence of people's political attitudes and beliefs in relation to democratic values. Thus, some of his interviewees – representatives of various strata of Soviet society – shared a strong disapproval of the Democratic Movement's activities. According to them, the dissidents were intent on harming the well-being of the country, trying to destabilise society by bringing disorder and propagating revolutionary ideas.

For instance, to Soviet people, criticism of the political system is considered to be highly non-patriotic, immoral and even sinful. That is why the majority of people at all costs tried to avoid associating themselves with any kind of anti-regime movements. As a result, Feifer's dissident interviewees were highly pessimistic about any chance of democratisation for the inherent political lethargy present in the SU. Thus, he claims that Soviet citizens are 'not only happy with the heavy hand of dictatorship, but actually require it'(1975: 421) for the economic well-being, predictable future and order that comes with it. This conclusion suggests a presence of certain 'degree of accord between the political culture of the USSR and its political system' (White 1979: 34).

Feifer and White are not alone in pointing out the non-democratic nature of Soviet political culture; among others, the seminal work of Archie Brown (1974) has underlined the persistence of traditional values in Russia that impede the development of democratic values. Furthermore, the prominent Kazakh historians Abylkhozhin (2007) and Masanov (Masanova 2007) also emphasised the primitive, pre-industrial agrarian mentality of the Kazakh population and how it slows down the formation of civil society in Kazakhstan. Finally, Eckstein's (1998) theory of congruence questions the very possibility of democracy taking root in Russia. These and many other cultural theorists have stressed the centrality of cultural explanations in determining the success of democratic transitions.

With the exception of the Eastern European and Baltic states, 70 years of communism have managed to create a 'Soviet man' ideology – an ideology that is still current in the political cultures of post-communist societies – in the territories of the post-communist states. However, recently some of the post-Soviet societies such as Ukraine and Georgia have showed some signs of escaping from the legacies of the Soviet past. By toppling

their authoritarian governments in a series of popular uprisings – the so-called ‘colour revolutions’ – they put forward the public’s demands for democratic reforms. While sharing a common past then, what is it that conditions the possibility of revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine and the endurance of non-democratic governments in the rest of the former-SU countries including Kazakhstan, Russia, and Uzbekistan? While the answer to this question is far from clear, the present research emphasises the role of popular protest mobilisation in challenging authoritarian governments.

Popular Protest Mobilisation

As we have seen so far, protest activities were not very common in Soviet Kazakhstan, something that cannot be said of protest mobilisation in the independent Kazakhstan. As was mentioned in the earlier chapters, in this study the term ‘protest mobilisation’ refers to various instances of riots, protests, strikes, public demonstrations of all kinds and pickets. The history of contention in Kazakhstan shows that there is no easily identifiable single pattern that would show either a gradual increase or decrease in the rate of popular protest mobilisation since the collapse of the SU. Instances of mobilisation tend to vary across time and space as a result of the various intervening variables to be discussed later in the chapter. Thus, Figure 3.1 presents 694 protest events from 1992 until 2009, which vary across three time phases and four issue areas. This protest event data allowed me to answer the study’s first two research questions (outlined in Chapter 4), addressing protest cyclicity and variance across different issue areas.

This section discusses the most notable instances of public dissent in Kazakhstan highlighting variation of protest mobilisation across time and space. Before I begin discussing them, I offer a general overview of protest dynamics in every time phase.

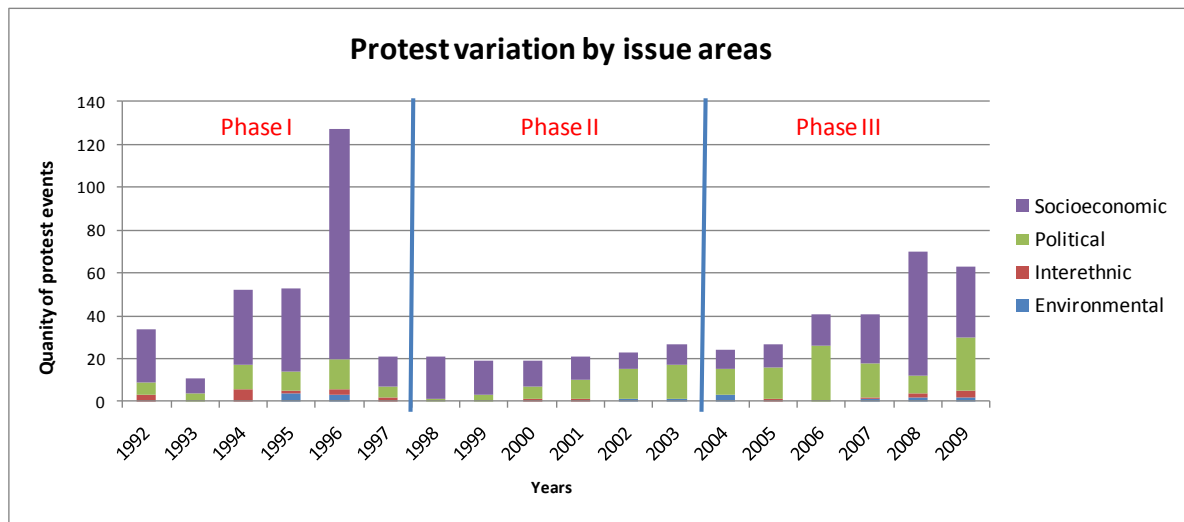


Figure 3-1: Protest events' variation by issue areas, 1992–2009

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, for the sake of hypothesising I divide the 1992–2009 period into three time phases. The protest data in Figure 3.1 shows that each of these phases is characterised by either a growth or decline in the number of protests. In addition, it shows different protest cyclicity patterns across different issue areas. Thus, prior to the first phase, Gorbachev's *Glasnost*' campaign initiated the emergence and spreading of numerous social groups and public associations operating around various issue areas. The unprecedented growth of such organisations coupled with the public's growing dissatisfaction with socioeconomic and political issues led to extensive popular protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan in the first phase. Figure 3.1 shows that interethnic and environmental issues did not, however, mobilise as many people for protests as the socioeconomic and political issues. Further sections in this chapter and Chapter 4 address this phenomenon in more details.

The sharp decline of protest mobilisation at the beginning of Phase II coincided with the stalling democratisation in Kazakhstan in the mid-1990s. While it still remains to be seen whether protest mobilisation stalled as a result of stalling democratic transition or vice versa (Chapter 6), it is nonetheless evident that people became more reluctant to protest around the beginning of Phase II. The almost total absence of political protests in 1998

and in 1999 emphasises the regime's growing intolerance of political challengers and a resulting repression of political opposition. The political crisis of 2001 stimulated a growth of political protests, but then the overall improvement of living standards at the end of Phase II contributed to a further waning of socioeconomic protests.

Deepening socioeconomic deprivation and an increasing number of people ready to solve their problems by protesting led to a gradual growth of protest mobilisation in Phase III. The public no longer perceived protesting as an unacceptable means of influencing decision-making. The regime in its turn grew more tolerant of protests that did not aim to challenge its rule. As a result, we observe that the majority of protests in the third phase revolve around socioeconomic issues. Speaking of political protests, apart from letting people protest about the controversial murder of oppositional figures in 2005 and 2006, the regime maintained heavy control over any political and politicised protests posing a potential threat to its survival. Phase III witnessed a resurfacing of interethnic and environmental protests, which are although minimal in numbers, still mobilise Kazakhstani public.

A glance at Figure 3.1 shows anomalously low protest activity in 1993, and enormously high protest mobilisation in 1996; there are several reasons accounting for this. Anomalously low instances of protest in 1993 could be attributed to two major reasons: 1) on 4 July 1992 Supreme Soviet of Kazakhstan enacted a decree according to which organisers of public protests and demonstrations have to obtain permission from local government to hold a public gathering – a norm previously absent in 28 July 1988 decree of Supreme Soviet of the USSR regulating public demonstrations (Zhovtis and Ospanov 1993); 2) in 1992 President Nazarbayev and political parties and public associations concluded a moratorium on holding of public demonstrations for the duration of one year

with subsequent prolongation (Abdakimov 1994; Department of History MSU 2005). Enormously high frequency of protests in 1996 can also be explained by two reasons. First, originally founded as commercial projects, *Karavan* and *Karavan-Blitz* newspapers which I used as sources for protest data started to politicise in 1995 by publishing materials critical of the government, president and policies. By blaming the regime of being involved in the controversial fire at the newspapers' warehouse in April 1995, Boris Giller (owner of *Karavan*) took the side of opposition forces (Mamashuly 2011). Newspapers' focus on heightened coverage of protests was aimed at discrediting the regime. Second, not all the issues of the *Karavan-Blitz* newspaper (June 1994 – December 1997) were catalogued by National Library's Periodicals Department in Almaty resulting in overrepresentation of protests in 1996 – the only year with all the issues of *Karavan-Blitz* present in the library. Both of these reasons of enormous spike of protests in 1996 suggest that protest data for 1996 should be analysed with caution.

Having outlined the general trend of protest cyclicity in three phases, I now move on to discussing the most noteworthy protest events that shaped the overall dynamic of protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan. Undoubtedly, the opening of POS in the mid-1980s spurred the nationwide emergence of dissident groups and informal clubs that framed the public's socioeconomic grievances and resulted in sporadic outbursts of protests, pickets and hunger strikes. In most cases, people were protesting against delays in the payment of wages and pensions. Thus, events like the coal miners' strike in Karaganda in 1989 frequently appeared in the national newspapers. Environmental grievances were especially acute in mobilising the masses after the regime's clamp down on public demonstrations after the Almaty Uprising. The Nevada-Semei environmental movement organised marches in many cities across Kazakhstan. Interestingly, the Nevada-Semei events were not oppressed; on the contrary, the government supported the drive against

Moscow's exploitation of Kazakh soil for the testing of nuclear weaponry. In describing the first independent political movements in the SU in the 1980s, Hosking et al (1992) argue that 'a question of environmental protection had also become a question of human rights' (p. 9). That is because the regime was allowing all but the political movements. Therefore, any political groups formed in the late 1980s had to operate under the cover of Nevada-Semei.

However, the replacement of Gennadii Kolbin, the General Secretary of KSSR, with Nazarbayev in 1989 re-opened POS that were closed by Kolbin after the 1986 Almaty Uprising. This change made possible a series of demonstrations, which attracted some 5,000 participants, led by the opposition movements 'Azat', 'Zheltoksan' and the 'Republican Party' in June 1992 and demanding the formation of a coalition government (Olcott 1997). The status of the Russian population and language in Kazakhstan was debated by the newly formed political parties. Thus, in December 1992, some 15,000 residents of Ust-Kamenogorsk rallied to demand the adoption of Russian as an official language, dual citizenship, and greater autonomy for Eastern Kazakhstan (Ibid.). Overall, the political opportunities offered by Gorbachev created first informal groups in Kazakhstan that, by framing their strategies around the starkest public grievances, managed to mobilise the masses for numerous collective action campaigns in the first phase.

The large number of protest events in the first phase significantly decreased in the second phase. Since most of the protests were socioeconomic and political in nature, it is worth studying the reasons for the huge drop in the number of such protests²⁸. Public discontent with socioeconomic problems slowly started to wane in response to the government's anti-crisis programme, which had been adopted in 1993 (Smagulova and Ushbayeva

²⁸ For an in-depth discussion of waning protest mobilisation in Phase II, see Chapter 6, pp. 263 – 270.

2012). According to the leader of the ‘Pokoleniye’²⁹ movement, within several years of gaining independence the government significantly improved, moving from being an extremely inexperienced and incompetent body to a professional institution enacting policies that reflect the interests of the poor, pensioners and other low-income social groups. An elite interviewee representing the ‘Workers’ Movement’ – a SMO responsible for organising numerous coalminers’ protests including the aforementioned 1989 protest in Karaganda – noted that after the ‘Workers’ Movement’ achieved its primary goals of increasing wages and social benefits for coalminers, many of its members and adherents lost interest in collective action. Thanks to gradually improving standards of living resulting from the proven effectiveness of early economic reforms, the number of socioeconomic protests started to diminish. In general, increase of salaries, social benefits and pensions in the late 1990s decreased the public’s propensity for protests.

In regard to political protests, the steady drop from fourteen in 1996 to only one in 1998 can be attributed to two factors: growing repression and the public’s political apathy. Representatives of all selected political SMOs unanimously state that in the abovementioned period their SMOs were subject to significant repressions; a leader of ‘Azat’ even compared them to the repressions previously witnessed in the Soviet Union. A co-leader of the then non-existent ‘RNPK’ party remembers a sharp decline in the turnout at political protests, which suffered the most from escalating repressions. ‘To prevent people from attending our protests, the KNB [Committee of National Security] would intimidate and threaten our members and activists with prosecution’, recalls a leader of ‘Azat’. It was not only the fear of repressions that dissuaded people from protesting, but also growing political apathy. Witnessing how SMOs suffer from intra-

²⁹ From this point onwards, for information about this interview as well as interviews with other elites, see Appendix D.

elite cleavages and experience a lack of resources, many people lost faith in the opposition's ability to deliver political change. Moreover, the head of the 'Pokoleniye' movement remembers: 'by the mid-1990s people developed a sense of longing for the Soviet past where they did not have any of the problems which they face now'. Highlighting an abrupt decline in protest mobilisation at the end of Phase I, an 'Azat' interviewee claims that people started to care less about politics because the question of 'survival in hard economic times' became the ultimate priority for the majority of people. Overall, by the middle of Phase II the regime's curtailing of civil liberties such as freedom of expression and assembly indicated the growing consolidation of power in the presidency.

Already minimal instances of environmental and interethnic protests further declined in the second phase mostly because the government addressed the troublesome environmental and interethnic issues that had arisen in the first phase. Thus, the closure of Semei nuclear site resulted in the waning of the Nevada-Semei movement. Interethnic grievances were also accommodated by the state's formation of the People's Assembly³⁰ of Kazakhstan, and the resolving of questions regarding the status of the Russian language through the adoption of the Law on Languages in 1989. For instance, a 'Lad' interviewee claims that the establishment of the People's Assembly of Kazakhstan meant that 'Lad' achieved its primary goal of ensuring representation in the state bodies for the Slavic ethnic minority. 'Why should we protest? We got what we wanted!', such was a response of my interviewee to a question of what factors led to decline of 'Lad's' protests in Phase II.

³⁰ The People's Assembly was created in 1995 under the President's decree with the aim of developing and overseeing nationality-related politics and fostering interethnic peace and accord. Each of Kazakhstan's ethnic minorities has representatives in the Assembly.

The majority of protests in the third phase were about socioeconomic issues related to housing shortages, increasing food prices and the land plots crisis. One of the largest socioeconomic protests in Phase III occurred in summer 2006. The Almaty City Council's claims for the land plots allegedly owned by the citizens sparked an armed confrontation between homeowners and police. The three-day protests resulted in the arrest of several 'Shanyrak' movement activists such as Aron Atabek and Ainur Kurmanov. Since the homeowners in question were migrant workers and working class people living in the outskirts of Almaty, the protests did not attract participants from other parts of the city. The locality of the demonstrations as well as the sporadic nature of the protests differentiates them from the larger-scale protests that took place in the first and second phases.

The third phase also witnessed the growth of interethnic clashes between Kazakhs and various ethnic minorities. Several violent clashes between Kazakh, Chechen and Kurdish youth in Malovodnoye and Mayatas villages in 2007, which I will discuss later in the chapter, took the government by surprise. A representative of 'Vainakh' Chechen Association expressed his concern with the treatment of Chechen minority in Kazakhstan and refused to comment³¹ on the abovementioned violence in Malovodnoye village. As some experts put it, the state's neglect of interethnic grievances brought about conflicts that threatened political stability in Kazakhstan (Savin 2009; Tatilya 2011). Interethnic protests increased also because Kazakh nationalists such as Amalbek Tshan and Mukhtar Shakhanov were able to construct CAFs based on the belief that Kazakhs' interests are not properly protected by the constitution, and that Kazakhs are humiliated by ethnic

³¹ I associate interviewee's refusal to elaborate on clashes between Kazakh and Chechen youth to the presence of interviewer effect. Seeing that I am an ethnic Kazakh, he did not feel comfortable sharing his personal opinion which is most likely to be critical of the Kazakh youth.

minorities. Such frames of action coupled with the absence of a national ideology are favourable preconditions for the growth of interethnic grievances.

As we can see from above, protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan tends to vary across three time phases and four issue areas. Having introduced the dependent variable, chapter will now discuss the explanatory variables accounting for this variation.

Relative Deprivation

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, I believe that the nature of protest events in post-Soviet Kazakhstan varies by the extent of RD in relation to various issue areas. In this section I discuss the public's grievances surrounding various socioeconomic, environmental, interethnic and political issues.

Socioeconomic Grievances

As we can see in Figure 3.1, socioeconomic problems have generated the largest proportion of protest events (65%) in Kazakhstan, with most of them taking place in Phase I. It appears that socioeconomic issues such as unemployment, delays in the payment of salaries and pensions, and poverty have the greatest mobilisation potential compared to other issues. This observation is quite intuitive because frustration with poor living standards coupled with extremely low levels of life satisfaction were the primary reasons for protest activity across all post-Soviet states in the aftermath of the SU's disintegration.

It is impossible to discuss socioeconomic grievances in Kazakhstan in the first phase without mentioning Gorbachev's *Perestroika* campaign. *Perestroika*, which aimed at accelerating economic reforms, led 'not to the revival of the Soviet system, but to its disintegration' (Rutland 1992). Though there are many contrasting views about the

feasibility of his ambitious reforms, its effects on the Soviet population are hard to underestimate. Walker writes, '[t]he majority of the population benefited from the old system. The state provided it with cradle-to-grave welfarism in the form of free education, health and basic social security. The standard of living was not high but it was guaranteed. Radical *Perestroika* and above all the move to a market system threatened all of this' (1993: 57-58). Soaring unemployment rates, scarcity of housing and poor-quality medical services all contributed to the growing pessimism and disillusionment with Gorbachev's policies. According to Walker, '[m]any older people were frequently heard to say that life had been better under Brezhnev than it had been under Gorbachev' (Op cit.: 226). Table 3.1 seems to confirm Walker's observation in showing that the stalling Soviet economy represented by the budget deficit, underinvestment in key industries and food shortages caused by the plummeting agricultural output have indeed undermined Gorbachev's popularity in the SU.

	1986–90 average (plan)	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
National income produced	4.2	2.3	1.6	4.4	2.4	-4.0	-15.0
Industrial output	4.6	4.4	3.8	3.9	1.7	-1.2	-7.8
Agricultural output	2.7	5.3	-0.6	1.7	1.3	-2.3	-7.0

Table 3-1: Soviet economic performance, 1986–91 (average annual rates of growth, percentages)

Sources: *Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR v 1989g.* (Moscow: *Finansy i statistika*, 1990) pp. 8–9; *Ekonomika i zhizn'*, 1991, no. 5, p. 9, and 1992, no. 6, pp. 13–16 in Rutland, 1992.

The 1980s socioeconomic crisis in the SU was further exacerbated by Gorbachev's policy of *Glasnost'*, which among other things promoted provision of 'full and objective information about everything that is going on in society' (Benn 1992). This meant the publication of previously hidden statistical data on unemployment rates, infant mortality and various economic performance indicators (Buckley 1992). Thus, in July 1991 the *Moskovskii Komsomolets* newspaper officially declared that in a society where

previously there were almost no unemployed people, the unemployment rate reached 8 million and might soon be 32 million (Op cit.: 233). Rutland argues that, '[h]ealth care spending was only 4 per cent of GNP (compared to 8–10 per cent in the West) and the USSR occupied fiftieth place in the world in terms of infant mortality, just behind Barbados' (1992: 204). The inflation rate in 1991 was approximately 150–200% (Walker 1993: 205). The share of capital investment in housing diminished from 23.4% under Khrushchev to 12% under Gorbachev (Buckley 1992: 235).

The SU collapsed shortly after *Perestroika*; many people in Kazakhstan as well as in other post-Soviet republics expected that their lives would improve after gaining independence. However, socioeconomic hardships of the day proved their expectations wrong. Hence, a cross-national survey conducted by the Giller Institute in December 1995 revealed that 64.7% of respondents stated that life after Kazakhstan gained independence became worse (1995c). Among the most widespread sources of socioeconomic grievances were public dissatisfaction with standards of living (89.2%), social protection (87.2%), healthcare (84.4%), crime rates (76%), citizens' ability to influence politicians (68.9%) and education, science and culture (64.5%) (Gurevich 1995). Another survey carried out by the Giller Institute in June 1994 in the then capital city of Almaty showed that 75.2% of respondents were unsatisfied with life; only 23.7% of respondents claimed that they were either completely or somewhat satisfied. Indicative of public frustrations with socioeconomic grievances in the first phase is a letter by the 'Pokoleniye' Committee for Social Protection of Pensioners addressed to Almaty City Council on 29 June 1993. Below is an extract from that letter:

“According to the City Department of Social Security, there are 205 thousand pensioners, 80% of whom are below the poverty line... We are deprived of our savings, we are deprived of adequate nutrition. We are deprived of medical care and medicaments. We live worse than in the years of war [referring to the Second World War – *author*]. Our conditions are worse than 'ordinary fascism'. Then the foreigners were destroying the

people, whereas now we being depopulated by all means by ours– who live at the expense of wealth created by us” (Pokoleniye 1993).

Such letters addressed to the high echelons of power were published in every issue of independent newspapers, and collectively represented the interests and concerns of various professional unions and social groups. Unsurprisingly, such a great number of deeply frustrated people explain the largest number of instances of protest events appearing in the first phase. Indeed, a poll conducted by the *Mestnoe Vremya* newspaper in the industrial city Pavlodar in September 1994 showed that 45% of respondents believed strikes to be the most effective method of defending one’s rights, with 30% stating that while they have a positive attitude toward boycotts, they do not think such measures are effective (Evseev 1994).

The second phase witnessed the rapid recovery of the Kazakh economy after gaining independence and a consequent decline in protests driven by socioeconomic grievances³². In this period, Olcott maintains, ‘[t]he country’s economy was diverse, with sufficiently well-developed manufacturing and agricultural sectors to allow a smooth transition to an independence in which public satisfaction was kept high enough to maintain political stability’ (2002: 128). Table 3.2 demonstrates the results of the economic transformations that were underway in Kazakhstan.

	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006
GDP growth (annual %)	-5.3	-12.6	0.5	-1.9	9.8	9.8	9.6	10.7
GDP per capita (USD)	168.7	737.2	1349.6	1445.6	1229.3	1654.6	2862.5	5362.6
Foreign Direct Investments (USD millions)	...	659.7	1673.6	1232.8	2781.2	4106.4	8317.3	10568.6
Unemployment (% of total labour force)	0.6	11.0	13.0	14.0	...	8.8	8.0	7.4
Inflation,	2960.8	1401.9	39.1	7.2	13.3	5.9	6.8	8.5

³² For the sake of convenience, throughout the chapter and thesis I will be referring to protest events driven by, say, socioeconomic grievances, as socioeconomic protests, environmental grievances-driven protests as environmental protest, and so on.

consumer prices (annual %)								
Life expectancy, at birth (years)	68	66	64	65	66	66	66	66
Poverty headcount ratio of national poverty line (% of population)	...	...	35	...	...	15	...	...
Expenditure on health and education (% of GDP)	6.1	5.3	7.2	6.2	...	6.3	3.8	...
UNDP (HDI)	...	0.72	...	...	0.73	0.77	0.78	...

Table 3-2: Kazakhstan economic and social development indicators, 1992–2006

Sources: UNDP, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, World Health Organization, Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Investment, Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Statistics.

Blessed with a wide range of natural resources, the Kazakh government directed its efforts at the oil and gas industry, which heavily contributed to the growth of annual GDP from -5.3% in 1992 to 9.8% in 2000. With the creation of a favourable investment climate, the government was able to increase the amount of Foreign Direct Investment from US\$659 million to US\$2781 million in less than a decade. Per capita GDP increased eightfold from 1992, up to US\$1,349 per capita in 1996. However, despite the positive advances in the economic sphere, living standards in the early second phase remained low. Thus, the widespread unemployment, growing food and consumer goods prices, delays to salaries/pensions and reductions of social welfare were negatively affecting the levels of life satisfaction. The 1996 survey commissioned by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) revealed that, country-wide, more than four-fifths (82%) were dissatisfied with the situation in the country (44% somewhat and 38% very dissatisfied) (Askeeva 1997). According to another poll carried out by BILESIM International Kazakhstan in August 1999, two-thirds of respondents stated that within the past three months the economic situation in the country had worsened, 25.8% noted no change and only 7% of respondents said that the situation had improved (Karavan 1999). Interestingly, the public's attitude toward their country's economic

development does not coincide with the official development figures shown in the table above.

In the beginning of the third phase, Kazakh society began to experience an improvement in living standards. Further strengthening of the Kazakh economy, the introduction of legislation aimed at social welfare, and political stabilisation resulted in the improvement of living standards and a growth in public confidence in the country's future. The unemployment rate dropped from 14% in 1998 to 7.4% in 2006; the percentage of poor people declined from 35% in 1996 to 15% in 2002; and the Human Development Index rose from 0.72 in 1994 to 0.78 in 2004. In describing Kazakh society in the third phase, Daly (2008) attributes the growth of the middle class in Kazakhstan to increased wages and consumerism. He notes that, '[a]s the country moved further away from its Soviet past, Kazakhs began to spend their disposable income on goods and services that went beyond mere survival needs' (2008: 29). The 2004 public opinion poll conducted by the Center for Communication Technologies "Reputatsiya" (2004) concluded that 74% of the respondents were satisfied with life (22.4% completely and 51.6% fairly satisfied). Asked to evaluate possible changes in life in the course of next two years, 72% believed that their life would positively change, 22.9% believed their life conditions would likely remain the same and the smallest proportion of respondents (2.7%) predicted a possible deterioration in their lives.

Environmental Grievances

Looking at Figure 3.1 we can see that environmental grievances did not produce many protest events. This low number of environmental protests in Kazakhstan might be explained by two reasons. First, the society's environmental consciousness is underdeveloped (Mamayev 2010), preventing the masses from caring for the

environment, let alone protesting about its preservation. Indicative of this reason is the republican poll conducted in 1996 by the Institute of Development of Kazakhstan, where none of the respondents indicated environmental problems as one of the five most acute problems of the day (Institute of Development of Kazakhstan 1996). This finding makes sense because people would not care much about the environment in times of socioeconomic hardships. Second, since newspapers do not find environmental protests as newsworthy as the other three types of protests, they are not keen to cover the already minimal instances of environmental protests that do take place.

That said, there being minimal instances of environmental protest activity does not necessarily mean that the public is not concerned with environmental issues; the public might instead be using an alternative strategy and tactics to voice their environmental grievances. As we will see further in Chapter 4, when it comes to protecting the environment Kazakhstanis prefer conventional means of influencing decision-making to voice their concerns (i.e. sending petitions, forming NGOs, organising press conferences, taking legal action, etc.) rather than taking to the streets. This, as well as the two abovementioned reasons for weak environmental protest activity in Kazakhstan, should be bore in mind when analysing environmental grievances in all three phases.

Throughout the three phases, the most environmental protests occurred in the first phase. Thus far, the largest environmental issue in Kazakhstan was centred on the Semei region nuclear weapons testing site. Despite the fact that this issue was resolved by the beginning of the first phase, it is impossible to ignore the anti-nuclear movement in Kazakhstan due to its scale and significance. The testing site spans three republican districts and covers a territory of 18,500 sq. km. Since the first nuclear explosion in 1949, the site has been Kazakhstan's Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Chernobyl for 40 years. More

than 450 explosions took place at the site within this period. The testing site was closed in October 1989 due to the anti-nuclear campaign of the world-famous Nevada-Semei movement, which was led by a popular Kazakh writer Olzhas Suleimenov. The campaign's culmination occurred on 28 February 1989, when more than 2,000 people gathered in Almaty to demand an immediate closure of the site. 'Hundreds of people supporting our movement were bringing signed petition lists; populous anti-nuclear protests were held in various universities across the country; moreover, our supporters were organizing fund-raising campaigns', remembers movement activist Kanat Kabdrakhmanov (Nemchinova 2009). Recent radioecological research findings show that the air and ground in the region is still contaminated with an excessive amount of radioactive substances resulting in dramatic health (i.e. above average instances of cancer and maternal and infant mortality, as well as reduced life expectancy) and ecological (sick livestock, limited range of crops, contaminated water, etc.) consequences. Despite the President's official decree on the closure of the site in August 1991, attention to the rehabilitation of the region's ecology, evacuation of the remaining communities living on the site's area, and provision of social welfare to the victims of radiation is somewhat limited.

In addition to the Semei nuclear testing site, the public in the first phase was also concerned with the shrinking of the Aral Sea. The Aral Sea was once the world's fourth largest lake; today, it is the sixth largest and half of its former size. According to Micklin (2000),

"The basic problem was a growing lack of water since the 1960s owing to over-irrigation upstream. The Aral Sea is at the lower end of the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya [rivers]. Most of the water from these rivers is used upstream for irrigation. Little water, therefore, reaches the Aral Sea zone and the water that does has a very high salt-content, causing secondary salinisation³³ of the land and a decrease in agricultural output." (18).

³³ The salinity of the water is now eight times the level it was in 1960 (Micklin 2000: 7).

According to International Crisis Group (2002), since the 1960s the level of water has dropped between 13 and 18 metres. Micklin (2000) writes that, '[s]ome 400,000 square kilometres of land around the lake, home to four million people, have become a toxic wasteland' (7). This was due to the application of massive doses of chemical fertilisers that polluted water and lands and caused severe health problems among the inhabitants of the region (Feshbach and Friendly 1992). Unlike the case of the Semei testing ground, the Kazakh public has not responded with protest activity in relation to the Aral Sea environmental disaster. Instead, people published letters of concern in the local and republican newspapers, sent collective petitions to politicians, conducted public hearings, and formed public committees on saving the Aral Sea (Yanshin 1991). As a result of public advocacy, in 1993 five Central Asian states established an International Foundation for Saving the Aral Sea. However, despite existing for 20 years, the Foundation has not been effective in stopping the shrinking of the sea and improving the living standards of local inhabitants.

By the beginning of the second phase, the Government of Kazakhstan had done little to address the existing and new environmental issues; in fact, many environmentalists agree that the environment in Kazakhstan worsened after independence. Thus, Luong and Weinthal (1999) argue, '[n]ot only had the earlier environmental problems not yet been addressed, but new threats to the environment emerged as a result of Kazakhstan government's drive to develop its vast energy reserves in the Caspian Basin' (1269). What is most affected by the oil and gas industry in the Caspian Sea is the ecosystem, which during the Soviet period was declared by the scientists and policy makers to be very fragile; as a result, fishing and transport were stipulated as the only economic activities allowed (Luong and Weinthal 1999). Nevertheless, seismic exploration in the

Caspian endangered the population of sturgeons³⁴ and seals (Khabar TV Channel 2012; Tleppaev and Gizitdinov 2004). In addition to harming the Caspian basin's bio-fauna, oil and gas exploration also resulted in water and air pollution. Quite striking is the reaction of the public (including local inhabitants), who took no measures at all to express their concerns with the growing pollution and endangered Caspian ecosystem. It was not until the end of the second phase (early 2000s) when people started to pay more attention to environmental issues. This was achieved thanks to the successful work done by local environmental NGOs, which besides working closely with the government on environmental issues tried raising public awareness about the fragility of local ecology (Samarin 2010).

A major environmental issue in the second phase that stirred public environmental awareness in Kazakhstan was air pollution in the industrial cities of Oskemen, Karaganda and Temirtau. With the recovery of heavy industry from the collapse of the SU in the 1990s, the inhabitants of these cities expressed their grave concerns about the improper disposal of industrial waste and about air pollution. The dumping of mercury and other toxic materials into the River Nur in the Temirtau region, environmental contamination by a lead factory in Oskemen, and air-borne emissions in Karaganda resulted in widespread environmental advocacy by local NGOs such as the Green Cross and Crescent International, Green Salvation and Biosphere. All three cities have recently been rated by Kazakh ecologists as the dirtiest cities in the country (Altaynews 2012). Furthermore, in 2001 the Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources stated that Oskemen was the city with the most contaminated air in the country, with concentration of harmful substances in the atmosphere exceeding the norms by 17 times (Zabirov 2007). One survey of Oskemen dwellers in 2005 showed that the majority of respondents

³⁴ 90% of the world's sturgeon stocks are located in the Caspian Sea (Luong and Weinthal 1999).

prioritised ecological problems; however, only a few expressed themselves as ready to contribute to solving such problems (Livadin 2008). According to another regional survey conducted in 2004 by the Local Government Development Center in Oskemen, 14% of respondents are ready to participate in a demonstration on deteriorating ecology (Karpekov 2012). These numbers suggest that, while the Oskemen community is deeply frustrated by the environmental problems affecting them, at the same time they are mostly reluctant to engage in protest activity. Speaking of the whole population, a survey conducted in 2000 revealed that ‘74% of the population thinks that the government is performing poorly in cleaning up environmental problems’ (U.S. Department of State 2000 in Olcott 2002, 204).

Environmental grievances grew in the third phase with the emergence of new ecological threats such as the extinction of rare animals (e.g. snow leopard and steppe elk), damage to the national parks, and the explosions of several Russian rockets launched from the *Baikonur*³⁵ space centre in Central Kazakhstan. The most notable of these three is the harm to the environment and local population caused by the crashes of Russian Proton rockets in 1999 and 2007. The October 1999 crash scattered harmful debris (poisonous rocket fuel) over the Kazakh steppe and resulted in the death of livestock. Consequently, the government suspended launches for four months until Russia investigated the cause of the crash and paid compensation (Leverova 2002; Olcott 2002). Another crash of the same rocket system launched at *Baikonur* in September 2007 further inflamed public opinion, although to a much lesser extent than the first crash (Makarychev 2007). Russian officials responded by stating that the crash of the rocket did not cause any harm to either people or the environment. Nevertheless, after a series of investigations Russia

³⁵ Full control of the *Baikonur* space-launch facility and the town of Leninsk were passed to Russia in 1994 for US\$115 million a year, a sum that the Russians later applied against Kazakhstan’s debts (Olcott 2002: 45).

had to pay compensation amounting to 22 KzT million against the 7 KzT billion demanded by the Kazakh government (Kabikyzy 2007). Local environmentalists maintain that many households in the area of the crash have suffered from its consequences (Braun 2002). According to the Karaganda Oblast Department of Healthcare, the number of visits to doctors soon after the September 2007 crash increased fourfold (Kokhanova 2007).

Overall, the 2012 Environmental Performance Index³⁶ of the World Economic Forum placed Kazakhstan at 129th place out of 162 countries (Radio Azattyq 2012), a drop of 37 places compared to the preceding year. According to the leader of the Green Salvation movement, Sergei Kuratov, in spite of the adoption of environmental legislation in 1997 and the signing of international conventions in the area of protecting the environment, the worsening of the rating accurately reflects the ecological deterioration in Kazakhstan in recent years (Inkar Info 2008).

Interethnic Grievances

In commenting on the post-Soviet nation-building in Central Asia, many scholars have argued that Kazakhstan is the most ethnic conflict-prone country in the region mainly due to the fact that it is the most multi-ethnic one, where at the time of gaining independence the titular nationality was a minority population³⁷. Interethnic grievances in Kazakhstan include various ethnicities' discontent with ethno-social stratification, unequal treatment, and the disproportionate distribution of social benefits. The first and second phases mark grievances related to the fear on the part of non-Kazakh ethnicities of growing Kazakh nationalistic sentiments. The third phase witnessed the growth of

³⁶ The rating is based on 25 criteria, some of which are air pollution, water quality, ecological health and sustainable development of energy.

³⁷ According to the 1989 Soviet Census, Kazakhs constituted 39.5% of the population, while Russians made up 37.7%. Combined with the Ukrainians (5.4%) and the Belarusians (1.2%), Slavs thus make up 44.2% of Kazakhstan's population (Olcott 1997).

interethnic animosities based on economic stratification, which even escalated into several instances of collective violence. In this section, I shall describe each of these phases in more detail.

The centuries-long interethnic grievances in Kazakhstan resurfaced in the mid-1980s. The starkest of them were the grievances touching upon the relationship between the Kazakh and Russian populations. As was mentioned earlier in the chapter, discontent with the ‘Russification’ of Kazakh society, exploitation of natural resources by non-Kazakhs, and historical recollections of Kazakhs’ victimisation by Moscow (mass famine, 1930s brutal collectivisation, political repressions, etc.) caused an explicit resentment of Russian rule in Kazakhstan. The pronouncement of the Glasnost’ and Perestroika campaigns in the mid-1980s allowed for the publication of controversial materials, including those related to the re-thinking of Kazakh history, endangered Kazakh culture and traditions, the portrayal of Russians as colonisers, etc. According to Prazauskas (1998), compared to other Central Asian states, the sliyaniye programme resulted in Kazakh culture becoming the most Russified, and thus the most difficult to restore. Kazakh nationalists were especially sensitive to the centrality of the Russian language in the public domain, as reflected in the number of Russian secondary schools outnumbering those of Kazakh schools, the extensive use of Russian in politics and culture and the prevalence of Russian speakers over Kazakh speakers. To illustrate, in the last two decades of the SU’s existence, ‘linguistic assimilation was at full swing, as only 40% of Kazakhs could speak their mother tongue fluently’ (Ibid.: 62). As for Russians, less than 1% of Russians were fluent in Kazakh (Dawisha and Parrott 1994). With the increasing publication of articles and books critical of Russians, the interethnic tensions grew.

Despite the acute interethnic tensions in the republic, Kazakhs were kept silent thanks to the ‘popularity and political skills of long-time republic leader Dinmukhammed Kunaev, a Kazakh, as well as ingrained caution bred of the Soviet experience’ (Olcott 1997: 551-52). It was not until December 1986 when Kunaev was replaced by an ethnic Russian, Gennadii Kolbin (who had no previous connection to Kazakhstan), that the grievances turned into an act of collective violence commonly labelled the Almaty Uprising of 1986. There is still no clear evidence about how many people were killed in this uprising. According to some unofficial records, more than 200 people were killed and hundreds were imprisoned (Sheretov 2003). Moreover, there are contradictory ideas about the antecedents of the protest. The official version claims that the three days of social unrest in Brezhnev Square in Almaty was nothing less than a carefully planned uprising organised by the Kazakh nationalist youth and targeted at destabilising the political order in the republic. This version did not convince the general public, however, and it was obvious that the Communist Party was trying to lay all the blame on Kazakh nationalists. After a three-year investigation of the uprising, the official report of the Commission under the Presidium of the Supreme Council of KSSR concluded in September 1990 that the events in Almaty were not nationalistic in nature – instead, they illustrated the first attempt of the general public to practice its constitutional right to the free expression of civil and political position (Ibid.). Following this logic, the youth were protesting against worsening living standards, social injustices and the appointment of Kolbin, who had no prior knowledge and experience working in Kazakhstan. Whichever version is true, what is clear is that relationships between Russians and Kazakhs, and Moscow and Almaty, were deteriorating.

Apparently, the awakening of Kazakh nationalist sentiments alarmed the Slavic ethnicities in Kazakhstan and raised concerns about defending their status and rights in

the republic. In the middle of the first phase, following the dissolution of the SU, the Kazakh nationalists (i.e. the ‘Alash’ and ‘Zheltoksan’ nationalist parties) among other things demanded immediate proclamation of the Kazakh language as a state language. By and large, the Russian population did not mind that; however, it was interested in maximising the time allotted to learning Kazakh, and recognition of the Russian language as the second state language (Peyrouse 2007). Other claims made by the Russians in the early 1990s included the introduction of dual citizenship (Russian and Kazakh) for ethnic Russians and greater representation of Russians in the high echelons of power (Olcott 2002). Aware of the fragile interethnic balance in Kazakhstan, President Nazarbayev ensured that the Law on Languages (1989) provided enough time (up to the year 2000) for Russians to learn Kazakh; the law also stipulated that the Kazakh language be the state language, whereas Russian will be a language of interethnic communication. As for dual citizenship, neither Nazarbayev nor any other Central Asian leader believed dual citizenship for Russians to be possible, as it would destabilise the countries from within. Threatened by the rapid ‘Kazakhization’³⁸ of society, the Cossack population living in the northern regions of Kazakhstan spelled out its secessionist demands, claiming that the northern parts of Kazakhstan³⁹ must join Russia. The Cossacks’ claims to self-preservation, reluctance to recognise Kazakhstan’s sovereignty, and their overall irredentist moods disturbed Kazakh nationalists. Thus, when the Uralsk Cossack leadership in September 1991 announced its plans to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Cossacks’ service to the Tsar and homeland, the leaders of the ‘Azat’,

³⁸ Due to the massive emigration of ethnic Russians (up to 483,000 a year by 1994) and repatriation of ethnic Kazakhs from Mongolia, China and Turkey, by 1994 Kazakhs made up 44.3% of the population and the Russians 35.8%. ‘Kazakhisation’ also refers to the renaming of towns from Russian to Kazakh names, the appointment of Kazakhs to key administrative and executive posts, and the moving of the capital from Almaty to Astana in 1997 (a northern city mostly populated by ethnic Russians).

³⁹ Cossacks – who are a martial people of mixed ethnicity descending from Russians and Ukrainians – believe that the northern half of most of the Kazakh–Russian border oblasts belong to Russia, claiming that these lands were shifted to Kazakhstan in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution when the Kazakh republic was still a part of the Russian Federation (Olcott 2002: 76).

‘Zheltoksan’ and ‘Alash’ Kazakh nationalist parties perceived this as an insult to the Kazakh people’s national dignity. Members of these parties gathered in Uralsk to prevent the celebration and confronted the Cossacks from Don, Chelyabinsk, Krasnodar and various other Russian regions arriving in Uralsk. The situation in the city was potentially explosive, but in the end it was peacefully resolved (Sheretov 2003). Several similar cases involving confrontations between the Cossacks and Kazakhs occurred in Aqmola (present day Astana) in the mid-1990s and Ust-Kamenogorsk in 1999.

By the beginning of the second phase, the adoption of the Law on Languages (1989), fostering relations with Russia and a constitution guaranteeing and protecting the minority rights of Russians in Kazakhstan relaxed the tensions between Kazakhs and Russians. To address the grievances of Cossacks as well as other ethnic minorities, Nazarbayev founded the Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan in 1995, which was presented as part of a project to build a Kazakhstani nation that was not based on nationality (Peyrouse 2007). All in all, wise and rational decision-making in the resolution of potential ethnic conflicts in Kazakhstan has been widely attributed to the President Nazarbayev (Fuller 1994; Olcott 1997). Nazarbayev’s statements like the one below gave him the ethnic minorities’ trust and support:

“I hope that the people of Kazakhstan...will not permit even the slightest dissonance in our multi-ethnic harmony, not even the hint of ethnic conflict. For its part, the Government of Kazakhstan, and I as President, will continue to pursue a carefully considered nationalities policy and to act promptly to end any provocative actions aimed at undermining our multi-national unity.” (Nazarbaev 1992: 170).

As a result of skilful balancing between the interests of Kazakhs and ethnic minorities, interethnic grievances declined after 1993 and reached their minimum by the end of the 1990s.

In regard to the third phase, while the relations between the Kazakhs and Russians considerably improved, the grievances of several ethnic minorities and Kazakhs

themselves seemed to threaten the political stability in Kazakhstan. Relations between the Kazakhs on one side and ethnic Chechens, Uighurs and Kurds on the other are mostly defined by the economic stratification and grassroots xenophobia prevailing predominantly in the southern regions of Kazakhstan. Kazakhs' discontent in southern Kazakhstan about the fact that low-paid jobs are occupied by an illegal labour force from neighbouring Uzbekistan and Tajikistan inflames animosity toward immigrant ethnicities. Envy of the affluence of some minorities, especially in areas with a poorer Kazakh population, also causes resentment. Thus, in March 2007 the Makhmakhanov family⁴⁰ was attacked by several hundred people in Malovodnoye village, Almaty district as a result of which five people were killed and nine wounded. The official version states that the conflict stemmed from an everyday routine issue and does not represent an interethnic conflict. However, the 'Vainakh' Chechen Association claims that the attack was a carefully planned action organised and sponsored by some people interested in taking over the land and businesses belonging to the head of the Makhmakhanov family (Svetova 2009; Zhalmiyev 2007). Another conflict of a similar scale occurred in November 2007 in Mayatas Village, Shymkent district, where the local Kazakhs assaulted a Kurdish family and demanded that all Kurds leave the village. Sparked by the rape of a four-year-old Kazakh boy by a 16-year-old Kurdish boy, the observers stated that Kazakhs felt they could no longer tolerate the injustices, disrespect and mischief of the local Kurds. Amalbek Tshan, a vociferous Kazakh nationalist, commented on the Mayatas events by saying that it was an interethnic conflict driven by the humiliated Kazakhs, who feel abandoned by the state while the Kurds as well as several other ethnic minorities do not respect the culture and traditions of the Kazakhs who sheltered them during the SU purges (Mantrov 2007). The ethnic minorities call for the arrest of Tshan,

⁴⁰ The ethnic Chechen Makhmakhanov family is well known in the Malovodnoye village for being wealthy and owning several large businesses in Kazakhstan.

who is supposedly trying to instigate a large interethnic conflict in Kazakhstan aimed at expulsion of ethnic minorities from the country. The government in its turn aims at localising the instances of interethnic clashes and, therefore, maintaining political stability in the country at large.

Local governments attribute the abovementioned interethnic clashes to socioeconomic grievances, trying to veil any interethnic violence occurring in their constituencies. All in all, as political observers in Kazakhstan argue, the government is presently able to address the interethnic grievances; however, they also assert that the state should solve the problems resulting in interethnic hostility rather than turning its back at the instances of ethnic conflict (Zakon.kz 2007). By turning a blind eye toward minorities' concerns, the government is risking finding itself dealing with larger interethnic conflicts that would more seriously destabilise the current interethnic accord in Kazakhstan.

Political Grievances

While the definition and content of the previous three types of grievances is quite self explanatory, the understanding of political grievances is not as straightforward. In the context of this thesis, the public's political grievances represent its dissatisfaction with political developments in Kazakhstan. This may involve public discontent with the spread of corruption, violation of human rights, unfair elections, and imprisonment of independent journalists and members of the opposition. Since all of these problems are associated with the state's political institutions, political protests are mostly anti-governmental and anti-regime in nature.

It is worth noting that unless protest demands are not satisfied in a relatively short period of time, any non-political grievance may get politicised with people shifting their protest demands from, say, socioeconomic issues to political ones. For instance, the workers of

ZhanaozenMunaiGaz went on strike for eight months in 2011 demanding an increase in their salary and improvement of working conditions. Frustrated with the government's ignorance of their demands, they started demanding not only its dissolution but also the ousting of the President himself (Boranbayev 2012). I will discuss such politicisations of protest in more detail in chapters 4 and 6.

According to Figure 3.1, most political protests took place in the third phase with the amount (102) just below the number of socioeconomic protests (149) in the same phase. However, in the first two phases the proportion of political protests (98) was three times less than that of socioeconomic protests (304). Does this mean that socioeconomic grievances were more salient than political ones in the first two phases? Or does it mean that the regime was more repressive toward political protests, thus preventing the masses from taking part in them? Answers to these and other questions will be provided further along in the thesis.

Many political issues shaped the public's political grievances in the period prior to the first phase. These grievances were articulated by numerous political organisations formed at the end of the 1980s. Nationalist groups like the Russian 'Edinstvo' (Unity) and informal Kazakh organisations like 'Zheltoksan' (December) and 'Azat' (Freedom) represented the country's first oppositional groups (Olcott 1997). Among the issues they raised was the government's reluctance to grant official registration to these groups⁴¹ and President Nazarbayev's intimidation of his opponents in the 1991 presidential elections⁴². Foreseeing the collapse of the SU, most political parties and public associations

⁴¹ The political organisations formed in 1990 were in opposition to the Kazakhstan Communist Party. They were registered after the dissolution of the Communist Party in August 1991.

⁴² In the 1991 presidential elections there were three candidates: Nazarbayev, Suleimenov and Kozhakhmetov. For reasons that remain obscure, a few weeks before the elections, Suleimenov withdrew his candidacy. The leader of the 'Zheltoksan' party did not manage to collect the 100,000 signatures required to run for presidency (the opposition believes that the government interfered to prevent Kozhakhmetov from running in the elections).

demanded an immediate declaration of independence by Kazakhstan, the organisation of free and fair parliamentary and presidential elections, citizens' right to private property and many other issues related to separation from the SU and the launching of political reforms.

The dissolution of the SU did not tame political grievances; on the contrary, the citizens of independent Kazakhstan were becoming more concerned about the future of the political reforms. A growing interest in politics meant a simultaneous increase of political participation. If people were dissatisfied about a certain political issue, they could now openly and publicly speak their minds either through the mass media or in collective gatherings. A good illustration of this is the events surrounding the drafting of the first (1993) and second (1995) constitutions, which mobilised people and oppositional forces against the President's growing consolidation of power. Thus, according to the opposition ('Azat', 'Zheltoksan', 'Edinstvo', and the Democratic Progress of Kazakhstan Party), the 1993 constitution did not fully guarantee citizens' civil rights, the project of the constitution did not pass through the legal revision process, the constitution did not contain the impeachment procedures and, finally, the constitution did not stipulate people's right to call a referendum (Birlesu 1992; Sheretov 2003). Despite the opposition's call to hold a referendum on the adoption of the constitution, the first constitution of Kazakhstan was pronounced by the President in January 1993. The second constitution adopted in August 1995 was similarly criticised by the opposition for strengthening presidential powers, restrictions imposed on the parliament and the shrinking of democratic freedoms (Olcott 1997; Sheretov 2003). The alternative version of the constitution drafted by civil society institutions was abandoned altogether; a referendum held on the second constitution reportedly resulted in more than 90% of the electorate voting for it. Opposition actors which boycotted the referendum later convened

a press conference to announce that, according to the observers' reports, only 30% of the electorate had actually taken part in it.

Among other controversial political events in the first phase were the parliamentary elections of 1994 and 1995. Both of them received extensive negative feedback from various international election-observation missions such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and IFES. The most widespread violations during these elections were related to the transparency of electoral processes, observers' access to polling stations, candidates' access to the mass media, and manipulation of election-related figures. The dissolution of the 1994 parliament by the President in 1995 was regarded by the opposition and international observers as an illegal and undemocratic act (Belov 1995). In the words of Olcott, '[t]he Kazakh president wanted the legislature to be a rubber stamp for the economic decisions taken by his government' (Olcott 2002: 103). Should not the rubber stamp parliament be loyal to the president, Nazarbayev would find ways to dismiss it – something that happened to the 1994 Parliament.

The corruption scandal, which came to be labelled 'Kazakhgate', involving high-profile state officials and contributed to the strengthening of political grievances in the second phase. Corruption charges against an American businessman, James Giffen, revealed that Western oil companies had bribed Kazakh officials in the early 1990s to secure contracts relating to the Kashagan oil fields. Oppositional parties and the mass media accused the President and his family of involvement in the scandal. The public resonance caused by the scandal resulted in the regime's closure of the oppositional mass media at the end of the 1990s – i.e. the *XXI Vek*, *SolDat* and *Nachnem s Ponedel'nika* newspapers – for insulting the President's honour, reporting the activities of the opposition and abusing freedom of speech. For the same reasons, the regime prosecuted independent journalists.

Overall, by passing the stringent Laws on Mass Media and on National Security, the regime's authoritarian tendencies tightened the control of political life in Kazakhstan – something that can be noticed in the waning of political protests toward the end of the 1990s.

However, the political hiatus in the middle of the second phase did not last long; intra-elite cleavages and a consequent defection of political elites (Oraz Zhandosov, Bolat Abilov, Mukhtar Ablyazov and Galymzhan Zhakiyanov) from the government in 2001 created a radical opposition party, the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DCK). The DCK's declaration stated that Kazakhstan remains a state with an enormously high centralisation of power. Among the solutions to this, the declaration offered the liberalisation of the mass media, creation of a just and independent judicial system, restoration of the constitutional council, expansion of legislative powers, the creation of independent elections commissions and a greater observance of human rights (Sheretov 2003). From its inception, the DCK quickly attracted many members and supporters; by the end of 2003 there were 32,000 members (Human Rights Watch 2004). Many public demonstrations spread across the country in support of the DCK's political demands. A national poll conducted by the Kazakhstani Association of Politologists and Sociologists in 2004 reported deterioration of public's protest moods and growing number of people supporting radical versus gradual political reforms (Association of Politologists and Sociologists 2004).

The regime's immediate reaction to the political crisis was the imprisonment of key oppositional figures (i.e. Mukhtar Ablyazov and Galymzhan Zhakiyanov) on politically motivated charges in 2002. Leading independent newspapers ('Respublika', 'SolDat', and 'Svoboda Slova') and TV channels ('KTK', 'Tan') faced harsh treatment, including

direct and indirect intimidation by the National Security Committee, artificial tax evasion charges, fines and criminal charges for discrediting the dignity and honour of state officials. In several instances, the offices of several newspapers were set on fire and robbed and journalists beaten up⁴³, with print houses also refusing to print the newspapers concerned. In summer 2002, the US Department of State, the US Congress, the European Union, OSCE and the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights expressed serious concerns about the regime's encroachment on citizens' civil liberties, imprisonment of opposition leaders on politically motivated charges, and oppression of the mass media and journalists. Despite the international pressure, the opposition was crushed in the 2004 parliamentary elections.

The third phase witnessed a growth of protests in Kazakhstan, most of which were either political in nature or became politicised over time (Rogers 2010). As before, Kazakhstanis experienced unfair parliamentary elections, the closure of independent newspapers, assassinations of opposition members, imprisonment of journalists, and violations of civil rights. Each of these political issues mobilised a large number of people to protest. For instance, thousands of Almaty dwellers gathered on 11 February 2009 at the city's central square to express their grief and anger about the assassination of Altynbek Sarsenbayev, a leader of 'Nagyz Ak Zhol' (Real Bright Path) opposition movement, three years earlier. None of the participants believed the official version of the tragedy, and the demonstration ended with an appeal being issued to President Nazarbayev calling on him to review the case (Sharipzhan 2009). Throughout autumn 2009 many people also protested against an unfair four-year sentence handed down to Yevgenii Zhovtis, a prominent human rights activist, for vehicular manslaughter. The

⁴³ Independent journalists like Sergei Duvanov and Ermurat Bapi are at constant threat of being harmed or even killed. On 8 May 2008, Bapi's car was armed with an explosive device which nearly killed the journalist (Inkar.info, 15 May 2008).

trial of Zhovtis was reportedly politically motivated and was ‘marred with procedural violations and a failure to adequately consider evidence’ (Dave 2010a; Human Rights Watch 2009a). Interestingly, many political protests in the third phase had started off being purely socioeconomic in nature; however, the government’s neglect of the public’s concerns in 2008/09, together with the mortgage crisis, skyrocketing food prices, job losses and salary arrears, meant that socioeconomic demands were now becoming highly politicised. This was accomplished with the help of opposition parties, which were hoping to make a political comeback by riding a wave of popular discontent (Joanna Lillis 2009; Svoboda Slova 2008).

To conclude, as was mentioned before, RD in relation to various issue areas is very important in predicting and explaining the possibility of protest. However, the study of the emergence and cyclicity of protest activities only from the RD perspective would be somewhat short-sighted as there are also factors without which frustration with RD would never have materialised in the form of collective action. In the next section, I describe the role of POS in protest mobilisation. Then, I will provide a brief overview of the evolution of mobilising structures since the end of the 1980s, which is the time period regarded as the cradle of mass mobilisation in Kazakhstan. Finally, I will look at SMOs’ construction of CAFs aimed at mobilising people.

Political Opportunity Structures

As the previous chapter showed, POS are the institutional structures or informal power relations of a given national political system (McAdam et al. 1996). The social movement literature attributes the growth of social movements to the favourability of structural conditions such as open POS and the availability of mobilising resources (Tarrow 1998). In this section I describe the nature of POS in Kazakhstan throughout

three time phases. The collapse of the SU opened up POS for early grassroots movements. Unwilling to tolerate growing protest mobilisation, the regime closed POS in the middle of the first phase. It was not until the end of the second phase when elite defection from the government once again opened POS for contentious politics. Concerned with an incombustible opposition and growing protest moods in the third phase, the government again responded by tightening its control over political life in the country.

The appointment of Nazarbayev to the post of General Secretary of Kazakhstan Supreme Soviets in 1989 was viewed by Kazakh nationalist groups as the opening of POS. Indeed, the rehabilitation of political prisoners, the regime's declining capacity for repression, and growing access to power created favourable conditions for the growth of civil initiatives in Kazakhstan. Nazarbayev's initial support for democratisation and market reforms inspired the birth of civil society. Many newspapers that were banned during the reign of previous General Secretary Gennadii Kolbin were now allowed to publish, and previously banned literary and historical writings were available in bookshops and libraries.

Soon after the period of post-independence euphoria, the regime decided to shut down POS for two reasons. The first was the growing risk of interethnic clashes in the republic. Thus, the state refused registration to radical nationalist parties that were calling for the expulsion of Russians and other ethnic minorities from Kazakhstan. Second, growing pressure being exerted by political opponents was not pleasing to Nazarbayev. Oppositional political parties such as 'Azat', the People's Congress of Kazakhstan and 'Zheltoksan' were attacking the President for rigging⁴⁴ the 1994 and 1995 parliamentary

⁴⁴ Neither of the first two parliaments in Kazakhstan had any representatives from oppositional political parties, instead being mostly staffed by people loyal to the President.

elections and adopting an undemocratic constitution in 1995. In his interview with the 'Vashe Pravo' newspaper in August 1997, Nurbolat Masanov – a well-known Kazakh historian and political scientist – negatively characterised the state-building in Kazakhstan. According to him, hopes for democratisation in Kazakhstan were being betrayed through the overt centralisation of power in the hands of a single person who was taking the country back to feudalism. The regime's reaction to growing political dissent was the closure of opposition newspapers, the prosecution of opposition leaders and the adoption of legislation that would fence off the regime from political challengers. Thus, in mid-1992, the 'Kazakhstan legislature adopted a law on the organs of national security that gave the former KGB virtually a free hand' (Dawisha and Parrott 1994: 149). It meant that the agency could violate citizens' constitutional rights in extreme circumstances (without defining those circumstances) and, most strikingly, the agency was given the right to jam almost any foreign or domestic radio or television broadcasts. The closing of POS in the mid-1990s meant waning political activism and establishment of procedural democracy in Kazakhstan.

The biggest opportunity for the regime's opponents to gain strength following the collapse of the SU came about in 2002 as a result of elite realignments. Political process theorists agree that elite realignments in the regime's leadership structure political opportunities (Misztal and Jenkins 2004). Thus, the defection of several elites (prominent examples being Bolat Abilov and Galymzhan Zhakiyanov) from the government and parliament of Kazakhstan in 2002 and their decision to organise a unified opposition raised the chances of SMOs being able to mobilise the masses against the injustices of Nazarbayev's regime. A window of opportunity created by the regime's unpreparedness to face a political crisis in 2002 meant that the opposition attacked the regime at a time when it was least prepared to fight back against political challengers. The political

turmoil attracted the attention of international organisations and foreign governments, which positively contributed to the opposition's political opportunities. Thus, the US Congress, the EU, Human Rights Watch and Reporters without Borders condemned the government's treatment of the opposition and independent media and its human rights record. In many respects, this political crisis was a high point for the oppositional forces, similar in its scale to political processes at the beginning of the first phase, which not only gained national and international publicity for the opposition, but also earned it some much sought-after public trust and support. According to a poll conducted by ComCon-2 Eurasia in 2002, the popularity of the DCK opposition party was almost the same as that of the ruling 'Otan' (Native Land) party (ComCon-2 Eurasia 2002).

As had happened before in the first phase, the regime in the third phase closed POS by clamping down on these growing oppositional forces and media. Thus, just months after the formation of the DCK, two of its leaders Zhakiyanov and Ablyazov were jailed upon conviction of abuse of power charges – criminal cases believed to be politically motivated (Alibekov 2004). The broadcasting licenses of the 'Tan' (Dawn) and 'Era' independent TV channels which were actively broadcasting about the activities of opposition were suspended 'on the basis of various violations, such as a wrongly tuned transmitter, improper registration of the transmitter, violation of sanitary conditions, etc.' (International Freedom of Expression Network 2002). These are just a few cases illustrating the regime's closure of POS in the third phase. Nevertheless, looking at Figure 3.1 we do not see that the closure of POS decreased protest mobilisation. Evidently, there are other factors explaining the persistence of protest mobilisation in spite of the closed POS.

Mobilising Structures

Shifts in institutional structures do not necessarily predict the emergence of popular mobilisation; there must also be vehicles of collective action that drive the public toward contentious collective action. By referring to the concept of mobilising structures, McAdam et al (1996) mean '*those collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action*' (original emphasis, p. 3). The mobilising structures concept not only refers to the availability of formal or informal organisations working toward mobilising the population but also pays attention to the resources that these organisations need to attract in order to kick start the social movement (Jenkins 1983). The resource mobilisation theory, which is grounded in the foundations of the mobilising structures concept, focuses on just that aspect; namely, how do political entrepreneurs attract those resources and, most importantly, what kind of resources do the organisations draw upon? Among the most significant resources that organisations rely on are money, facilities, labour, legitimacy, and organising and legal skills (Ibid.).

It is impossible to discuss the birth of mobilising structures in Kazakhstan without considering the effects of the *Glasnost*' campaign on protest mobilisation. The democratisation campaign introduced by Gorbachev in the mid-1980s enabled the creation of the first politically independent groups in the SU. Since public political discourse was not allowed in Kazakhstan, the first social groups that emerged were the groups addressing environmental concerns (Luong and Weinthal 1999). Many politicised informal clubs (*neformaly*) and youth dissident movements were organised under the aegis of environmental public associations. However, almost all the organisations formed at that time did not possess the organising and legal skills vital for the development of

SMOs. This was because, like many other Soviet states, Kazakhstan was a highly traditional society with a large peasantry and a weak heritage of independent political action (Schopflin 1991). The first political organisation formed in 1988 in Kazakhstan was the Club '*Perestroika*' which was functioning in ways similar to the club with the same name in Leningrad. Along with many informal clubs, the '*Perestroika*' Club was targeted at supporting and defending the ideas of *Perestroika* against its conservative opponents in Moscow. Inspired by the success of the Baltic and Moscow People's Fronts, political activists announced the formation of the 'Almaty People's Front', consisting of approximately 30 people (Sheretov 2003). The multiplicity of organisations formed in the first phase lacked unity, coherence and, most importantly, skilful leaders. It was the presence of the latter that made possible the nationwide Nevada-Semei environmental movement against the nuclear testing site in Semei.

At the end of the first phase, operating in the environment of closed POS, mobilising structures struggled over the finances and deficit of foreign support. The Law on NGOs passed in May 1996 put severe restrictions on the financing of NGOs' activities. Thus, according to the law, public associations cannot receive funding from foreign sources and they have to report all financial transactions and disclose data on their members. This meant that many NGOs closed down for they could not exist without the funding of foreign governments and NGOs such as USAID, the Eurasia Foundation and the Soros Foundation. The requirement to thoroughly report on activities, members and financial flows was vehemently criticised by civil activists who claimed that the state's growing totalitarian practices were retarding the development of civil society in Kazakhstan. Luong and Weinthal (1999) claim that Kazakhstani NGOs 'face institutional obstacles in a political system that has become more restrictive since 1994, and lack access to organizational resources owing to the continued decline in economic growth' (1268).

Speaking of declining foreign support, due to the stringent regulation of civil society organisations and local NGOs' malpractices⁴⁵, the amount of foreign financial and organisation support to public associations declined considerably. Previously, the members and staff of public associations in Kazakhstan had been actively engaged in training and workshops (on skills development, development of civic initiatives, running NGOs, etc.) organised by foreign donor agencies and NGOs to foster the development of civil society in Kazakhstan, but this came to an end after the promulgation of the Law.

As was mentioned earlier, the political crisis of 2002 – characterised by elite defection from the government – strengthened the political opposition in Kazakhstan. While lacking access to economic resources and elite support at the end of the first phase, by the second phase the existing oppositional parties such as the 'Communist Party of Kazakhstan', 'Republican People's Party' and 'Forum of Democratic Forces' made considerable progress in attracting appropriate financial resources and expanding their elite support basis. The internal split among the regime's loyal political and business elites resulted in some of them joining the anti-regime forces. Thus, in November 2001 some of the high-profile political incumbents such as Oraz Zhandosov (ex-Vice Prime Minister and ex-Chairman of the National Bank) and Bolat Abilov (ex-parliamentary deputy) resigned from the state apparatus and formed the DCK. The DCK differed from the existing oppositional parties in that the leadership of the party was more powerful in terms of its possessing a stronger financial basis through which to support its public campaigns. In addition to accumulating organisational skills, SMOs learnt how to operate in the conditions of regime's constant intimidation and repression. As one Kazakh political observer noticed, political parties as well as civil society organisations in

⁴⁵ It has been reported that many local NGOs were involved in using the foreign grants for different purposes. Moreover, the very goal of some organisations was the winning of grants without the due implementation of the projects the grants were issued for.

Kazakhstan matured with the passage of time and the developing civil society institutions (Mamiraimov 2007). Hence, it is now more difficult for the coercive organs to crush public dissent because of citizens' growing civic consciousness and political awareness. Put differently, since the collapse of the SU the civic culture of Kazakhstani citizens, to use Almond and Verba's (1963) terminology, has developed from being a mostly parochial culture into becoming a subject culture, with an increased number of participant population. This consequently raises the stakes when it comes to oppressing dissent. Overall, armed with better internal organisation, devoted followers, elite support, access to economic resources and active international support⁴⁶, mobilising structures had thus become better equipped by the beginning of third phase to mobilise people.

Framing Strategies

According to McAdam et al (1996), the sole presence of POS and mobilising structures is not sufficient to account for collective action: 'Mediating between opportunity, organization, and action are the shared meanings and definitions that people bring to their situation' (McAdam et al. 1996: 5). Social construction of meaning, which is done by the movement entrepreneurs, is what Snow and Benford (1988a) refer to as the 'framing process'. The success of a social movement depends on the actors' skills in effectively constructing a socio-cultural meaning around a certain grievance and thus mobilising a public consensus.

Frames of collective action in the first phase were in abundance. The most viable of them were the ones dealing with the deteriorating economy, worsening living conditions, growing interethnic tensions and nuclear testing in Semei. Many organisations formed at

⁴⁶ International organisations like OSCE, the International Helsinki Federation and the Council of Europe have constantly criticised the current government for falling short of observing democratic norms and, thus, were supportive of organisations in opposition to the state regime.

the end of the 1980s framed the collective action around the delays in the payment of pensions and wages. The Kazakh nationalist parties that emerged in the early 1990s were trying to mobilise the masses around the frames of preserving Kazakh culture and heritage. Although the exact reasons behind the Almaty Uprising are still unclear, the fact that nationalist CAFs were present in it is obvious because some of the participants of the uprising were reportedly calling for the expulsion of Russians from Kazakhstan. The public's discontent with the environmental problems at the end of the 1980s was similarly favourable to SMOs wishing to construct CAFs. Thus, by framing the damages to the environment caused by the Semei nuclear testing site, the Nevada-Semei environmental movement mobilised 3 million people in the republic for nationwide marches and demonstrations. Interestingly, none of the organisations that formed in the 1980s were able or even aimed to construct effective CAFs centred on political grievances. Is this because the political grievances were not as sound as, say, socioeconomic ones? Or is it because the regime was suppressing them? As we shall see later in the thesis, the construction of action frames addressing political issues in Kazakhstan is complicated by the absence of a public consensus regarding dissent in relation to the political situation.

At the end of the first phase, the public associations and political parties opposing the current regime realised they needed significant public support, and mobilising wider society meant the construction of resonant CAFs. The major obstacle to framing political protest was the 'social mentality' (Tarrow 1992) of people, which was not susceptible to activists' claims regarding the political shortcomings of the regime. The authoritarian nature of the nation's political culture prevented SMOs from mobilising the masses on the grounds that the current regime is undemocratic. In other words, due to the lack of general consensus regarding the 'undemocraticness' of the regime, mobilisation

entrepreneurs could not achieve their goals. This framing construction problem was further exacerbated by the fact that the social problems of the day were more salient to the general public than issues related to growing corruption, unfair elections and violations of civil liberties. Interestingly, while being easy to mobilise in the early first phase, the environmental action frames lost their public appeal in the second phase⁴⁷. Because of this, almost none of the ecological NGOs and public associations aimed at mobilising public support; they preferred to directly influence the decision-making in Kazakhstan's higher echelons of power. The improvement of interethnic relations in Kazakhstan in the second phase resulted in the waning of 1980s nationalist CAFs. Thus, no nationalist party in the 1990s was urging the expulsion of a certain ethnic minority, separation from Kazakhstan or raising concerns about ethnic discrimination.

The most noteworthy feature of the second and third phase is the state's counterframing strategies aimed at discrediting the opposition in the eyes of society. While the opposition engaged in constructing and mobilising the public consensus for collective action by making the current regime responsible for the socio-political grievances inherent in the society, the state tried to undermine the image of the opposition by accusing it of attempts to destabilise the political order in the country and endanger economic development. To illustrate, during the parliamentary and presidential campaigns in 2004 and 2005, the state organs launched a media campaign to demoralise oppositional forces and prevent the electorate from voting for the opposition (Dave 2005; Kennedy 2006). Thus, state-owned print and electronic media published humiliating satire and caricatures of opposition leaders, broadcasting documentaries showing bloodshed and massive disorder caused by revolutionary changes and civil wars

⁴⁷ This was due to the closure of the Semei nuclear site and the resulting waning of the Nevada-Semei environmental movement, which was very active in the 1980s in terms of framing and mobilisation work. According to Snow and Benford (1992), action frames tend to wither with the passage of time or SMOs achieving their goals.

elsewhere in the world. Additionally, the regime equated the anti-regime protests with a lack of patriotism. Thus, the President portrayed his opponents as wanting to replace the political and economic stability with disorder in the country, which had only recently finally freed itself from a centuries-long Russian tutelage. By emphasising the turbulent past of the Kazakh people and the post-independence awakening of national culture and traditions, the regime evoked emotional feelings of pride and patriotism that made many people detest the opposition. The difficulty inherent in the opposition's framing work was further exacerbated by the fact that, for many people, President Nazarbayev represents a symbol of national peace and political stability leading the country in the direction of prosperity and success. Such sentiments thus stir the public's feelings of distrust in the opposition⁴⁸.

Encircled by the state's repressive mechanisms, the people's support for Nazarbayev's policies, and a distrustful population, the opposition's framing construction activities were almost completely jeopardised. While it was possible to win public trust and weaken support for Nazarbayev, combating the state's repressive measures was beyond the opposition's powers. As we saw earlier, the regime's oppression of the opposition was so severe that the latter cared more about its survival than the successful production of action frames. It was the regime's fear of losing its dearest assets – public trust and support – as a result of the opposition's framing activity that drove its persecution. One such instance of the regime's waning public support was the government's failures in the housing and land allocation policies in 2006, which created an opportunity for mobilisation entrepreneurs to capitalise on the crisis. Consequently, many people disillusioned with the government and the ruling party joined the opposition camp. In the housing crisis of 2006, the Almaty City Council commandeered plots of land from the

⁴⁸ Several polls conducted in the third phase indicate that the majority of respondents in Kazakhstan are skeptical about and distrustful of the opposition.

owners of cottages in order to build multi-storey houses. However, the cottage owners argued that they had legally bought the land from the City Council in the mid-1990s. The Council in turn claimed that those plots were illegally distributed and, thus, must be returned. Faced with the owners' resistance, the Council took the case to a court that controversially ruled in the Council's favour. The three-day clashes between the police and house owners in one of Almaty's poorest districts that followed garnered nationwide publicity. It was then that the 'Shanyrak' movement (defending of owners' rights) constructed a CAF which made the emotional appeal that the Kazakh government sent armed policemen against its own citizens and, thus, turned against its own people. Drawing upon the injustices and emotionality, the frame mobilised many people and, even today, 'Shanyrak' maintains this frame and applies it to any case wherein the rights of citizens are violated by the state.

Associations between Variables

As we have seen so far, all the independent variables are closely interconnected. According to McAdam et al (1996), open POS motivate the establishment of mobilising structures which in turn attract resources and mobilise a consensus to initiate collective action. Likewise, Gorbachev's *Glasnost*' policy created opportunities for the emergence of informal organisations and discussion clubs. These organisations started to spread the word about the true state of socio-political affairs in the SU through *samizdat* journals and informal social networks. Through the construction of mobilisation frames – connecting the shared cultural understandings with the organisations' goals – *informals* ('Neformaly') were aiming at conveying their messages to the government through the organising of demonstrations and protests.

In the present research, classical social movement theories meet the relative deprivation approach advanced by Gurr (1970), who claims that a group's frustration about deprivation (grievance) produces a propensity for collective action. By identifying four main grievances, I argue that each of them possesses its own characteristics such as higher or lower mobilisation potential. Moreover, when, for example, matching political grievances with the POS, the mobilisation outcome differs from the outcome achieved by matching the POS with environmental grievances. To again cite the *Glasnost*' example, the environmental groups operating around the environmental grievances enjoyed more space for manoeuvring in pursuit of mobilising the masses, whereas the activities of informal groups centred on political grievances were restricted despite open POS. The *Glasnost*' regime continued suppressing the politicised groups, although it did it to a much lesser extent.

While there are few doubts about the interconnectedness of the relevant variables (McAdam et al. 1996: 7), the question of causality is much more difficult to address. It is not obvious if open POS necessarily precede the formation of mobilising structures or vice versa. Nor can we say that a collective action is not possible without the existence of mobilising structures. As Gurr's (1993) study of global communal mobilisation showed, deep communal grievances such as economic discrimination can mobilise a community without the participation and/or assistance of political parties and NGOs (mobilising structures). In the Kazakhstani case, the Almaty Uprising of 1986 seems to have occurred without the interference of movement entrepreneurs. Deeply rooted interethnic and political grievances shaped by resonant action frames caused a demonstration which did not involve any SMOs. Indeed, as a matter of fact, interethnic grievances, backed by open POS, gave birth to many mobilisation organisations advancing nationalist rhetoric.

The interrelated nature of the independent variables and the complex causal chains requires a special research technique aiming to tease out the processes connecting the independent and dependent variables. As stated in the introductory chapter, I will use the process-tracing technique to trace the causal chains and track any intervening variables.

Conclusion

This chapter introduced the field and the present study's independent and dependent variables, drawing out some preliminary associations between them. By doing so, I set out the context for the testing of the research hypotheses.

I began the chapter by discussing the controversies surrounding Kazakhstan's relationship with Russia, emphasising the growing dissent among the Kazakh people regarding Russian imperialism. Early nationalist rebellions as well as the Kazakh intellectuals' movement in support of the liberation of Kazakhstan were suppressed by the Russian Empire. Due to a lack of unity and common objectives, early twentieth-century nationalist riots were also heavily repressed by the Bolsheviks.

Dissent in the SU emerged in the early 1960s with intellectuals' and scientists' writings about the observance of human rights by the state. Interestingly, while the dissident movement was very active in Moscow and several other Soviet republics, it never made its way to Kazakhstan. I questioned various narratives explaining why that was the case. One of the hypotheses I advanced connects the passivity of Kazakh citizens to a backward political culture that is highly imbued with authoritarian features, which thus prevents it from endorsing democratic values.

Next, I described the dependent variable, i.e. variance in popular protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan. Figure 3.1 showed how protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan varies across the

three time phases and four issue areas. Thus, we have seen the rise of protests in Phase I, their decline in Phase II, and another increase in Phase III. In addition, socioeconomic and political issues were found to have the highest protest mobilisation potential. After a discussion of Figure 3.1, I presented the most notable protest events in three time phases that can best characterise the evolution of contentious politics in Kazakhstan.

Having introduced the dependent variable, I moved on to discuss the study's independent variables. I began by outlining the public's relative deprivation in terms of socioeconomic, environmental, interethnic and political issues. As we have seen, the depth of deprivation in tandem with the nature of the issues involved in every grievance type produced different protest mobilisation outcomes. Furthermore, I elaborated on POS in Kazakhstan. A brief historical overview has shown that POS are crucial in predicting protest mobilisation. Next, I looked into the role of mobilising structures in the formation of public dissent. Hence, securing financial support as well as reaching out for elite support is the priority goal for SMOs should they wish to achieve mobilisational success. In the framing strategies section, I maintained that framing collective action is the most difficult task for the opposition because its image and reputation is constantly being undermined by state-produced counterframes aimed at demoralising the opposition and preventing people from joining it.

Finally, in the associations section I identified relationships between the independent and dependent variables and found that in some cases there was more than one independent variable accounting for a particular protest. I also showed that the process-tracing technique employed in this study can account for such equifinality effects.

The next chapter will answer the study's first and second research questions. We will thus see whether the CAF perspective is the most relevant of the four theories in terms of

explaining protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan. In addition, the chapter will discuss differences in the protest mobilisation outcomes achieved by socioeconomic and political and/or politicised protests.

Chapter 4

The Nuts and Bolts of Protest Mobilisation in Kazakhstan

This empirical chapter builds on the previous two chapters which introduced theoretical variables (Chapter 2) and placed them within the context of protest mobilisation (Chapter 3). The chapter pursues two objectives: first, explain protest cyclicity in Kazakhstan utilising four competing explanations; second, explain the prevalence of protests around socioeconomic issues over protests about interethnic, environmental and political issues. By doing so, it will address the study's first and second research questions. Before I begin my analysis of cases, I would like to stop by one major protest event that attracted enormous international attention to Kazakhstan in the recent years. At the time of writing, the Zhanaozen protests have not yet received scholarly attention. These protests offered academics a great opportunity to test various social movements, collective action and social psychological theories of protest in the post-communist Central Asian context. Another significance of these protests stems from the fact that many observers attributed these protests to social upheavals in the Middle East countries speculating that these protests could bring about political change. By discussing the Zhanaozen case I will not only address observers' speculations, but also lay the basis for the introduction to the 'nuts and bolts' of protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan.

A seven-month strike by oil and gas workers of Western Kazakhstan oblast which escalated into a series of violent and deadly riots in December 2011 in the cities of Zhanaozen and Shetpe demonstrated to the world community the extent of coercive

measures the regime can apply toward protesters in its attempt to preserve political stability and its international reputation. A number of international organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have issued official statements condemning the Kazakh government's use of excessive force to break up the protests, as well as the torture and ill treatment of striking detainees (Amnesty International 2012; Human Rights Watch 2011). Despite the authorities' claims that it was successfully addressing these violations, 'the government has failed to deliver on early promises to deliver justice in the case' (Sindelar and Toiken 2012). According to Irina Chernykh, an expert at the Kazakhstan Institute of Strategic Research, 'events in Zhanaozen showed a possibility of resolving labour conflicts via organization and conduct of protest campaigns. A strike as a form of upholding one's interests is now regarded as the most effective method of exerting pressure on employer and political elites in Kazakhstan' (Ten 2013).

By far the biggest lesson learned by the Kazakh authorities from the events in Zhanaozen is that the government's non-intervention in labour conflicts and ignorance of accumulated socioeconomic problems can backfire on the regime in the form of violent protests. A number of civic activists from organisations such as the 'Zhanaozen-2011' Committee, Socialist Movement of Kazakhstan, 'Coalminers' Family' and various professional unions unanimously agree that the authorities have adopted the wrong approach to dealing with labour conflicts (Baitelova 2012). Instead of establishing a dialogue with aggrieved workers and professional unions, the government turns a blind eye to their concerns, leaving them to the competence of employers who often resort to administrative resources⁴⁹ to suppress workers' grievances. Additionally, according to

⁴⁹ These refer to various measures undertaken by government authorities or employers to fence off political challengers and professional unions/employees respectively. For instance, the Parliament may amend the Law on Political Parties to complicate the official registration of oppositional political parties.

Zharmakhan Tuyakbay, a leader of the oppositional National Socio-Democratic Party, the Zhanaozen events were ignited by the regime's 'absolutely irresponsible and shameless ignorance of the elementary constitutional rights of its citizens' (Novosti-Kazakhstan Information Agency 2012). Tuyakbay maintains that events similar to the ones in Zhanaozen could be repeated elsewhere in Kazakhstan unless the authorities address various pressing socioeconomic problems, such as unemployment, income inequality and social provision for pensioners and other deprived social groups. All in all, the Kazakh government paid a high price for this bloody lesson, which cost at least 16 people their lives and injured over 100 people, also involving damage to the city in the region of over US\$20 million (Kazakhstan Embassy in the USA 2012). More important even than those figures, though, is the fact that the events shattered the country's reputation for stability and undermined the long-standing trust between the regime and society (Kazakova 2012).

Soon after the riots were suppressed, President Nazarbayev travelled to Zhanaozen to personally witness the damaged buildings and check on the status of reconstruction works. In addition, he introduced a new governor⁵⁰ (*akim*) to the local population and outlined several objectives for the government that aimed at a restoration of public confidence and prevention of a similar tragedy in the future (Olcott 2012). Among some of these objectives are dealing with oil workers' grievances, offering compensation to people who lost relatives, got injured or lost property, and finally holding responsible those protesters who violated the law and officials who abused power (Ibid., The Economist 2011).

Alternatively, employers may threaten protesting employees with repercussions such as dismissal or issuing an official reprimand and thus preventing them from organised collective action.

⁵⁰ President Nazarbayev initiated several personnel changes as a result of the Zhanaozen riots, with the local governor of Mangistau oblast, the head of the 'KazMunaiGas' Kazakh state oil company and the head of 'Samuryk Kazyna' (the country's National Welfare Fund) being replaced.

According to the sociologist Irina Chernykh, the Zhanaozen riots rendered protest events newsworthy for the mass media; protests now receive prompt coverage in the media and result in public discussions on social networks, blogs and internet forums. As an illustration of how fragile political stability can be, protests are now considered highly significant social phenomena (Ten 2013), so significant that many international observers have speculated about whether the ‘Arab Spring’ is heading for Kazakhstan by drawing parallels with the various tottering regimes in North Africa and the Middle East. Despite some similarities between Kazakhstan and the Arab Spring countries, most notable of which are endemic corruption, nepotism of the elite, poverty and the deficit of political freedoms, few if any analysts forecast a ‘Kazakh Spring’ in the near future (Indeo 2012; Joanna Lillis 2012; Tahir 2011b). The reasons for this are the political stability, the support of international geopolitical actors due to the country’s energy-strategic relevance, the comparatively positive financial and social situation, the resilient political elite and a toothless opposition. To sum up, claiming that Nazarbayev has anticipated all the factors which led to popular anger in the Middle East and taken corresponding measures to prevent collective violence from happening in Kazakhstan, Erlan Idrisov (Kazakhstan’s ambassador to the US) states: ‘We in Kazakhstan are secured against this because Nazarbayev and his team have addressed these issues as part of their long-term policy’ (Tahir 2011a).

All of the above suggests that the Zhanaozen riots did not go unnoticed. Despite the regime’s deepening of repressions targeted at independent media, journalists, opposition figures and civic activists (Yanovskaya and Kislov 2012), the third phase has witnessed a growth in the public’s protest moods and activities (Institute of Political Solutions 2013; Joanna Lillis 2013; Ten 2013). A noteworthy development relating to protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan is the so-called ‘Revolting Index’ compiled by Alen Mattich,

the Wall Street Journal observer, who ranked Kazakhstan at 31st place out of 85 countries which are likely ‘candidates for (un)civil upheaval on the basis of three equally-weighted criteria: social unfairness; propensity to revolt; and a trigger, in this case the share that food makes up as a percentage of household final expenditure’ (Mattich 2011). Although he warns that this rating does not qualify as a ‘cast-iron academically certified diagnostic tool’, it received extensive scrutiny among Kazakh political scientists and analysts. For instance, while also emphasising the conditional and populist nature of this rating, Eduard Poletayev, a Kazakhstani political scientist, highlights its shortcomings. In so doing, he claims that this rating includes only 85 out of more than 200 existing countries and excludes many countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in Central Asia which are extremely prone to violent upheavals. Additionally, he draws attention to the massacres in Libya, which has a GDP per capita rate much higher than in Kazakhstan or Russia (Lim 2011). Another expert, Gulmira Ileuova, head of the ‘Strategiya’ Public Foundation, claims that Mattich’s rating is mostly based on socioeconomic indicators and thus completely ignores political parameters and the local context. Finally, while acknowledging that there is a link between a rise in food prices and protest moods, Irina Chernykh argues that this link is never linear or straightforward. As a matter of fact, Chernykh claims, people usually connect their frustration at socioeconomic deprivation to other factors (such as moral and value systems, future outlooks, etc.), which then lead to protest mobilisation (Ibid.).

Despite the shortcomings of the ‘Revolting Index’, however, all the above mentioned experts nonetheless find it interesting and in need of further elaboration. Moreover, admitting that socioeconomic variables do have an influence on protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan, experts call for a thorough study of other variables within the context of modern Kazakhstan. According to Chernykh, there have not been any scholarly studies

on the topic of protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan that would reveal the nuances of such a crucial and highly contemporary issue (Lim 2011). Considering the national and international resonance of the Zhanaozen riots, as well as the growth of scholarly interest in contentious politics in Kazakhstan, this chapter aims to investigate the determinants of protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan from 1992 up to 2009 in addition to looking at the variation of protest cyclicity across different issues areas.

The chapter consists of two parts: part one addresses my first research question while the second part deals with the second. I begin by presenting four theoretical arguments, each represented by a diagram outlining key independent variables. Each diagram is followed by a discussion of how I operationalised the explanatory variables. Next, I analyse this study's 12 cases and see which of the four theories they support. In the chapter's second part I discuss why non-socioeconomic grievances do not enjoy as much protest mobilisation as socioeconomic ones.

Operationalisation of Variables

As we have seen in Chapter 2, there are enduring scholarly debates regarding the definition of theories' key concepts, terminology and required set of independent variables. Furthermore, academics extensively scrutinise how social movement scholars operationalise these variables. Aware of these debates and considering some of the major criticisms of the theories in question, I chose definitions and came up with a list of variables for each theory that is most commonly used and recognised by the majority of authors. I start with relative deprivation (RD) followed by resource mobilisation (RMT), political opportunity structures (POS) and, finally, collective action frames (CAF).

Relative Deprivation

The selection of independent variables for RD theory was primarily based on Gurr's study *Why Men Rebel* (1970). According to Gurr, public dissatisfaction with various aspects of life does not automatically translate into protest mobilisation. There are certain mediating variables which play motivating (social conditions) and rationalising (psychological conditions) functions in people's calculations of protest participation.

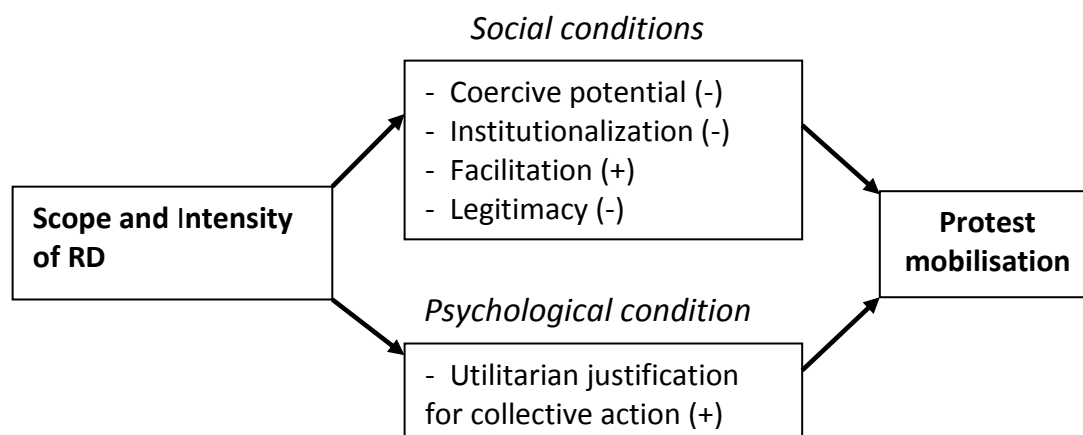


Figure 4-1: Causal diagram of RD theory adapted from Gurr (1970)

Figure 4.1 demonstrates this theoretical argument. While Gurr's dependent variable is the magnitude of civil strife, in this study I am explaining variations or, put differently, the cyclicity of protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan. Another modification to Gurr's original causal diagram is the inclusion of a psychological condition. Although aware of its significance, Gurr intentionally excluded it from the diagram claiming that public justification of collective violence in obtaining scarce values can be an independent source of political violence (1970: 13). Nevertheless, I added this variable because Smelser (1962) and other traditional collective behaviour theorists attribute crucial explanatory power to it, arguing that people would not mobilise for protest even in the case of acute deprivation unless there is a widely shared public utilitarian justification for collective action as a means of resolving their grievances. Moreover, adding this variable

to the diagram would test Gurr's assumption regarding the secondary role of psychological conditions.

Scope and intensity of RD: Unlike Gurr, whose measurement of RD was based on aggregate statistical data such as employment and school enrolment rates, I directly interviewed the leaders of various social movement organisations (SMOs), which represent four types of grievances. This approach is in line with Davies' (1997) criticism of Gurr's methodology, which claims that Gurr should have directly interviewed people regarding their grievances as this method would yield more accurate conclusions. There are several questions in the interview schedule which ask elite interviewees to reflect on the scope and intensity of RD. Thus, the scope of deprivation is inferred from the frequency of and turnout at protest events organised by interviewees' SMOs. Intensity of deprivation is based on two factors: type of protest event and protesters' resort to violence. Open confrontation with the police, inflicting damage to property and acts of self-immolation are examples of intense deprivation. Sit-ins and making collective petitions, on the contrary, are acts illustrative of protests involving a low intensity of deprivation.

Coercive potential: Conventional wisdom suggests that the state's repressions prevent people from protest mobilisation. By repressions, I mean police beatings of protesters, arrests, prosecution and legal action against SMOs' leaders, activists and protesters. I asked interviewees whether their activists or protest participants have been subject to violence and prosecution during and after protest events by law enforcement agencies. Additionally, interviewees had an opportunity to name 'state repression' as one of the obstacles hindering the mobilising of the masses for protest.

Institutionalisation: Countries with large numbers of political organisations and effectively functioning political procedures are more stable than countries with neither of the two (Huntington 1965). Various civic organisations such as public associations, professional unions, political parties and social movements help the aggrieved public to express their discontent and bring it to the government's attention. If such organisations are scarce, then the aggrieved masses seek non-conventional means of attaining value satisfactions such as flocking to the streets. Since in this study I am focusing on variation in protest events in four issue areas, I am interested in how well each of these areas is institutionalised. For an issue area to be considered *institutionalised*, it must have at least three issue-centred SMOs in each phase. To illustrate, unless there are three different SMOs operating in the field of socioeconomic grievances in the first phase, I would not consider this issue area as institutionalised and hence resulting in high instances of socioeconomic protest. Of course, to obtain a more credible representation of institutionalisation, it would be necessary to look at the membership data for these three organisations per issue area –data that, unfortunately, hardly exists.

Facilitation: In this thesis I look at three specific social and environmental conditions which facilitate protest mobilisation: past levels of civil strife, external assistance to protesters and SMOs, and international context (such as social unrest in neighbouring countries). Data for all three conditions is based on elite interviews. Information on past levels of civil strife is inferred from interviewees' responses to a question regarding how they compare their current protest mobilisation successes with those in the past. It is assumed that instances of successful protest mobilisation in the past will inspire and hence facilitate future protest mobilisation. By external assistance to protesters I mean third parties' (foreign governments, NGOs, inter-governmental organisations, etc.) financial, legal, logistical, moral and other types of support. I asked SMO leaders

whether they ever received such support, how, and under what conditions. Finally, social unrests in neighbouring or remote countries can be contagious by facilitating local and/or national protest mobilisation. Interviewees were asked to evaluate the influence of regional and international context on mobilisation efforts.

Legitimacy: Gurr defined the legitimacy of a regime in terms of popular compliance and the 'extent to which its directives are regarded by its citizens as properly made and worthy of obedience' (1968: 1115). He devised two indicators of a regime's legitimacy: 1) the circumstances under which the regime attained its present form and 2) its durability. Unfortunately, both of these indicators are inapplicable to Kazakhstan because they lack variation in the Kazakhstani context within the period 1992–2009. Thus, present-day political institutions in Kazakhstan originated from the collapse of the Soviet Union (SU) and consecutive national parliamentary (1990 and 1994) and presidential elections (1991). Large turnouts (more than 90%) and the victories of pro-presidential parties legitimised the regime's authority and the newly emerging political institutions. The regime's composition of political elites and the ideological stance of political institutions which emerged in the early 1990s have not changed since then. Furthermore, the 24-year-long presidency of Nazarbayev ensured the durability of the current political regime. Thus, due to inapplicability of Gurr's indicators, I developed my own indicator – the public's support for President Nazarbayev and his government. Interviewees note that the cyclicity of protests is affected by changes in the public's trust and support for the president and government.

Utilitarian justification for collective action: Aggrieved people must believe in the worthiness of organising and/or joining a protest in solving their problems. Predicting that SMO leaders would be familiar with the public's level of frustration with

deprivation, I asked them to describe how people justified their intention to protest. It appears that sometimes not all the members of aggrieved social group may perceive collective action as an effective means to attain their goals; some may adhere to conventional means of solving their issues. It follows that successful protest mobilisation requires not only the presence of solid justification for collective action but also a large number of people motivated to choose that course.

Resource Mobilisation

The founding fathers of RMT theory never presented a causal model depicting the relationships between variables (Opp 2009). Even so, building on classical and contemporary RMT literature, Opp offered what he calls the *orienting propositions* of the RMT approach in a causal model, which I have slightly modified for the purposes of my thesis. Originally, the proponents of the RMT approach – McCarthy and Zald (1977) – defined SMOs’ emergence, growth and success as the approach’s dependent variables. However, as can be seen in Figure 4.2, I removed the SMOs’ emergence factor from

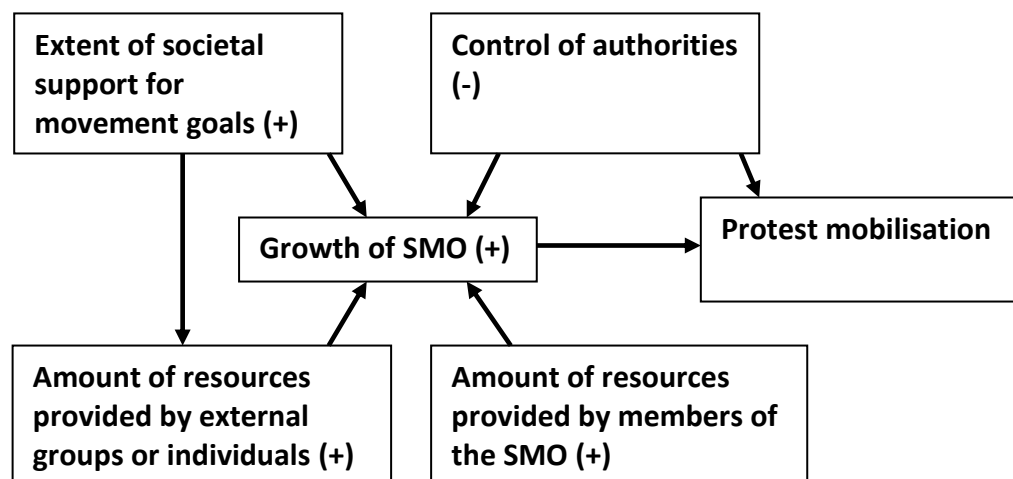


Figure 4-2: Causal diagram of RMT approach adapted from Opp (2009)

Opp’s model because the focus of this study is *not* on how SMOs come into existence but instead on how existing SMOs mobilise resources to organise protest events. Unfortunately, protest behaviour, which is the central subject of this thesis, is not

regarded by the RMT theory as a movement goal but as a movement strategy for obtaining its goal (Opp 2009: 128). Therefore, since I am not studying whether SMOs achieved their movement goals, I replaced the 'SMOs success' variable with the 'protest mobilisation' dependent variable. All in all, Figure 4.2 illustrates how societal support for the movement goals and resources mobilised by SMOs from within and outside the movement positively affect SMOs' growth, which in turn results in a higher frequency of protest mobilisation. The only factor that negatively affects SMOs' growth and mobilisation efforts is the extent of authorities' control of SMOs.

Extent of societal support for movement goals: It is impossible to imagine the growth of an SMO occurring without societal support. Interviewees were asked if their SMOs enjoyed the public's support and trust. They unanimously stated that without the public's support for the movement goals, SMOs experience difficulties mobilising resources and organising protests. Societal support for movement goals is expressed via the public's approval of SMOs' activity in the mass media, writing letters to SMO leaders, organising press conferences and attending demonstrations.

Resources provided by external groups/individuals: Resources – both tangible (funding, facilities, etc.) and intangible (skills, experience, etc.) – provided to SMOs by sympathetic sponsors such as foreign NGOs and governments as well as local businesses and organisations help boost the morale and financial well-being of SMOs. I asked respondents about the type of external support they received and how it affects their protest mobilisation work.

Resources provided by members of the SMO: This variable pertains to the resources mobilised by SMOs from their adherents and constituents. The larger the number of adherents and constituents, the more resources SMOs can mobilise. According to this

logic, SMOs strive to expand their support base by recruiting new members and attracting more adherents. Hence, in addition to asking respondents about the resources they receive from SMOs' members, I asked how SMOs recruit members.

Control of authorities: This variable is marked with a negative (-) sign because the political environments where SMOs operate are mostly known to be hostile to contentious collective action (Rucht 1996). Like RD theory, RMT theory also attributes crucial explanatory power to the extent of authorities' control of SMOs. Authorities such as the police, local government and prosecutor's office constrain SMOs' activities through arrests of activists, denying permission for protest events, dubious tax audits, etc. Interviewees discussed with me whether their SMO has been subject to such repressions and how this affected protest mobilisation.

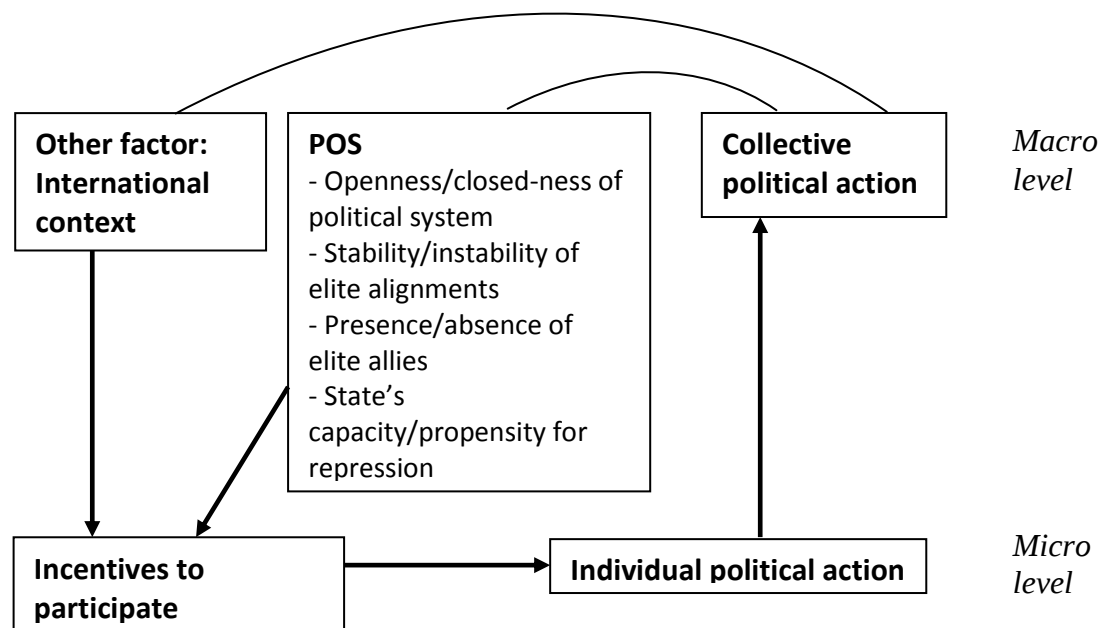
Growth of SMOs: All the variables mentioned above with the exception of 'control of authorities' lead to the strengthening and/or growth of SMOs. Two indicators of SMOs' growth which are most widely used in the social movement literature are membership size and amount of financial resources. Ideally, I would have used these indicators; however, almost none of the cases keep records of membership or disclose information on their financial resources. Hence, I had to rely on respondents' subjective evaluation of SMOs' performance. Thus, assuming that cyclicity of protest mobilisation depends on the growth/strength of SMOs, I asked SMO heads to historically assess their SMO's success in mobilising people throughout the SMO's existence. For instance, if an interviewee says that in the first phase his/her SMO was more successful in protest mobilisation than in the second one, I would deduce that the SMO became weaker in the second phase.

Political Opportunity Structures

Although the relationship between POS and protest mobilisation seems to be taking place on a macro level, most scholars – including the founder of the POS perspective, Peter Eisinger (1973) – advance a micro–macro model to explain it (Opp 2009). As can be seen in the causal diagram below (Figure 4.3), Eisinger does not suppose there is a direct causal relationship between POS and collective political action; instead, he suggests a correlation between them. Thus, opportunity structures indirectly influence collective action (i.e. the macro level) by affecting individuals’ incentives (i.e. the micro level) to participate in protest, which is represented by people’s subjective expectation⁵¹ of protests’ success (i.e. perceived goal attainment) as a result of changes in opportunity structures. In other words, only when individuals perceive that changes in the political environment raise the probability of goal attainment will they take individual political action that would aggregate to collective political action. Proponents of the POS approach also mention other factors besides POS that affect protest mobilisation, including costs of inaction (Tarrow 1998), sufficient organisation (McAdam et al. 1996), and indigenous organisational strength (McAdam 1982). None of these variables, however, has been included in the theory; instead, ‘[t]he introduction of other factors is *ad hoc*’ (Opp 2009: 180). In my thesis I look at international and/or regional political context as an important determinant of protest mobilisation. Figure 4.3 illustrates that international political context correlates with protest mobilisation and affects micro-level incentives.

⁵¹ This subjectivist definition of POS advocated by Tarrow (1994) is contrasted to the objectivist definition according to which POSs are defined as environmental changes that change the objective likelihood of goal attainment, where ‘it is irrelevant whether the actors are aware of these changes or not’ (Opp 2009: 167).

Figure 4-3: Causal diagram of POS theory adapted from Opp (2009) and based on Eisinger's (1973) theory of POS



POS dimensions: All four dimensions of POS were discussed in Chapter 2. Here is how I measured each of them.

Openness/closed-ness of the political system: as mentioned earlier, this dimension refers to the government's responsiveness to citizens' needs and demands – put simply, to political input structures. According to Kitschelt (1986), there are four factors that determine a regime's openness: 1) a large number of political parties, factions and other groups that effectively articulate different demands in electoral politics; 2) autonomy of the legislature to develop and control policies independently of the executive; 3) pluralist and fluid links of intermediation between interest groups and the executive branch; and 4) new demands finding their way into the process of forming policy compromises via mechanisms that aggregate demands. Since in my study I adopt a subjectivist definition of POS and bearing in mind the abovementioned 'regime openness' factors, I asked SMO

leaders about whether they thought that the political system in a certain phase was more open or closed.

Stability/instability of elite alignments: factors such as electoral instability caused by highly competitive elections, elite divisions among the regime incumbents, and defection of elites from government signal to insurgent groups the regime's vulnerability and hint at possible mass mobilisation. I asked interviewees if they witnessed changes in elite alignments and how they perceived them⁵². For instance, the defection of an ex-prime minister to the opposition may not necessarily constitute the opening of POS. For that to happen, SMOs must subjectively perceive this event as a factor contributing to a rise in the probability of goal attainment by politically active groups.

Presence/absence of elite allies: by supporting SMOs, out-of-power elites, various political organisations and elites who defected from the government change the structure of political opportunities and act as 'catalysts for change'. SMO leaders commented on whether they had elite allies and how elites supported their SMOs. This POS dimension has certain similarities with the RMT theory variable 'external resources mobilised by SMOs'. Elite allies provide tangible as well as intangible resources to SMOs in support of their movement goals.

The state's capacity/propensity for repression: I measured this dimension by asking interviewees whether their SMOs and activists were subject to the state's repressive mechanisms such as arrests, forbidding assemblies, suspending newspapers, etc. In times when neither the SMO's leaders nor its members are arrested or when SMO

⁵² In line with subjectivist definition of POS, features of the political environment such as stability of elite alignments can be considered as opportunity structures only if they change challengers' subjective 'expectations for success or failure' of potential collective action.

members do not perceive any threats from the regime, I would infer that the state's capacity for repression is in decline.

International context: According to Oberschall (1996), events such as the colour revolutions in Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan could create incentives for individuals to participate in protests by inspiring and convincing them that collective action is an effective strategy for goal attainment. I asked my interviewees whether regional/international political and economic processes had any effect on SMOs' protest mobilisation work.

Incentives to participate: Ideally, to measure individuals' incentives to participate in a protest, I would have interviewed the aggrieved public. However, due to methodological limitations, I had to rely on SMO leaders' accounts regarding the public's (including the SMO's members and non-members) perception of the changing political environment and the effects it had on their expectation of success or failure. For example, some interviewees noted that often their SMO was unsuccessful in mobilising the masses for protest mainly because people were extremely politically apathetic and unconfident. First and foremost, disincentives stem from that fact that individuals do not perceive the emergence of opportunity in events such as defection of elites to the opposition or dissolution of parliament. Secondly, individuals are reportedly reluctant to participate in protests due to widespread scepticism regarding the potency of protests to address deprivation.

Collective Action Frames

Just like the RD and POS perspectives, the causal model of the CAF theory is based on the micro-macro level theoretical propositions. Thus, the founders of the CAF perspective (Snow et al. 1986) attempt to explain protest mobilisation (the dependent

variable) by looking at two factors: social psychological (micro level) and structural and organisational (macro level). Figure 4.4 illustrates that both of these factors are linked through ‘frame-alignment processes’ which are the ‘processes by which SMOs link and align their “interpretive orientations” to those of non-mobilized individuals’ (Opp 2009: 235). Once the SMO’s CAFs align with the frames of non-mobilised individual actors, the authors predict individuals’ growing support for an SMO and participation in protest events. Frame alignment does not happen automatically; SMOs have to engage in framing work, which is ‘(1) the process of communication in which actors articulate their frames, and (2) a cognitive process such as applying, adopting or changing frames’ (Opp cit: 238). Moreover, for SMOs’ frames to align successfully, they must be resonant and immune to various hazards and vulnerabilities.

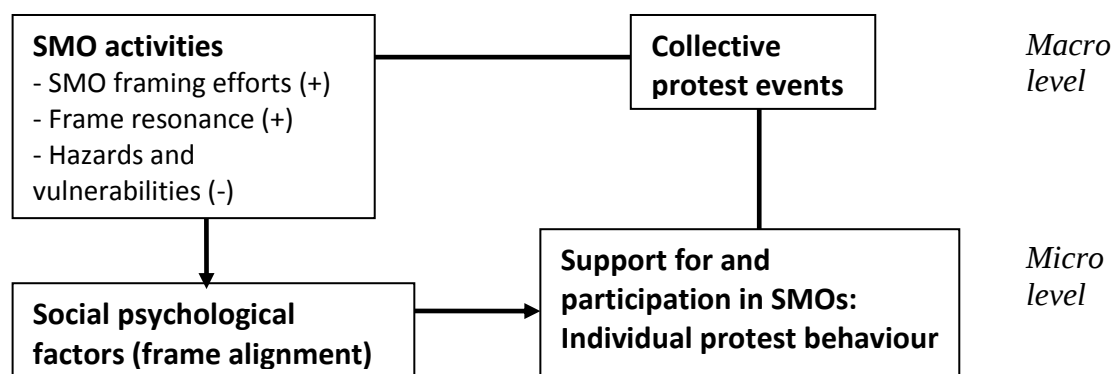


Figure 4-4: Micro–macro causal diagram of CAF theory adapted from Opp (2009) and based on Snow et al. (1986)

According to Opp (2009), SMO activities indirectly affect collective protest events via changing the individual factors which then lead to individual protest behaviour that aggregates to collective protest events.

SMO activities: SMOs have to engage in various activities related to protest mobilisation. The most crucial of these, according to the proponents of the CAF perspective, is the production of CAFs – *framing*. Several questions in the interview schedule are devoted to exploring SMOs’ framing activities:

SMO framing efforts: these refer to SMOs' attempts to link their frames to the frames of unmobilised third parties. Besides ensuring the resonance of frames (discussed below), SMOs have to be good at communicating CAFs through a two-step process of frame articulation and amplification. I discussed with SMO leaders how they constructed CAFs and communicated them to the non-mobilised public.

Frame resonance: as was mentioned in Chapter 2, frame resonance depends on multiple factors. Johnston and Noakes (2005) suggested three most important aspects of frame resonance: frame makers, frame receivers and quality of frames. I asked interviewees to reflect on the resonance of the frames constructed and used by their SMOs throughout SMOs' existence. They had an opportunity to discuss various aspects of frame resonance including the ones mentioned earlier that contributed to either the success or failure of CAFs in protest mobilisation⁵³.

Hazards and vulnerabilities: often, SMOs' framing efforts are challenged by countermovements, the mass media and state agencies. Frames articulated by SMOs' competitors – *counterframes* – attempt to rebut and undermine SMOs' interpretive frameworks and hence represent CAFs' major hazards and vulnerabilities. During the discussion of CAFs which failed to resonate, interviewees mentioned various hazards and vulnerabilities which complicated SMOs' framing efforts.

Frame alignment: Snow et al (1986) distinguish four types of frame alignment processes: frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension and frame transformation. Asking interviewees to describe how their SMOs linked their CAFs to the frames of the non-mobilised public, I inferred which of these four types of frame

⁵³ 'Success' here means that SMOs' managed to align their CAFs with the frames of the non-mobilised public: 'The more the frames of SMOs and mobilized individuals are aligned, the more likely is mobilization and/or collective action of the unmobilised individuals' (Opp 2009: 241).

alignment processes was at play. The choice of a particular frame-alignment strategy conditions the likelihood of successful frame alignment and subsequent protest mobilisation. For instance, sometimes an SMO would have achieved larger frame alignment had it relied on bridging a certain frame, instead of extending it.

Support for and participation in SMOs: As Figure 4.4 illustrates, macro phenomena such as collective protest events are a function of individual protest behaviours. According to Opp (2009), the aggregation of individual protest behaviours into collective protest events is analytical (hence there is no causal arrow) as ‘if the theoretical argument predicts that many individuals will convene at a certain location at a certain time carrying posters with political messages then this means that there will be a “demonstration”’ (248). Since the focus of my study is on collective protest events, I am interested in the aggregate of individual protest behaviour which is, in this case, the dependent variable.

Competing Theories’ Contesting Explanations of Protest Mobilisation

Drawing on interview data from 12 cases, in this section I test my first research hypothesis according to which the cyclicity of protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan is best explained by the CAF perspective. For this hypothesis to hold true, CAF’s theoretical predictions about variances in protest mobilisation must match the empirical evidence better than the predictions made by the competing RD, RMT and POS perspectives. Additionally, as I mentioned in the introductory chapter, besides making unique predictions about protest mobilisation, the most apposite theory is expected to reveal novel facts and insights into the phenomena at hand. In order to do this, first, I will analyse the relevance of CAF’s explanation of protest in Kazakhstan, and then I will assess the explanatory power of the remaining three perspectives.

Collective Action Frames

Data analysis reveals that the CAF perspective met several challenges in the context of protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan; all of them reflect one of the problems of the CAF perspective highlighted in Chapter 2. I will discuss these issues as I assess each individual explanatory variable of the CAF perspective shown on Figure 4.4.

SMO activities: all SMOs engage in framing work. Some SMOs are less and some are more active in frame-construction activities. Empirical evidence suggests that the extent of SMOs' framing efforts depends among other things on how well the constructed frames do against existing counterframes. Additionally, one would expect that frame resonance would depend on the amount of effort invested by SMOs into frame construction and articulation. However, as we will shortly see, the extremely high level of resonance of certain frames does not in fact depend on the extent of SMOs' framing efforts.

SMO framing efforts: a representative of the 'Green Salvation' environmental NGO said that they never prioritised framing work over direct involvement with the public's environmental concerns. 'Since we do not resort to protest activity, we rarely engage in framing work... we prefer to use existing legal mechanisms such as suing the local government to press officials to meet our demands', he said. Another reason why 'Green Salvation' refrains from framing work is related to the difficulties it faces in constructing resonant environmental frames, which I will discuss in the next section.

The framing experience of 'Green Salvation' is an exception rather than a rule. Most SMOs adopt different frame-construction strategies to ensure their resonance. This is achieved by first studying and researching the public's current concerns (as was done by 'RNPK' and 'Ult Tagdyry'). As a result, 'RNPK' and 'Nevada-Semei' developed two

types of frames: local and republic-wide, the former of which was more effective in protest mobilisation as people cared more about issues that were familiar to them, such as endemic corruption in the local government. Republic-wide frames, on the contrary, touch upon more universal national issues such as growing unemployment and violation of human rights. To ensure the public appeal of republic-wide political frames, ‘RNPK’ and ‘Workers’ Movement’ attempted to politicise the population’s socioeconomic grievances, which have always had larger mobilisation potential. They did so by, for instance, linking coalminers’ frustrations with their low salary to the corrupt government, which fails to protect the interests of coalminers and hence should be replaced. According to my ‘Tabigat’ interviewee, this strategy does not prove to be really useful because organisations which employ this strategy usually not only fail to mobilise people but also suffer reputational losses. This is due to the fact that politicised protests are more heavily repressed than non-politicised ones.

Does the ‘SMO framing efforts’ variable contribute to the overall explanatory power of the CAF perspective? The answer is yes. Thus, some interviewees claim that their SMOs’ framing efforts were more successful in the first phase than they were in the later two phases. According to the ‘Alga’ representative, frame construction and articulation was much easier done in Phase I than in phases II and III. ‘Modern SMOs must support their frames with facts regarding what has been done by SMOs to win public trust’, he said. SMOs’ inability to construct and communicate effective frames resulted in the low resonance of CAFs in Phase III.

Frame resonance: as I mentioned earlier, a number of interviewees claim that SMOs which construct republic-level CAFs in order to boost the resonance of their frames usually risk harming their reputation – a crucial factor contributing to the

resonance of any SMO's frames. To illustrate, adherents of 'Workers' Movement' in Phase II expected their leaders to focus only on an increase in coalminers' salaries; however, when the movement changed its framing strategy to focus on demanding the dissolution of an ineffective government (which constitutes a republic-level CAF), adherents saw this as an act of betrayal on the movement's part. As a result, disillusionment with the movement's goals drove many of its adherents away.

As we can see, the resonance of frames in Kazakhstan heavily depends on the reputation and image of frame makers in society. Thus, many SMOs in Phase I such as 'Nevada-Semei' and 'Azat' enjoyed a nationwide reputation based on public trust and the charisma of their leaders. Additionally, elites which defected from the government in 2001 and formed the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DCK) oppositional political party also rapidly garnered a reputation as being trustworthy politicians with a genuine interest in democratic reforms. Consequently, the CAFs articulated by the leaders of these SMOs always enjoyed high resonance and mobilised people for protest. Interviewees from 'Workers' Movement', 'Alga', 'Ult Tagdyry' and 'Lad' attest that CAFs in Phase III are significantly less resonant than those in earlier phases. The representative of 'Alga' I interviewed attributes this to the lack of charismatic leaders in contemporary SMOs and the inherent lack of public trust in frame pronouncers (i.e. in SMOs).

Of course, the resonance of a given frame depends not only on the quality of frame makers but also on the quality of frame receivers. Hence, by comparing the environmental consciousness of citizens in phases I and III, a leader of 'Green Salvation' concludes that in the early 1990s citizens were more conscious about environmental issues. The subsequent deterioration in the environmental consciousness weakened the

resonance of environmental CAFs, and therefore resulted in a decline in the number of environmental protests.

As was mentioned earlier, certain frames in Phase I were so coherent and understandable to the population that only minimal SMO framing effort was required to make them resonant. For example, a leader of ‘Ult Tagdyry’ maintains that political frames in Phase I were more resonant than interethnic ones because they raised issues that were very universal and unanimously accepted by the population (e.g. democratic reforms, increase of salaries, etc.), whereas interethnic frames touched upon issues that were very unpopular and rather controversial (dual citizenship, recognition of Russian as a state language, etc.).

A puzzle that the CAF perspective encounters in the Kazakhstan context relates to the increase of protest mobilisation in Phase III despite the low resonance of movement frames. This is one of the major issues afflicting the CAF perspective as highlighted by Opp (2009), who criticised the CAF theory for its inability to explain protest mobilisation that happens without any framing work being carried out by SMOs.

Hazards and vulnerabilities: counterframes launched by SMOs’ competitors and Kazakhstan state agencies have a detrimental effect on SMOs’ framing work. Probably the best example of the regime’s counterframing activity is its extensive national propaganda, as launched in the mass media in Phase III, depicting the negative features and consequences of the colour revolutions in the neighbouring countries. Representatives of ‘Alga’, ‘Tabigat’, ‘Azat’ and ‘Shanyrak’ claim that the regime frightened the population by focusing on the negative consequences of the ‘colour revolutions’ such as armed conflict, uncertainty in the future, loss of jobs,

unemployment, social crises, etc. As a result, many people refrained from supporting the opposition and became more politically passive.

A leader of the 'Lad' Slavic movement emphasised the regime's rhetoric aimed at demobilising the Slavic population living in Kazakhstan. He quotes politicians in Kazakhstan saying: 'You see what's happening to Russians in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine. Their interests are endangered by the opposition's policy of 'anti-Russism'. 'Hence, we believe that since the Kazakhstani authorities are interested in maintaining peace, they are working against the colour revolutions and we support this work', he added.

Speaking of earlier phases, a leader of the 'Azat' movement also mentioned the extent of the regime's counterframing agenda in Phase I, which aimed at destroying 'Azat'. According to my interviewee, President Nazarbayev and the 'KGB' intentionally supported competitor SMOs and portrayed 'Azat' as a radical movement aiming to undermine gradual political reforms. All of this seriously weakened the framing work and harmed the resonance of 'Azat' frames. Likewise, a co-leader of the 'RNPK' party remembers party congresses held in Phase II that were infiltrated by the Committee of National Security, who ensured there were people present that praised the government's achievements in conducting reforms and cursed the 'RNPK' for inhibiting government's work.

Overall, how valid is the 'hazards and vulnerabilities' variable? The evidence suggests that it is valid in accounting for the variance of CAFs' resonance throughout three phases. Thus, the counterframes in Phase I were offset by the positive reputation and image of SMOs that contributed to the high resonance of CAFs. However, the

decline of SMOs' credibility in the remaining phases could not counteract the regime's counterframes, which resulted in the low resonance of CAFs.

Frame alignment: Of the numerous frames produced by SMOs, only a few are successfully aligned with individuals' interpretation of reality. The 'Nevada-Semei' movement, for example, successfully aligned anti-nuclear frame of 'No to nuclear war!' through a strategy of frame bridging⁵⁴ in early Phase I, resulting in a series of large protest demonstrations and marches. Other organisations such as 'Azat' and 'Workers' Movement' were also very successful in bridging the frames 'We demand independence for Kazakhstan' and 'Improve safety in the workplace' respectively. All these frames were very timely and welcomed by people aggrieved with nuclear explosions, Soviet tutelage and high mortality rates among coalminers.

Many frames remain unnoticed and unheard due to wrongly chosen frame alignment strategies, which often fail at protest mobilisation. In its attempt to mobilise youth, 'Nevada-Semei' resorted to frame extension⁵⁵: 'The youth of Kazakhstan is against nuclear weapons!' However, this frame proved to be unsuccessful in mobilising the youth in Phase II, wherein people did not perceive nuclear disarmament as a top priority (especially since the testing site at Semei had been closed by then). Likewise, the 'Alga' party attempted to attract more adherents in Phase III by chanting: 'Today it is Zhovtis⁵⁶, tomorrow it will be you'. Expecting that this slogan would politicise an otherwise

⁵⁴ Frame bridging is a one of the four types of frame alignment processes and refers to 'the linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem' (Snow et al. 1986: 467). Considered to be the most common type of frame alignment, frame bridging links SMOs with aggregates of unmobilised individuals 'who share common grievances and attributional orientations, but who lack the organizational base for expressing their discontents..' (Ibid.).

⁵⁵ Frame extension: in order to enlarge its pool of adherents, an SMO extends its framework so as to also embrace the interests and values of potential adherents.

⁵⁶ Yevgenii Zhovtis is a prominent human rights activist imprisoned in September 2009 for hitting and killing a pedestrian. Local and international human rights organisations complained about numerous procedural violations in the court trial and expressed their concerns about possible exploitation of the case for political purposes (Human Rights Watch 2009b).

politically apathetic citizenry, 'Alga' employed a frame-extension strategy to claim that the regime's injustices in the Zhovtis case are not alien to people's lives and that anyone could fall victim to such circumstances. With the exception of a few small demonstrations, however, the protest campaign launched by 'Alga' did not achieve massive protest mobilisation or significantly raise public awareness about political issues in Kazakhstan. Many interviewees – including the leaders of 'Pokoleniye' and 'RNPK' – blamed the public's political indifference and lethargy coupled with fear of repressions for the masses not reacting to 'Alga's frame. 'To solve one's problems, one inevitably must politicise' – such was a frame pronounced by the aforementioned SMOs, whose frame-alignment strategy was based on transforming⁵⁷ people's current values and beliefs about the immutability of politics. While this frame in some ways did succeed at overcoming political apathy and mobilising people (evident in growing politicisation of socioeconomic grievances in Phase III), it could not deal with participants' chronic fear of repressions.

As we can see, it is not only the SMOs' activities directed at frame construction but also how SMOs manage to align frames with individuals' interpretive frameworks that determine the chances of successful protest mobilisation. If the 'frame alignment' variable was valid in the Kazakhstani case, then we would have expected an increase of protest mobilisation at those times when frames were effectively aligned, and a decline of mobilisation when alignment was unsuccessful. While we see that this variable holds true in phases I and II (mobilisation increase in Phase I and decrease in Phase II), we do not observe a waning of mobilisation in Phase III characterised by SMOs' unsuccessful frame alignment. This explanatory discrepancy poses a second challenge to CAF perspective.

⁵⁷ Frame transformation takes place when SMOs whose causes, values and programmes are not resonating with the masses decide to plant and nurture new values that are intended to resonate with the public.

All in all, the two challenges faced by the CAF perspective weaken its theoretical suitability in explaining the cyclicity of protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan. First, frame resonance – which, according to this study’s first hypothesis, is central to understanding protest variation – has in fact become the weakest factor in the CAF perspective when applied to Kazakhstan. According to my interview data, the resonance of frames in Phase III falls short of the level needed to mobilise people for protest; however, the protest data suggest quite the opposite. The second challenge is very similar to the first one: interviewees attest that constructing and, most importantly, aligning frames has become significantly harder in Phase III than in the previous two phases; however, we observe a gradual growth of protests. Having rejected my first hypothesis and the CAF perspective’s explanatory power along with it, I now turn to testing the competing theories.

Relative Deprivation

The RD perspective is barely applicable as an attempted explanation of protest variation in Kazakhstan. While there is no doubt that the larger the frustration with RD the higher the prospects of protest mobilisation, the problems faced by RD’s intervening variables handicap RD’s theoretical applicability. As before, I proceed with the analysis by discussing each individual variable.

Scope and intensity of RD: the scope of RD was highest in Phase I, which in its turn resulted in the largest instances of protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan (featuring ‘Pokoleniye’, ‘Ult Tagdyry’ and ‘Lad’). The representatives of all of the SMOs that existed at that time claim that their most frequent and numerous protests were held in the early 1990s. Realising that the regime was extremely fearful of protests with thousands of participants, ‘Workers’ Movement’ organised an unprecedented march from

Shakhtinsk to Karaganda in 1992 which mobilised more than 6,000 people. Even larger and more frequent marches were organised by 'Nevada-Semei' in 1989, 1993 and 1995. Commenting on such large-scale protest mobilisation in the early 1990s, a leader of 'Shanyrak' says that many SMOs understood that the regime must be pressed 'the more the better' to attain the movement's goals. By the end of Phase I, however, the scope of RD had started to decline, leading to more difficult protest mobilisation. Later on in this chapter, I will show how the relationship between these variables is mediated by intervening social and psychological conditions.

Like the scope of RD, its intensity was also highest in Phase I, especially among political and socioeconomic SMOs. Thus, the leader of 'Azat' is proud of his radicalness and of his use of violence at protest events, inflicting damage to property and confronting the police. An activist from 'Workers' Movement' claims that the intensity of deprivation was so high that protesters frequently resorted to radical forms of protest. He further adds: 'I remember talking my friends out of acts of self-mutilation by saying that their injuries or even death would not help in solving their problems'. Of three environmental SMOs, only one – 'Green Salvation' – used to be radical in its choice of protest types (blocking roads) in Phase I. 'We didn't want to risk the freedom and safety of our protesters and decided to turn to legal forms of contention', the leader of 'Green Salvation' told me. In regard to violence, neither 'Green Salvation' nor the rest of the SMOs made use of such a tactic throughout the three phases. The leader of 'Tabigat' justifies his SMO's policy of non-violence by saying: 'Violence distances and demobilises people by scaring them'. Another proponent of non-violence, the 'Ult Tagdyry' interviewee, maintains that by using violence protesters achieve nothing but harming their movement's cause; they succumb to police provocations, which builds the

establishment's case against the SMO on the grounds of it inspiring acts of civil disobedience.

A noteworthy aspect of RD's growing intensity in Phase III is interviewees' accounts of protests' radicalisation. The leader of the 'Alga' party boasts: 'we are the genuine opposition and the only SMO that does not refrain from radicalisation'. Similarly, the head of 'Shanyrak' justifies protesters' use of violence against law enforcement in the 2006 riots: 'we never resort to violence, but when they [police] beat and shoot us, we obviously must defend ourselves'. These two instances of a growing intensity of RD are suggestive of the growing protest mobilisation seen in Phase III.

Coercive potential: A crucial factor in explaining protest mobilisation on both the micro and macro levels and one mentioned by all interviewees is the state's coercive potential, which varied throughout the three phases. Repression was widespread until Kazakhstan gained independence in 1991 and protest activity in Phase I was not heavily obstructed by law enforcement agencies initially, at least until the mid-1990s. Repression levels remained high from then until the early 2000s (according to 'RNPK', 'Azat' and 'Lad'). The decline in the regime's coercive potential was jeopardised by the political crisis of 2001/02. Since then, repressions have gradually been increasing once again.

My interviewees listed the regime's various methods of repression, such as refusing SMOs state registration, intimidating and threatening SMO leaders and activists, arresting SMO activists, illegally confiscating property, harshening the 'Law on NGOs', etc. One interviewee ('Ult Tagdyry') notes that the regime has become very sophisticated in repressing its opponents in Phase III. Calling them 'quiet repressions', he refers to the regime ensuring SMO activists are dismissed from their jobs, preventing their children from enrolling in university, threatening their family members, and refusing them access

to subsidised housing. In addition, several interviewees (i.e. the representatives of ‘Shanyrak’, ‘Alga’ and ‘Azat’) emphasised the lack of professionalism of the police, who are not only unfamiliar with the country’s Criminal Code but also frequently resort to illegal use of force against protesters and SMOs. According to interviewees’ accounts, such repressive measures have always been used to undermine SMOs’ mobilisation work. ‘Although people are ready to protest, they are not ready to suffer from potential repressions’, said the leader of ‘Shanyrak’.

It seems like the ‘coercive potential’ variable has a high level of applicability then, except for one puzzling question: if repressions were increasing in Phase III, why do we also observe an increase in protest mobilisation? The answer is that, out of the four types of protests, there is an increase in the number of socioeconomic ones, while the dynamics of political, environmental and interethnic protests remain relatively constant. Does this mean that the regime is selective in repressing all but the socioeconomic protests? Interviewees from ‘RNPK’, ‘Shanyrak’ and ‘Alga’ claim that repressions did not prevent people highly aggrieved about socioeconomic issues from protesting in Phase III. ‘The acute nature of the deprivation coupled with people’s frustration can overcome repression’, said the head of the ‘Shanyrak’ movement. Moreover, the regime is lenient toward socioeconomic and environmental protests compared to political or interethnic protests, according to the ‘Ult Tagdyry’ interviewee. I will discuss this last point in more detail the second part of this chapter. As we can see, the puzzle faced by ‘coercive potential’ variable does not weaken it but, on the contrary, in fact contributes to its explanatory scope.

Institutionalisation: Like coercive potential, institutionalisation has a negative effect on protest mobilisation. This variable requires me to look at protest mobilisation in each

issue area individually. A glance at Figure 3.1 shows that in all three phases the least mobilised of the four issue areas were the interethnic and environmental dimensions. Both of these issue areas were highly institutionalised and received proper state support. Thus, in order to be able to boast of interethnic accord and stability in Kazakhstan, President Nazarbayev and the government have always shown wholehearted support to ethnic minorities (Nazarbaev 2008). A leader of the 'Vainakh' Chechen Association confirms this by saying that the Almaty District local government as well as the district mayor have always been very helpful in organising cultural festivals as well as providing material, legal and logistical support. Moreover, like 'Vainakh', all the major ethnic minorities in Kazakhstan have their own cultural centres and/or associations which have been represented in the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan since 1995.

In regard to the environmental issues area, this was not as institutionalised as the interethnic one, especially in the first and third phases which did see some environmental protests. While the protests in the first phase were organised by 'Nevada-Semei', the environmental protests occurring in the third phase were not organised by any of the existing ecological SMOs. It appears that none of these SMOs got involved in people's dissatisfaction with issues such as illegal felling of trees, construction of high-voltage power line in residential area, etc. This initially surprising finding does, however, chime with statements made by my 'Tabigat' and 'Green Salvation' interviewees. Both of these SMOs refrain from non-conventional political action in favour of working within the legal framework (petitions and legal action). In addition, unlike interethnic issues, environmental ones rarely attract the involvement of state organisations.

Turning to socioeconomic and political issues, it is worth mentioning that there has been an abundance of socioeconomic and political SMOs in the second and third phases. The

extensive protest mobilisation seen in Phase I can be explained by the weakly institutionalised public domain. Thus, interviewees claim that newly emerged SMOs lacked public trust and the necessary skills to mobilise people. In addition, according to Kuttykadam (2010), post-Soviet state institutions were disoriented and uncertain about the course of reforms and state formation in the early 1990s. While there is little doubt about the validity of the institutionalisation variable in the first phase, problems arise when we look at the other two phases. As I mentioned earlier, the number of socioeconomic and political SMOs was rapidly growing. By the beginning of Phase II, each issue area had more than three strong SMOs engaged in interest articulation. Moreover, according to the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators for Kazakhstan, the political system has significantly stabilised since the early 1990s and the government has improved its effectiveness (World Bank Institute 2011). Despite the proliferation of SMOs and the better functioning state institutions, we nevertheless see a growth of protest mobilisation from 2001 onwards. Relevant here is a statement by the 'Shanyrak' interviewee, who explicitly affirmed that highly aggrieved people do not need SMOs in order to mobilise for protest. The failure of the institutionalisation variable to account for growing mobilisation in phases II and III thus has a detrimental effect on the theoretical strength of the RD theory.

Facilitation: Of three facilitative conditions, only one – external assistance to protesters – demonstrated strong empirical evidence. Of the other two, the past mobilisation variable had little explanatory power, while the international context variable had a somewhat mixed effect on protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan.

All of the interviewees claim that external assistance to SMOs always played a crucial role in facilitating protest mobilisation. It was during the periods when SMOs were

strongly supported by external organisations that they managed to achieve the highest mobilisation success. For example, the head of 'Ult Tagdyry' remembers the 1990s when he was involved in various political and interethnic SMOs in the following terms: 'I used to win grants from foreign NGOs for conducting different civic projects. One such project was targeted at civic education where I had to travel across Kazakhstan and talk to local populations on matters of human rights, civil liberties, state formation, etc. I call this approach of meeting people 'Ghandi's Method' and it inevitably had great effect in mobilising people'. He associates his SMO's inability to mobilise people in the third phase with the lack of external support. In a similar vein, the representatives of 'RNPK', 'Alga', 'Pokoleniye', 'Nevada-Semei', 'Workers' Movement', 'Green Salvation' and 'Tabigat' all highlight the vital importance of external support for SMOs' various projects, including the organisation of protests. For instance, my 'RNPK' interviewee claims that without the OSCE's and US Senate's pressure on the Kazakh government, they would have never have been able to register their party. The protest activities of 'Lad', 'Azat' and 'Workers' Movement' in the 1990s were inspired and backed by moral, legal and financial support from the Russian embassy in Kazakhstan, private businesses and Polish 'Solidarity' Movement's activists respectively. According to several interviewees, the waning of such external assistance in Phase III has rendered protest mobilisation a difficult task for contemporary SMOs.

Instances of past mobilisation do not seem to facilitate future protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan. The leader of the 'Azat' movement said that despite successful protest mobilisation in the early 1990s, 'Azat' could not attract many people to protests in Phase II. 'People were too much engaged with their daily affairs; most people found jobs and settled down. Unlike in 1992 to 1995, the stakes were much higher because people subsequently had things to lose', explained the interviewee. Furthermore, the

representatives of 'Lad' and 'Green Salvation' stated that instead of facilitating their mobilisation activities, past protest activity only hurt protest mobilisation in Phase II. They associate this with the public's emerging belief in the ineffectiveness of protests in addressing interethnic and environmental concerns.

Protests outside Kazakhstan had both positive and negative effects on protest dynamics. Most interviewees maintain that protests in the neighbouring post-Soviet countries facilitated protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan by inspiring the local population to protest and showing them that protesting is an effective measure in solving their issues. The leader of 'Shanyrak' said that events such as the colour revolutions inspired many to participate in contentious politics. 'The international context often raises the social enthusiasm of our citizens', he added. My interviewee from 'Workers' Movement' highlights the catalytic nature of the international context: 'For ages, workers were exploited by unjust bosses telling them "Work, work quietly!" – until one day they learned about the protests occurring somewhere close to Kazakhstan. Knowing how risky protesting can be, they nevertheless saw that by protesting they could change something'. Speaking of the international context's negative impact, however, the interviewees from 'Shanyrak', 'Alga', 'Lad' and 'Azat' mentioned that because of anti-protest propaganda in the mass media and the regime's launching of anti-protest counterframes, people became extremely sceptical about the possibility of successful protest campaigns. According to the 'Azat' and 'Alga' leaders, the regime is very fearful of large-scale protests similar to the ones that took place in the colour revolutions. To prevent such protests from happening in Kazakhstan, the regime intimidates and bullies citizens through repressions. People, in their turn, become fearful about losing their businesses and jobs and thus prefer to stay away from collective action.

There are two particularly interesting observations regarding the international context that are worth mentioning. First, the nature of the influence of the international context on protest mobilisation tends to vary depending on the issue areas involved. Thus, representatives of the environmental 'Nevada-Semei' and interethnic 'Ult Tagdyry' claim that the colour revolutions did not have any effect on mobilising environmental and interethnic protests. 'Most affected by protests abroad are the mobilisation efforts of political, or let's say oppositional SMOs', mentioned the head of 'Ult Tagdyry'. Second, the international context has a larger influence on mobilising people if the event in question is geographically close to Kazakhstan. The leaders of 'Azat' and 'Shanyrak' argue that protest events occurring further afield do not inspire locals to mobilise as much as protests taking place in the neighbouring post-Soviet countries such as Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine and Georgia.

Legitimacy: Given that citizens are on record as trusting and supporting the president and his government, one would not expect them to participate in protests which often call for the resignation of the head of state and/or government. According to the 'Azat' interviewee, the public's lack of belief in the government's promises regarding reforms in Phase I served as an impetus to protest mobilisation. Thus, a survey carried out in 1995 showed that 42.5% of respondents did not trust the government (Giller Institute 1995b). The president, on the contrary, was supported by 80% of respondents. Does this discrepancy mean that public trust in the president does not correlate with protests? Indeed so, at least according to 'Azat' interviewee; it appears that the population's participation in protest has nothing to do with its level of trust in the president. To illustrate, the lowest percentage (42%) of public support enjoyed by President Nazarbayev in 1998 did not result in extensive protest mobilisation at the end of the 1990s (Tsentr Sotsialnykh Tekhnologii 2006). In contrast, a trust rating of 92% in 2008

did not tame the protest dynamics seen in Phase III. Speaking of changes in the public's trust in government, one poll conducted in 1998 (Phase II) showed that 50% of population trust it (ComCon-2 Eurasia 2002); 10 years later 68% of the population professed to trust it (IRI 2008). As we can see, a gradual growth of both public trust in government and support for the president did not lead to the waning of protest mobilisation as conventional wisdom would suggest, but on the contrary led to its growth. Therefore, this discrepancy undermines the validity of the 'legitimacy' variable in explaining the cyclicity of protest mobilisation.

Utilitarian justification for collective action: Many interviewees claim that in Phase I the citizens believed in the worthiness of protesting in addressing their grievances. The heads of 'Azat' and 'Tabigat' relate such acute protest moods to the fact that the aggrieved public did not have anything to lose. A poll conducted in the industrial city of Pavlodar in September 1994 revealed that 45% of respondents considered strikes to be the most effective measure of defending one's rights (Evseev 1994). The leader of 'Workers' Movement' maintains that workers were becoming aware of the efficiency of protesting in attaining their goals. In fact, protest events were so widespread in the mining city of Karaganda that one journalist wrote: 'The leaders of the coalminers do not seem to understand that by protesting they deprive the country of a constant provision of coal. Moreover, mere striking will not provide food for their families' (Kosenko 1994).

People's readiness to protest started to decline in Phase II, which corresponds to the waning of protest events at the end of the 1990s. My interviewee from 'Workers' Movement' remembers offering his help to coalminers in organising labour strikes: 'They refused and told me that they do not want to risk losing their jobs as a result of protesting'. Furthermore, the leader of 'Azat' claims that, unlike in the early 1990s,

people's propensity to protest declined by the early 2000s because now they were preoccupied by their daily routine. On top of that, the 'Alga' interviewee stresses that the state's propaganda aimed at dissuading the population from protesting by saying that the 'current political system is not amenable to citizens' scrutiny'. All of this bred political apathy and indifference among the population, according to the 'Lad' and 'Tabigat' interviewees. As a result, according to the representatives of 'Pokoleniye', 'Lad', 'Shanyrak' and 'Vainakh', the majority of citizens in Phase III did not perceive collective action as a means to solve their problems.

According to the interview data, collective action was well justified in Phase I, whereas in phases II and III the masses started to have doubts regarding the efficiency of protesting in resolving their grievances. However, the protest data suggests a growth of protest mobilisation in Phase III, which by no means resonates with citizens' lack of faith in the worthiness of protesting. As we can see then, the 'justification for collective action' variable is not without flaws. This finding supports Gurr's argument regarding the secondary role of psychological conditions in protest mobilisation.

Resource Mobilisation

Undoubtedly, mobilisation of tangible and intangible resources as well as nurturance of societal support for movement goals is vital for SMOs' protest mobilisation work. However, when applied to the Kazakhstani context the RMT perspective is faced with two key problems: 1) organisations which say they enjoyed societal support in Phase III showed minimal growth and have become incapable of organising protest events; and 2) organisations existing in Phase III note a deficit of resources compared to earlier phases, yet there is growth of protest events. Both of these issues suggest that societal support and the presence of resources do not necessarily translate into protest mobilisation.

Extent of societal support for movement goals: First of all, it is worth mentioning that all of the SMOs in this study understand the importance of societal support for movement goals and value their national reputation and prestige. The interview data illustrates that the SMOs' period of growth is associated with the extent of their societal support and public trust. Thus, organisations such as 'Azat', 'Pokoleniye', 'Nevada-Semei', 'Workers' Movement' and 'Lad' experienced major organisational growth and mobilisation successes in Phase I, at a time when they were enjoying nationwide societal support.

Due to intra-elite cleavages (related to SMO leadership issues and conflicting programme goals) and the resulting splits in various SMOs in Phase II, people's trust in some SMOs started to decline. Organisations such as 'RNPK' and 'Azat' had to either reorganise or shut down completely as a result of losing followers. My 'RNPK' interviewee claims that the formation of the oppositional 'DCK' party in 2001 confused many supporters of 'RNPK': 'People felt like they were betrayed by the leaders of 'RNPK' who defected from it and joined the newly formed 'DCK''. Indicative of declining trust in SMOs such as 'Azat' and 'RNPK' is the general decline of protest mobilisation seen in Phase II.

All of the SMOs present in Phase III stated that, despite problems with societal support in Phase II, their SMOs were widely supported in Phase III. In this vein, my 'Pokoleniye' interviewee claimed that her organisation's reputation exceeds that of many modern day political parties. 'Alga' and 'Shanyrak' base their mobilisation work on the principles of reciprocity: they offer legal, material and moral support to their members and followers, in the expectation that one day they will return this favour by signing SMOs' petitions or participating in protests. Paradoxically, however, these particular SMOs are much weaker in Phase III compared to earlier phases. When asked when their SMOs were more

successful in protest mobilisation, all of them made references to earlier phases. How then can we explain the growth of protest mobilisation in Phase III?

Before answering the above question I would like to explain the paradox whereby SMOs with extensive societal support do not organise protests in Phase III. The leaders of some Phase III SMOs – ‘Tabigat’, ‘Green Salvation’, ‘Ult Tagdyry’, ‘Pokoleniye’, ‘Lad’ and ‘Shanyrak’ – said that they changed their tactics. ‘We decided there is no use of waging “street politics”; we now work within the country’s legal boundaries. Yes, it takes more time to solve an issue, but it definitely works and does not compromise the safety of our members’, said the head of ‘Shanyrak’. Hinting at the presence of repression in Kazakhstan, he further adds: ‘Some of our followers are ready to protest, but unready to suffer’.

If Phase III SMOs are not involved in protest mobilisation, why then do we observe its growth? A number of local political observers claim that there is a growing tendency for citizens to self-mobilise in Kazakhstan without the involvement of SMOs. Referring to the ‘Nesoglasnye’ movement in Russia and Kazakhstan, Amirzhan Kosanov, co-leader of the OSDP ‘Azat’ oppositional political party, said: ‘If previously protest mobilisation was the primary prerogative of political parties and movements, now civil society can self-mobilise’ (2012). Moreover, the Zhanaozen riots in December 2011 demonstrated the extent of self-mobilisation resulting from growing protest moods in Kazakhstan (Ten 2013) in Phase III.

Control of authorities: This variable is similar in content and structure to the RD-related ‘coercive potential’ variable. All interviewees claim that the regime’s repression and various intimidation practices have always complicated the growth of SMOs and their protest mobilisation efforts. Repression either did not happen or was softer in nature

in Phase I and at the end of Phase II – marked by the largest number of protests and outbreaks of protest activity respectively. At other times, the regime was quite repressive toward all but socioeconomic SMOs, which can be seen by the low number of instances of protest activity in the relevant years. As I mentioned earlier, all non-socioeconomic protests were under tight control of the authorities in Phase III, which is why there is such a significant difference in the rates of non-socioeconomic and socioeconomic protests. I will discuss this anomaly in more detail later in the chapter.

Heavy-handed repressions of non-socioeconomic protests in Phase III could explain why some SMOs changed their tactics from protesting to conventional means of opposing the regime, such as signing petitions, lobbying, releasing anti-regime propaganda and taking legal action. All in all, there is no doubt that the ‘control of authorities’ variable possesses great explanatory power in describing protest dynamics in Kazakhstan.

Resources provided by external groups/individuals: Like the previous variable, this variable has close similarities with one of the components of RD’s ‘facilitation’ variable – external assistance to protesters and SMOs. Interview data shows that SMOs’ growth and protest mobilisation efforts benefit a lot from resources provided by various sympathising parties such as foreign and local public and private organisations.

The presence of external support determined SMOs’ success in organising protests and vice versa. The activities of ‘Pokoleniye’, ‘Tabigat’, ‘Nevada-Semei’ and ‘Lad’ were extensively supported in Phase I by foreign NGOs and governments which, according to interviewees, significantly contributed to SMOs’ different civic projects including the organisation of protest campaigns. With the gradual decline of external support in Phase III (as reported by interviewees), the abovementioned SMOs experienced underfunding of their projects and a consequent weakening of their influence. Therefore, in order to

survive financially and support their projects, organisations such as ‘Nevada-Semei’ and ‘Ult Tagdyry’ had to apply for state funding. The reliance of these and many other SMOs (not included in the current analysis) on state funding led to changes in their anti-governmental rhetoric and obviously put an end to anti-governmental protests. Based on the observation of cases existing throughout the three phases, we can conclude that the ‘external resources’ variable does tell us a lot about the growth and decline of SMOs and their protest mobilisation work.

Noteworthy is a comment made by the ‘Alga’ leader about the waning of external assistance to local SMOs: ‘Foreign donors are reluctant to press the current regime for democratic reforms under the existing conditions of strong government and weak opposition because they want to secure their investments. However, once they see the formation of a strong oppositional force that would pose a serious threat to the regime, they will definitely support it’. This view is based on numerous accounts of local observers regarding the mercantile logic of foreign support to anti-governmental SMOs in Kazakhstan (Nogaibekov and Abdullayev 2007). Bolat Abilov, a co-leader of OSDP ‘Azat’ oppositional party, calls this logic on the part of foreign organisations and governments cynical: ‘We are all aware that the West is interested only in our energy resources and Nazarbayev satisfies them [the West] because he is open to negotiation. Hence, we make it clear that our problems will be solved only by our people’ (Vaiskopf 2012).

As we can see, it is not only the escalation of repression that pushed SMOs to change their movement tactics but also the shortage of external resources that made some once actively protesting SMOs (in Phase I and II) dependent on state funding and support in Phase III.

Resources provided by members of the SMO: Just like the availability of external resources in the first two phases, there were plenty of internal resources at SMOs' disposal to organise protest mobilisation campaigns. Among the most crucial resources named by interviewees were skills, money and charismatic leaders. Skill training was often provided to SMOs by foreign governments and NGOs and covered such themes as transparency, good governance, election observations, party building, and civil society and NGO strengthening (Luong and Weinthal 1999; Nurmagambetov 2013). However, there is no consensus among interviewees regarding the significance of skills in protest mobilisation. For example, the 'Pokoleniye' leader said that skills did not matter, while the 'RNPK' interviewee claims that without skilled activists the organisation of protests and recruitment of new members would have been difficult, especially in the highly repressive second phase.

The good financial standing of some SMOs such as 'Azat', 'Green Salvation' and 'RNPK' enabled them to publish their own newspaper and/or bulletin which they used to communicate with adherents and attract new members. On the other hand, the leaders of 'Tabigat' and 'Azat' proudly belittle the role of financial resources by stating that SMOs do not have to be extremely wealthy to mobilise the masses, stating instead that people were ready to attend SMOs' protests as long as they were trustworthy. In fact, the 'RNPK' interviewee said that many of its activists worked on a voluntary basis in Phase II.

While the significance of skills and financial resources was debated by interviewees, however, no one questioned the role played by movements' elites and charismatic leaders in protest mobilisation. For example, my 'Nevada-Semei' interviewee went so far as to compare the movement's leader Olzhas Suleimenov to Mahatma Ghandi: 'He enjoys

people's respect and admiration. He is a figure, a man of planet scale. I would also call him a sovereign of minds and great peacekeeper'. Charismatic leaders not only mobilise movements' adherents to protest, but also attract new members and external support. The head of 'Alga' and the co-leader of 'RNPK' claimed that potential recruits always associate SMOs' goals and objectives with their charismatic leaders. This, according to 'Alga' representative, is profoundly wrong because in doing so they ignore the movement's ideology and programme. 'No matter how charismatic they are, SMO leaders can be manipulated, infiltrated or even assassinated, resulting in dissolution of the SMO whose agenda and appeal were based solely on its charismatic leader', he explained. The 'RNPK' interviewee remembers the role played by its leader, Akezhan Kazhegeldin, in attracting foreign support to the opposition in Kazakhstan. 'Thanks to him, our members were frequently invited to talk at the OSCE, Council of Europe, and US Congress and received wholehearted support from western colleagues. Without such support we would have never been able to officially register our party with the Ministry of Justice', he added.

All SMOs unanimously state that they experienced a lack of resources in Phase III. While some report financial problems, others complain about an absence of human resources, including strong leadership. The representatives of 'Ult Tagdyry', 'Vainakh', 'Lad', 'Pokoleniye' and 'Tabigat' said that they do not have enough funding to finance key projects not to mention organise protests. The 'Pokoleniye' leader stressed the mercantile interests of the movement's modern adherents: 'Throughout our existence, we have never paid people to make them protest and they protested, but our modern followers would not protest unless you pay them – something that we would not do even if we had the money'. This brings us to the problem of human resources. By saying how difficult it is to recruit new members because of the upsurge of repressions in Phase III,

interviewees from ‘Ult Tagdyry’, ‘Lad’ and ‘Vainaikh’ report a scarcity of human resources. Furthermore, the leader of ‘Alga’ claims that the presence of influential elites at the end of Phase II boosted the movement’s morale and protest mobilisation, as well as attracting thousands of new members – a phenomenon that has not been repeated since then. Finally, the lack of charismatic leadership in many SMOs as well as intra-elite cleavages alienated many movement supporters and bred widespread distrust in the opposition (Baurzhanov 2010; Chulkov 2013).

There is a major problem with the RMT perspective in that it fails to account for the growth of Phase III protests organised by SMOs lacking resources and/or protests that are held without SMOs’ involvement. As I mentioned earlier, some SMOs manage to organise protests without a large pool of resources. Besides ‘Azat’ and ‘Tabigat’, which exemplify the 1990s when people supported SMOs’ protests irrespective of their resource base, the ‘Shanyrak’ leader claimed that they showed only moral and legal support to socioeconomic protesters without direct involvement in demonstrations and pickets. He explicitly refers to citizens’ self-mobilisation into collective action, which is a major characteristic of protests in Phase III that I mentioned earlier. The inability of the RMT perspective to explain citizens’ self-mobilisation is typical for social movement theories which disregard individuals’ incentives to protest (i.e. the micro level) in their theoretical models. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, this is one of the major problems of the RMT perspective identified by Opp (2009), which thus fails to explain protests at a micro-to-macro level of analysis by underestimating the role of grievances and the ideological factors behind individuals’ decision to protest.

Growth of SMOs: It can be deduced from the above discussion of the RMT theory’s variables that Phase I was the best period of growth for all SMOs, including those that

still exist. Interviewees report booming protest mobilisation across the republic, underlining that the availability of resources played crucial role.

The growth of SMOs and protest activity was jeopardised by the climate of repression that dominated the early part of the second phase and the waning of external as well as internal resources. Due to this, many organisations including those which were not selected for this study had to reorganise, shut down or merge with other SMOs. Societal support for movement goals also was in decline. The leaders of ‘Workers’ Movement’ and ‘Azat’ argue that, on one hand, people were disillusioned with the weak opposition but, on the other, they no longer wanted to risk their safety and were fearful of repressions.

The political crisis of 2002 marked a great moment of upheaval for SMOs in Kazakhstan. The head of ‘Pokoleniye’ remembers protest events in the 2002/03 period as follows: ‘There was an enormous rise of protest activity, comparable in its scale only to the protests of the early 1990s’. The leader of ‘Alga’ said that defection of elites to the opposition brought about a dramatic increase in resources, thus enabling movements to mobilise the masses for protest and advance their movement goals. As I mentioned earlier, the tightening of control of SMOs that followed the political crisis forced many SMOs to reconsider their movement tactics, with a shift away from open and radical confrontation to non-violent and constrained opposition. The leader of ‘Green Salvation’ describes the nature of the repressions seen in the third phase: ‘It may look like repressions have waned but in fact they became even harsher, especially in the last three or four years. They are not as bold as they used to be; on the contrary, now they are more refined and casuistic’. Nevertheless, as we can see from the protest data, the escalation of repressions at the end of Phase III did not prevent many people from protesting,

especially those aggrieved by socioeconomic issues (2007–2009). However, the growth of protest activity at the end of the 2000s does not indicate a strengthening of SMOs. As I mentioned earlier, it is instead connected to a growing tendency of citizens to self-mobilise.

Political Opportunity Structures

Earlier in this chapter, we witnessed the rejection of this study's first hypothesis due to the failure of the CAF perspective to address protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan. After process-tracing of the variables of the competing RD and RMT perspectives, I have also concluded that, just like the CAF perspective, neither of them are fully applicable to Kazakhstan. In this section I will test POS perspective's theoretical predictions and see if they are better than those of the competing theories in matching the empirical evidence.

Openness/closure of political system: According to all interviewees, within a span of three phases the government was most responsive to citizens' demands in Phase I. The 'Workers' Movement' and 'Azat' leaders remember the president personally attending protests and listening to protesters' demands. Representative of 'Nevada-Semei' said that the government supported the anti-nuclear movement, emphasising that, 'we were working with the government, not against it'. Furthermore, the leader of the 'Vainakh' Chechen Association mentioned that the government and president always listened to their concerns and tried to help; the establishment of the 'National People's Assembly of Kazakhstan' in 1995 illustrates the extent of the government's support of ethnic minorities.

The political system started to contract at the end of the first phase. The head of 'Tabigat' said that the Soviet government was more responsive to the movement's demands than the government of independent Kazakhstan: 'Many times we invited government

officials to our roundtables on various ecological issues, but they never showed up', he said. Additionally, according to the representative of 'RNPK', the government was ignoring the opposition's proposals on amendments to electoral legislation. 'It is due to this reason' – he argues – 'that we had to defiantly leave one of the OSCE-funded roundtables in 2000 which was attended by the government's top officials'. The leader of 'Green Salvation' complained by saying that, although government was cooperating with the organisation, they often tried to conceal information from them. Furthermore, the representatives of 'RNPK' and 'Pokoleniye' also mentioned that their letters and petitions published in newspapers or sent directly to the government either never reached their intended recipients or did not receive any response. For example, the head of 'Pokoleniye' claims that she wrote numerous letters to President Nazarbayev, but never got a reply from him. Resultantly, out of curiosity, she decided to write to the US President Bill Clinton, requesting his portrait. She was extremely surprised to receive a letter from him in a matter of few weeks.

Thus, the political system in the third phase became extremely selective in dealing with SMOs' demands. The leader of 'Shanyrak' told me that the system's input channels were open only to those SMOs that did not advance political demands, criticise the president and/or resort to radical protests. Since all SMOs operating in Phase III, with the exception of the overtly political 'Alga', distanced themselves from political demands and refrained from radicalism, their concerns were frequently discussed and ultimately resolved by the government. The leader of 'Ult Tagdyry' evocatively describes the government's intolerance of politicised demands and movements: 'When preparing for protest, officials often censor our slogans by saying that we could criticise whoever we want – be that local governor or prime minister – but we must never criticise the president and his family. If we do not agree with them, they do not give us permission to

hold a protest demonstration'. Radical and/or politicised movements such as socioeconomic 'Talmas' report government's ignorance of their demands and constant intimidation. To illustrate, in the 2007–2009 period the 'Alga' party ran a project called 'People's Address to the President', which involved sending petitions signed by hundreds of citizens to the president's administration. 'We delivered scores of boxes with citizens' letters to the president, who never even dared to reply even to a single letter', I was told. Furthermore, as was mentioned earlier in the chapter, politicised SMOs were not only blocked but were also heavily repressed by law enforcement agencies in Phase III.

Stability/instability of elite alignments: All of my interviewees perceived Phase I as the period with the most unstable elite alignments. Indeed, the 'Azat' and 'Lad' members said that people felt turmoil in all domains of public life, especially in the government. Soon after the collapse of the SU, the regime incumbents divided into two opposing groups: hard-liners and soft-liners. Disillusioned with the course and pace of reforms, some of the regime's soft-liners defected to the opposition (as discussed in more detail in chapters 5 and 6). No matter whether they joined the oppositional forces or stayed out of power, SMO leaders, activists and adherents perceived the defection of elites as a signal for protest mobilisation.

The regime's elite alignments were well consolidated in the second phase, except for two major events that shook up the country's political system. The first was the resignation of Prime Minister Akezhan Kazhegeldin in October 1997 following tax-evasion charges. Critical of President Nazarbayev's regime, he joined the country's opposition camp by establishing the 'RNPK' party. The 'RNPK' interviewee (who became the party's leader soon after Kazhegeldin was forced into exile) remembers the end of the 1990s: 'Kazhegeldin's defection to the opposition not only piqued people's interest in politics,

but also inspired many to collective action'. The head of 'Ult Tagdyry', who used to be a close partner of Kazhegeldin, stated that Kazhegeldin was attempting to unite the opposition into one major force against the authoritarian regime. Another historical moment that united the country's opposition and contributed to the growth of protest mobilisation was the defection of the government's top officials in 2002 (a so-called political crisis), which I explore in more detail elsewhere in the thesis.

The stability of elite alignments in the third phase was jeopardised by the defection of two top officials as a result of political rifts with President Nazarbayev: the Minister of Information, Altynbek Sarsenbayev, in 2003 and Almaty City Mayor, Zamanbek Nurkadilov, in 2004. The elites' fierce criticism of the authoritarian regime and support for oppositional political SMOs earned them respect and people's sympathy. 'It was not, however, until the mysterious deaths of both figures in February 2006 and November 2005 respectively that the opposition managed to mobilise thousands of grieving and anti-regime masses to marches and demonstrations in Almaty', the head of 'Pokoleniye' informed me. Furthermore, the leader of 'Alga' openly admits receiving financial support from another public defector and harsh critic of Nazarbayev's regime, Mukhtar Ablyazov. As in the case with Kazhegeldin, Ablyazov's moral and financial support of 'Alga' enabled it to recruit new members and attract new adherents.

Presence/absence of elite allies: the content of this variable partially stems from the content of the previous one; in other words, elites who defected from the government, as a result of changes in elite alignments, are potential elite allies for SMOs. As we saw earlier, the presence of elite allies significantly boosted the mobilisation work of various SMOs throughout the three phases. It is worth mentioning that the organisations most affected by the presence of elite allies and which benefit the most from them are political

SMOs. This is due to the fact that elite allies defect from the government as a result of their anti-regime views, which coincide with the views and agenda of political SMOs. Looking at Figure 3.1 we can relate the variances in the frequency of political protests to the presence/absence of elite allies. Thus, many of the political protests in Phase I could be explained by the abundance of elite allies. Next, the gradual decline of political protests seen from 1996 up to 1998 correlates with the lack of regime defectees. Kazhegeldin's resignation from the post of prime minister and the subsequent formation of the 'RNPK' led to a gradual increase in protest activity, which increased even further with the largest instance of elite defection in 2001/02. Moreover, the murders of major elite allies of political SMOs in 2004 and 2006 were a further impetus for protest mobilisation.

Elite allies' close association with political SMOs does not necessarily mean, however, that non-political SMOs do not enjoy their support. Rather, to get their support they would have to politicise their frames. As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, politicising the movement's frame and agenda could backfire on the movement's leaders, activists and followers with the following negative consequences: 1) potential repressions as the regime is not willing to tolerate SMOs advancing political demands; 2) a loss of reputation and adherents because people do not want to risk their safety; and 3) the political system will close its input channels to politicised SMOs. Unwilling to bear such costs, non-political SMOs such as 'Ult Tagdyry', 'Pokoleniye' and 'Tabigat' avoid politicising their frames and try to distance themselves from political SMOs.

The state's capacity/propensity for repressions: This is by far the most crucial variable within the POS perspective and it has a pronounced effect on protest mobilisation both at the macro and micro levels. To illustrate, in the third phase many SMOs were witnessing

a growth in the state's propensity for repression⁵⁸. Unwilling to risk their existence and losing their members, many SMOs had to adjust their mobilisation work. As we saw earlier, every SMO reacted differently to repressions in Phase III. Thus, aware of the government's intolerance of political and politicised SMOs, political SMOs either softened their anti-regime rhetoric or gave up on radical protests in favour of conventional means of opposing the regime (petitions, legal action, propaganda, etc.). Socioeconomic SMOs also decided to change their movement tactics by shifting from the politics of contention to cooperation. The question of why there was such a dramatic increase in the number of protest events in Phase III is a question begging for a micro-level explanation of individuals' incentives to protest. Although I partially answered this question earlier when referring to the growing instances of citizens' self-mobilisation in Phase III, I will return to discuss this phenomenon in more detail later in the chapter.

Speaking of the first two phases, many interviewees date SMOs' growth and successful protest mobilisation to Phase I and the end of Phase II. According to interviewees' accounts, many people perceived the state as incapable of repressing people in Phase I for three reasons: 1) state institutions (including law enforcement agencies) were weak and poorly organised; 2) public memory of the government's violent suppression of the December 1986 riots was still fresh; and 3) the government was interested in legitimising its rule. In my interview, the 'Azat' leader stated that it felt like it was the right time to push post-communist incumbents to release political prisoners, declare independence and break away from the Soviet legacy. Perceiving the government's amenability, many newly founded SMOs (including political ones) did not hesitate to flock to the streets to advance their movement's demands. In the face of the state's low capacity for

⁵⁸ This variable has many overlaps with RD's 'coercive potential' and RMT's 'control of authorities' variables. For detailed discussion of the state's evolution of repressions in Kazakhstan, see the relevant parts of this chapter.

repressions, pensioners, teachers, ethnic and religious minorities, scientists, doctors, and social workers all believed that such measures could help resolve their grievances.

By legitimising its rule through a series of presidential and parliamentary elections as well as two national referenda in 1995, the regime started to consolidate around the presidency of Nazarbayev. Confident in public support, Nazarbayev initiated the elimination of his opponents early in the second phase by repressing oppositional SMOs, their leaders, activists and ‘affiliated media’ (at least according to ‘RNPK’ and ‘Alga’ in the interviews). By decapitating numerous movements, the regime ensured total political control of the public sphere. According to the ‘RNPK’, ‘Green Salvation’ and ‘Workers’ Movement’ leaders, fearful of arrests, intimidation and criminal persecution many people were demobilised. The political crisis at the end of Phase II (2001/02) was perceived by many SMOs and people as an opening of POS which allowed for the voicing of long-held grievances.

International context: This variable is very similar to RD’s ‘international context’ variable which is one of the theory’s facilitative social conditions for protest mobilisation. All the empirical evidence in support of this variable should apply to the POS perspective’s international context variable. Therefore, to avoid repetition, I will outline the major ideas about the influence of the international context on individuals’ incentive to participate in protests.

Certain changes in the international context (such as the occurrence of the colour revolutions in neighbouring countries) are perceived by many local SMOs and people as an opening of POS. Successful protest mobilisation elsewhere inspires and encourages a local population to think that collective action is an effective tool in attaining value satisfactions. Through the construction of resonant CAFs, SMOs often succeed in

attracting popular support and mobilising the masses for protest in such contexts. However, fearing that popular uprisings in foreign countries could have a spill-over effect in Kazakhstan, the authorities took various measures such as blocking news coverage of protests in the national media and portraying these protests in a very negative way in order to discourage citizens from protesting. Interviewees claim that the regime's counterframes were relatively successful in creating disincentives for individuals to protest in the third phase. For example, the leader of 'Alga' comments: 'Although many were discouraged by the government's demonic portrayal of the 'Orange Revolution' in Ukraine, the spirit and success stories of foreign protests live in people's minds and wait for the opening of the next political opportunity to mobilise citizens'. According to some interviewees, the government was much more sophisticated in blocking the influence of the international context in Phase III compared to earlier phases.

Incentives to participate: the collapse of the SU, the instability of elite alignments, the presence of elite allies and the state's low capacity for repressions in the first phase were perceived by the majority of population as an opening of POS. On top of that, the successes of national liberation movements in various Soviet republics in the early 1990s were also perceived by local movements as an impetus for mobilisation. Such changes in the structure of political opportunities increased citizens' subjective expectations of protests' success in goal attainment. As a result, thousands of people across the country were actively protesting around multiple issue areas, such as delays to salaries and pensions, unemployment, nuclear tests, industrial pollution, ethnic discrimination and human rights.

However, protest mobilisation started to decline in the second phase due to the growth of scepticism among people regarding the probability of goal attainment resulting from

changes in POS. Thus, the government was becoming less responsive to public demands as articulated by SMOs. Elite alignments formed in the first phase were very stable until 1999 when Prime Minister Akezhan Kazhegeldin resigned from his post to create the 'RNPK' party. Following this seismic shift, elites which used to support SMOs in the first phase either left politics for business or joined the government at the beginning of second phase, thus leaving SMOs without influential elite allies. In addition, the intimidation of radical SMOs and journalists at the end of the 1990s was perceived by society as evidence of the state's growing capacity for repression. Finally, the absence of potentially contagious social upheavals in the international context meant that no incentives for individuals to participate were created.

The political crisis of 2002 was immediately perceived by members of civil society as an opening of POS. However, not all the POS dimensions changed in favour of collective action; as before, the international context lacked any significant events in the early 2000s to inspire individuals to protest and the political system was still ignoring civil society demands. It was the changes in elite alignments and the resulting appearance of elite allies in conjunction with the softening of repressions that was regarded by individuals as adequate openings in POS, sufficient for increasing people's expectations of protests' success in goal attainment. Figure 3.1 illustrates the growth of protest mobilisation that resulted from the political crisis.

There were plenty of changes in Phase III POS which led to a further increase in the levels of protest mobilisation that had started at the end of Phase II. As I noted earlier, the regime adopted a discriminatory approach to SMOs in the third phase, meaning that it would be open only to non-political and/or non-politicised SMOs. Moreover, the regime's capacity for repressions was also dependent on the abovementioned differential

treatment of SMOs based on their issue area, with political or politicised SMOs being repressed more severely than socioeconomic or environmental SMOs, which would generally be tolerated. Changes in these two dimensions of POS provide a good explanation of the differences in the rates of political and socioeconomic protests in Phase III. Despite the state's differential treatment of SMOs in regard to repression, SMOs have not waned but have instead, as one interviewee noted, become more sophisticated, which nonetheless did not prevent the population from protesting in Phase III. This finding is in line with an explanation provided by the heads of 'Shanyrak' and 'Alga' movements: 'Acuteness of deprivation coupled with people's frustration can overcome repressions'. The defection of high-profile elites to the opposition and the consequent appearance of elite allies contributed to the public's heightened expectation of mobilisation success in goal attainment. This, in addition to the influence of the colour revolutions on local SMOs and citizens' incentive structures, led to the ultimate increase in protest mobilisation.

The POS Perspective's Response to Challenges Faced by Competing Theories

The theoretical predictions of the POS perspective provided better explanations of protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan than those of competing theories. According to George and Bennett (2005), for a theory to be regarded as the best guide to understanding the phenomenon in question, it must not only be better than competing theories in predicting what happened and why it happened but also lead to the discovery of more novel facts and insights. It is envisaged that by responding to the issues faced by competing theories, the POS perspective would lead to aforementioned discovery of new facts and insights.

CAF:

- a) *Rise of protest mobilisation in Phase III despite low resonance of SMOs' frames or no framing work at all:* Protest mobilisation did not wane as a result of frames' declining resonance due to the relatively open POS and the public's growing propensity to self-mobilise independently of SMOs' mobilisation work.
- b) *Failure of SMOs to successfully align their frames did not lead to waning of protest mobilisation in Phase III:* Same as above. In addition, self-mobilised individuals construct their own action frames which are often more resonant than those constructed and disseminated by SMOs.

RD:

- a) *There was a growth of protest mobilisation despite heightened state repressions:*
Two reasons can explain this apparent anomaly. First, people are not afraid of repressions in times of heightened frustration about acute deprivation. Believing that the cost of deprivation is higher than the cost of protesting, the aggrieved public manages to overcome the fear of repressions – as happened in Phase III. Second, the leader of the 'Alga' party argues that their activists and adherents are not afraid of repressions when they protest because they know that 'Alga' will not let them be arrested or will assist them in the court. Adherents' loyalty and confidence in 'Alga' stems from the fact that 'Alga' is supported by powerful elite allies.
- b) *Despite a good level of institutionalisation across the four issue areas there was a growth of protest mobilisation in Phase III:* Each issue area may be represented by a variety of SMOs, but none of them may enjoy societal support and trust at a

given moment. The lack of public trust in SMOs in Phase III stems from two reasons. First, many SMOs (especially non-political ones) have experienced a deficit of external resources. To stay afloat they had to seek the state's financial support. The state, in its turn, was willing to co-opt SMOs by opening its input channels to them. Witnessing SMOs' rapprochement with the state, many of their followers felt themselves betrayed and decided to leave. Second, some SMOs' softening of their anti-regime rhetoric and changing movement tactics from confrontation to cooperation disillusioned many of their followers. As a result of growing distrust in SMOs' ability to resolve people's problems, the aggrieved public started to self-mobilise by forming new SMOs and/or organising protests without the involvement of major existing SMOs.

- c) *Despite growing belief in the ineffectiveness of protesting in resolving various grievances there was a growth of protest mobilisation in Phase III:* Many interviewees note that local political culture is slowly democratising, thus leading to a gradual growth in the number of politically active citizens. For example, the 'Workers' Movement' interviewee claims that despite sharing a largely parochial political culture, people have been slowly developing a protest culture since the 1990s which is now evident in the rise of protests in the third phase.

RMT:

- a) *Many interviewees said that their SMOs experienced a lack of resources, yet there was a growth of protest mobilisation in Phase III:* This phenomenon runs contrary to the RMT theory's major theoretical proposition emphasising the vital role of RMT. A number of interviewees made reference to instances when neither the SMO nor its resources were necessary for protest mobilisation. With the

exception of elite allies, resources do not play a crucial role in the POS perspective's explanation of protest mobilisation. Hence, proponents of the POS perspective would argue that growing protest mobilisation in Phase III was a result of favourable changes in POS rather than an abundance of resources at SMOs' disposal.

Grievance-Based Mobilisation Outcomes

According to one of the tenets of the RD perspective, the nature of the deprivation in question determines the scope and intensity of protest mobilisation. Puzzled by an overall higher frequency of socioeconomic protests in comparison to non-socioeconomic ones, I hypothesise that the difference in mobilisation outcomes is based on the regime's susceptibility to the challenges posed by each of the four grievances. This line of argumentation corresponds to the theoretical predictions of the POS perspective. If the second hypothesis can be backed with empirical evidence, then we would expect the regime to be closed and repressive towards SMOs that challenge its rule and open and tolerant towards SMOs that do not.

Differences in the regime's treatment of SMOs are mostly evident in phases II and III. In the second phase the regime started to consolidate authoritarianism, which it later on had to protect against challengers. This is when post-communist incumbents started to differentiate the threats stemming from the four types of SMOs. Since political SMOs had political agendas, they were identified as the major threat to the regime's well-being. Interethnic SMOs were also identified as a potential threat to stability in the republic. Environmental grievances due to their nature and low number of operating SMOs and followers never posed a serious challenge to the regime. Finally, although the regime does not view socioeconomic SMOs and protest events as a direct threat, it understands

that it must be cautious with them because by blocking socioeconomic protests it could face terrible consequences marked by large-scale upheaval of the popular masses, of such a magnitude that it could eventually overthrow the regime. That is why regime chooses to tolerate them for they are a means through which the masses aggrieved by socioeconomic grievances can ‘let off steam’. This explains the government’s lenience toward socioeconomic SMOs in the phases II and III.

As we have already seen, certain non-political grievances could politicise for many different reasons some of which I discussed earlier in the chapter. The most obvious reason for politicising, for example, socioeconomic grievances is to attract support from political SMOs. By allying with SMOs from a political issue area or starting to make political claims, socioeconomic SMOs such as ‘Pokoleniye’ want to attain two goals: 1) mobilise a larger number of people; and 2) draw the government’s attention to serious socioeconomic issues. As we saw earlier in the chapter, politicising the socioeconomic or any other non-political frame could not only fail to mobilise people but also cost a non-political SMO its prestige and reputation. This is exactly what happened to ‘Nevada-Semei’ movement in 1991 when upon achieving the closure of the Semei nuclear testing site, it attempted to politicise its agenda by wishing to participate in parliamentary elections. Many of its followers and funding donors perceived this as a betrayal of movement’s key mission of being an impartial NGO working exclusively around environmental issues. Consequently, Nevada-Semei lost significant public support and had to found a People’s Congress of Kazakhstan – an affiliate political party designed to address political issues.

Besides risking prestige and reputation, politicisation of grievances by non-political SMOs could attract regime's repressions. For example, Figure 4.5 illustrates the regime's attitude to protests organised by politicised and non-politicised socioeconomic SMOs.

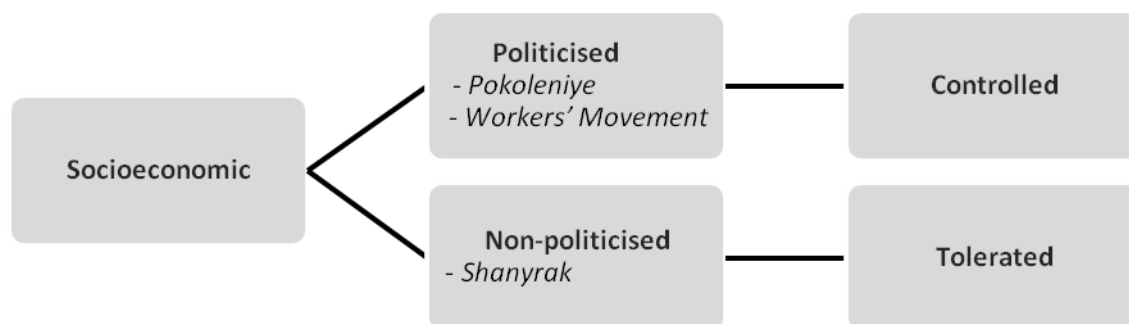


Figure 4-5: The regime's attitude to protests organised by politicised and non-politicised socioeconomic SMOs

As we can see, two out of three socioeconomic SMOs in my sample constructed politicised CAFs and hence the activities of these SMOs as well as the protests they organised were under the regime's strict control. To illustrate, a leader of 'Pokoleniye' described a situation when, at the end of the 1990s, a whole group of the movement's activists was arrested: 'It was all because one of our members brought a huge portrait of ex-Prime Minister Akezhan Kazhegeldin [then heading the oppositional party 'RNPK']...'. On the contrary, protests organised by the non-politicised 'Shanyrak' were tolerated, which means that the authorities allowed these protests events. 'Shanyrak' interviewee confirmed that his SMO was almost never refused a permission to carry out a protest demonstration.

Figure 4.6 depicts the regime's attitude to politicised and non-politicised protests organised by this study's nine remaining non-socioeconomic SMOs. The interview evidence suggests that since the beginning of the second phase the regime has not tolerated political or politicised SMOs which criticised the regime and/or promoted radical political demands such as the release of political prisoners, dissolution of the

government, registration of an oppositional political party, and better observance of human rights. Protests organised around such issues would always be monitored by the state's law enforcement agencies. On the contrary, interviewees from non-political and non-politicised SMOs – 'Shanyrak', 'Nevada-Semei', 'Green Salvation' and 'Vainakh' - said that they never experienced any significant obstacles to organisation and conduct of protest events.

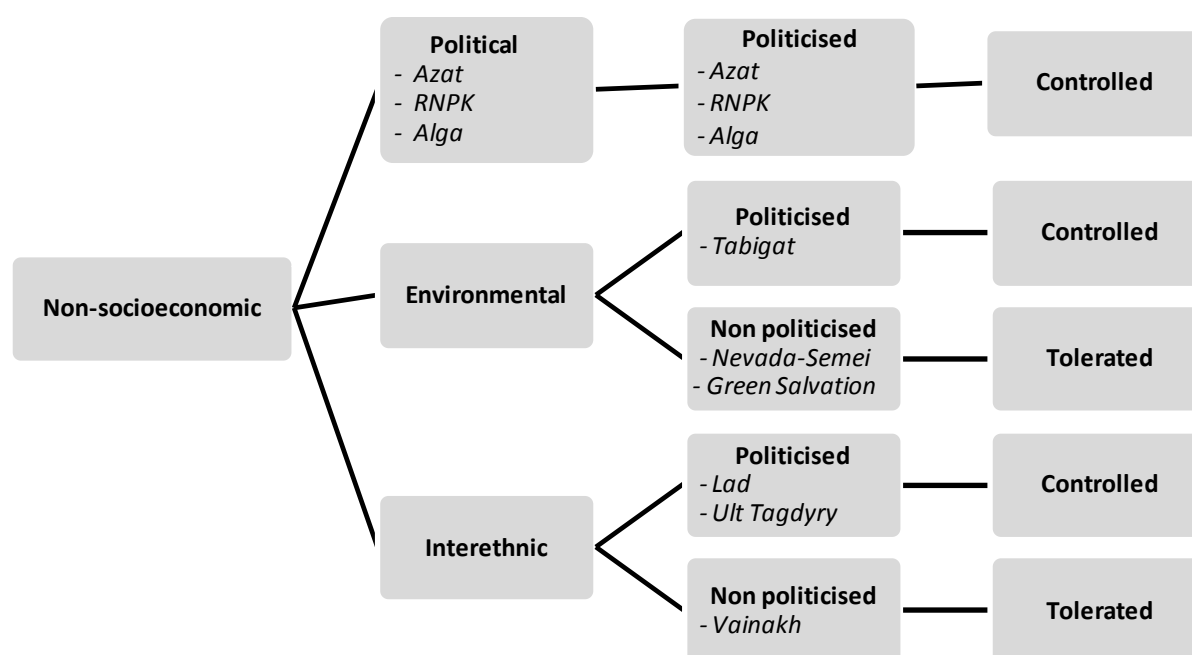


Figure 4-6: The regime's attitude to the politicised and non-politicised protests conducted by nine non-socioeconomic SMOs

My content analysis⁵⁹ of the Almaty City Internal Policy Department's records on granting permission⁶⁰ to SMOs wishing to hold a protest event revealed that 85% of applications are turned down for many different, sometimes obscure, reasons. In addition, I found out that almost none of the protest applications filed by non-politicised SMOs were refused. There were instances when political or politicised SMOs would apply more than 10 times and still get a refusal letter. This observation shows just one of the methods used by the regime to exert control over its challengers. Namely, it conducts

⁵⁹ The content analysis was carried out on 24 September 2009 in the Almaty City Mayor's office, and consisted of an analysis of protest permission records for the period 11 April 2008 to 23 September 2009.

⁶⁰ A 17 March 1995 Kazakhstan Law on Public Gatherings stipulates that citizens must obtain permission from the local government body in order to hold a public gathering.

a strategy of exclusion (closed input channels + cooptation through repressions) towards political and politicised movements, and strategy of inclusion (open input channels + cooperation through toleration) towards socioeconomic and non-politicised movements.

Is the empirical evidence provided above sufficient to confirm the second hypothesis? Not yet. While the POS perspective's *propensity for repression* variable provides a legitimate explanation of protest variation across issue areas in phases II and III (a strong state with a high propensity for repressions), we still have to see how the POS perspective explains the prevalence of socioeconomic protests over other types of protests in Phase I – a period characterised by the state's low propensity for repressions. In other words, propensity for repressions variable is central to the POS argument in the explanation of protest variation across issues areas in the later two phases characterised by heavy repressions; will the POS theory be still valid to account variation across issue areas in the Phase I when the regime was unable and unwilling to exert control over the SMOs? As we have seen in the previous chapter, Kazakhstan had a relatively open political system in Phase I and there was minimal repression of the protesting public and SMOs irrespective of the issue involved in protests. Yet the protest data in Figure 3.1 show that the socioeconomic protests prevailed over all other types of protest.

The most obvious explanation for such a huge gap between socioeconomic and non-socioeconomic protests in the first phase is the high intensity of frustration (i.e. RD) about deteriorating living standards. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, followers of the 'Workers' Movement' were so frustrated with delays in the payment of wages and dangerous working conditions that they were ready to commit acts of self-mutilation. The leaders of 'Azat' and 'Tabigat' attribute the public's resorting to radical forms of protest to the fact that people did not have anything to lose. The poll conducted in 1995

by the Giller Institute (1995b) revealed that 89.2% of respondents prioritised the problem of poor living standards, 76% crime, 68.9% citizens' ability to influence power, 58.4% the observation of human rights, and 47.7% civil and political rights. As we can see then, the huge disproportion in the number of political and socioeconomic protests is dictated by the people having a much deeper and wider dissatisfaction with socioeconomic issues rather than political, environmental and interethnic ones.

Numerous opinion polls like the one mentioned above and interview evidence suggest the applicability of Maslow's (1943) theory of 'Hierarchy of Needs' in explaining disparities in the socioeconomic and other types of protests in Phase I. According to this theory, men will always prioritise basic physiological and safety needs, which are the cornerstones of socioeconomic grievances. Hence, more people are expected to protest about poor provision of basic material needs (such as wages and pensions) than poor observance of human rights (fair elections, freedom of speech, etc), which is perceived in light of men's higher need for self-esteem. Sergei Duvanov, a political expert, and leaders of 'Workers' Movement', 'Azat', 'Pokoleniye' and 'Alga' attest an applicability of Maslow's theory to explaining variance of protest dynamics across four issue areas in Phase I. Maslow's theory adds to the validity of RD's explanation of protests' variation across grievances types, which, to reiterate, states that the nature of the deprivation in question determines the scope and intensity of protest mobilisation.

The POS perspective failed to fully address the study's second research question related to variation of protest across issue areas. Its *propensity for protest* variable provided a good explanation for why socioeconomic protests prevailed in quantity over all other types of protest in phases II and III but struggled to explain the same variation in Phase I, when the regime's propensity for repression was minimal.

The RD theory's *scope and intensity of deprivation* and *utilitarian justification for collective action* variables resolved the abovementioned puzzle. The extent of protest mobilisation around one of the four issue areas in Phase I depended on the scope of the public's deprivation in relation to a certain issue and to people's belief in the worthiness of protesting in addressing their grievances. Thus, socioeconomic protests were more widespread than other types of protest in Phase I due to the higher intensity of socioeconomic grievances and the public's stronger belief in the worthiness of protesting about socioeconomic issues. From looking at Figure 3.1 it can be seen that environmental and interethnic issues were not as intense as socioeconomic and political ones. Moreover, as was noted in Chapter 3, people were less concerned about environmental and interethnic concerns in the face of socioeconomic crisis and political chaos in the early 1990s. Acknowledging the theoretical fit of RD's explanation of protest variation across issue areas in the first phase, could we therefore expect it to satisfactorily address variation in the remaining phases?

Unfortunately, the crucial problems with the RD perspective that were identified earlier in this chapter continue to prevent us from accepting it. Although the intensity of deprivation variable offers a good explanation of prevalence of socioeconomic protests in phases II (improving living standards=protests decrease) and III (worsening living standards=protest increase), it fails to account for the drop in the number of political protests in Phase II (worsening political situation≠protest decrease) and III (worsening political situation≠protest decrease). The justification for collective action variable is also challenged by an inability to explain the growth in the number of socioeconomic and political protests in Phase III in conditions wherein people were reportedly very pessimistic about the effectiveness of protest in resolving their various grievances.

All in all, returning to the question posed above, the POS perspective failed to fully account for variations in protest mobilisation across four issue areas in all three time phases, resulting in the rejection of the study's second hypothesis. However, among the four competing theories it has the best match to the dependent variable. POS perspective's failure to address variation of protest across issue areas highlighted the significance of psychological factors of frustration with deprivation advocated by Gurr (1970) in mobilising individuals for collective action. It also confirmed the interconnectedness of all social movement theories in general, underlining an important link between psychological and structural theories in particular. By doing so, it emphasised the need for the development of a better macro-micro social movement theory that would connect 'structure and action' – an attempt undertaken by Opp (2009) and described in the Conclusion of this thesis.

Conclusion

The aim of this empirical chapter was to test the study's first and second hypotheses. It began by operationalising the study's independent variables and introducing causal models for each of the four theoretical perspectives. Then, using the process-tracing technique I matched the theoretical predictions with the empirical evidence. I thus found that the CAF perspective failed to match the empirical observations of the study's 12 cases, thus resulting in the rejection of thesis's first hypothesis. Resultantly, the POS perspective proved to be the theory that best described the cyclicity of protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan. The chapter's second part tested the second hypothesis, according to which differences in protest mobilisation outcomes between socioeconomic and other types of protest are determined by the regime's intolerance of political and politicised protests due to the challenge they represent to the regime's survival. The

research findings suggest that, while the POS theory was able to address variations between issue areas in phases II and III, it failed to account for such variation in early Phase I, resulting in the rejection of the second hypothesis. The public's deeper concern with socioeconomic grievances above all other types of grievance in Phase I suggested the applicability of the RD perspective's explanation for Phase I; however, it could not explain variation in the later two phases.

The next chapter will critically assess the democratisation process in Kazakhstan. Looking at it from three major democratisation perspectives, I show in more detail how I conclude that democratisation stalled in Kazakhstan in the mid-1990s.

Chapter 5

Assessing the Transition to Democracy

As was mentioned in the introductory chapter, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union (SU) not all the ex-Soviet states have managed to build effective democratic institutions. Despite state leaders' initial proclamations about their adherence to democratic ideals and parliaments' adoption of liberal laws and decrees, many post-Soviet states fell short of observers' expectations about the prospects of democratisation in these countries. Kazakhstan is one such country, which within two decades has achieved enormous success in rebuilding its economy and conducting market reforms, but whose achievements in democratising its political system never matched the progress made in the economic domain. According to Dave (2010b), Kazakhstan 'can succeed further and achieve sustainable success if it were to see democracy, elections, and political participation not as a threat, not at something that needs to be controlled, but something that needs to be promoted'. Promoting and advancing democracy is exactly what the Kazakhstani leadership embarked on doing in the years following independence in 1991. However, by the mid-1990s and onwards the development of nascent civil society as well as other democratic institutions was jeopardised by Kazakhstan's 'unfulfilled promise' – a term coined by Martha Brill Olcott (2002) to denote the stalled democratisation in Kazakhstan.

This chapter will assess Kazakhstan's transition to democracy in the 1990s, the point at which it reportedly started and stalled. Without such an assessment, this thesis would be driven by mere assumptions about the breakdown of democratic transition in Kazakhstan. Hard evidence of stalled transition is needed before any hypothesising can be carried out.

Hence, this chapter aims to provide such evidence. First, I start by presenting some crucial preconditions for democratisation advanced in the major theoretical perspectives in the literature on democratic transitions – modernisation, transition, and culture. This will be followed by a discussion of Robert Dahl’s ‘procedural minimalists’ of *polyarchy* – a political system that transition countries strive to achieve. Then, considering that not all transitions end up building effective democratic institutions, I will shed light on the issues of regime classification. Next, the chapter will proceed with an assessment of Kazakhstan’s democratisation from the abovementioned perspectives and evaluate it according to Dahl’s seven preconditions of democracy. Finally, a brief summary concludes.

Preconditions for Democratisation

Almost a century of scholarship on transitions to democracy has produced a mass of literature speculating on the necessary preconditions for democracy, its consolidation and survival, and the empirical tools to measure it. Authors ranging from scholars like Max Weber (1906) in the early twentieth century to present day policy-makers like Thomas Carothers (2002) have contributed to the theoretical and methodological scope of the democratisation literature, which in its classical stance views the process of democratisation as a political transition from a non-democratic to a democratic form of government. This literature is interested in the prerequisites for the successful institutionalisation of democracy, obstacles to democratisation, and democracy promotion and breakdown. The transition to democracy can be regarded as complete if a country possesses certain prerequisites and, moreover, meets the so-called ‘procedural minimal’ required for democracy to exist (Schmitter and Karl 1991). Before further

discussion of the prerequisites and criteria for democracy, I will first define the concept of democracy.

According to Schmitter and Karl, '[s]cholars hesitated to use the term democracy – without adding qualifying adjectives – because of the ambiguity that surrounds it' (1991: 75). The definition of democracy tends to vary from one scholar to another, who equate it with the presence of frequently held elections, majority rule or civic and political rights. Yet practice has shown that the mere inclusion of any of these institutions on its own does not constitute a valid definition of democracy. To illustrate, elections which are held frequently, but which also exclude certain parties or candidates, and which do not allow for the participation of certain portions of the population, are considered by some scholars as a sufficient condition for the existence of democracy – a phenomenon called an 'electoral democracy'. Hence, the majority of scholars unanimously agree that democracy does not consist of a single unique set of institutions; it is rather a combination and close interaction of institutions such as accountable government, competitive elections and robust civil society that make up the democratic regime. Schmitter and Karl define '[m]odern political democracy [as] a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives' (1991: 76). I prefer this definition to others because, unlike other definitions, it encompasses the fundamental attributes of the democracy concept in one place. Having briefly defined the concept of democracy, I now turn to the prerequisites for the evolution of democracy and its 'procedural minimal' attributes.

As was mentioned before, there is a large body of literature providing various explanations of democratisation patterns. Most of these explanations can be said to relate

or be part of two general theoretical approaches: modernisation and transition (Potter et al. 1997). This is not to say that the theoretical explanations do not converge. In fact, no explanation of democratisation process would be complete if analysed solely from the perspective of one approach; on the contrary, several different explanations, which are rather complementary in nature, should be taken into account (Huntington 1991; Vanhanen 1997).

The modernisation approach to democratisation associates the chances of successful democratisation with a country's socioeconomic development. In his essay on the social requisites of democracy, Lipset (1959), a classic proponent of this approach, underlined the significant influence of economic development on the chances of democratic transition. He maintains that the modernisation, industrialisation and urbanisation that result from economic growth produce the educated and politically active citizens crucial for the well-being of democracy. Referring to their own empirical evidence, Marks and Diamond confirmed Lipset's original findings by asserting that the level of economic development 'continues to be the single most powerful predictor of the likelihood of democracy'(1992: 6). Diamond proceeded to sum up Lipset's approach as 'the more well-to-do the people of a country, on average, the more likely they will favour, achieve, and maintain a democratic system for their country' (1992: 468). Despite its growing popularity, however, Lipset's thesis has received numerous criticisms regarding the issues of causality, methodology and general explanatory power. Thus, Przeworski and Limongi (1997) claim that the modernisation theory has no empirical basis on which to claim that development increases the likelihood of a poor dictatorship undergoing a democratic transition –what they call the 'endogenous' version of modernisation theory. Instead, they assert that, once developed, democracies will be less likely to revert to dictatorships – an 'exogenous' version. Hence, they conclude that development does not

increase the probability of a country's successful democratisation, but rather decreases the chances of its pre-existing democracy becoming a dictatorship. To refute the theoretical critique of Przeworski and Limongi, Boix and Stokes argue that Przeworski and Limongi do not provide a theory that would draw a conceptual distinction between the endogenous and exogenous versions of modernisation theory, and hence they cannot claim that development induces actors in democracies to sustain that system and does not induce actors in dictatorships to change to democracy (Boix and Stokes 2003: 518). Undoubtedly, Lipset's explanation of democratisation laid the foundation for hundreds of studies conducted in the similar vein and, thus, it plays a crucial role in the contemporary literature on democratisation.

Unlike the theories of the modernisation approach, transition theories of democratisation stress the paramount role of political actors in shaping the processes of democratisation and democracy consolidation. Evolving on the verge of the third wave of democratisation in Europe, Rustow's (1970) seminal article 'Transition to democracy' was among the first to challenge Lipset's modernisation argument. Rustow claims that instead of studying a country's preconditions of democracy in the present tense, researchers need to adopt a historical approach, 'marked by holistic consideration of different countries as case studies' (Potter et al. 1997: 14). Moreover, he emphasises the need to question 'how a democracy comes into being in the first place' (1970: 340) as opposed to Lipset's inquiry into the structural factors enhancing democratisation.

The actor-centric transition approach posits that democracy emerges as a result of four main phases. First, political elites must have a common understanding of the borders of the state which must be sovereign and characterised by a national unity (Linz and Stepan 1996b; McFaul 2002; Potter et al. 1997). As a result of divisions within the ruling class,

the next phase is characterised by political struggle between the older elites aiming at preserving the status quo and the new opposing elite demanding a significant place in the polity. This phase is usually accompanied by socioeconomic conflicts that prolong it to such an extent that some countries never make it to the next phase (Potter et al. 1997: 14). Countries that escape the fate of violent conflicts and where elites decide to compromise over power-sharing arrangements pass to the next phase. The third and fourth phases of democratisation have benefited a lot from the contributions of a four volume study edited by O'Donnell and his colleagues in 1986 – *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*. As democratisation can stall and revert back to authoritarianism, these transition scholars distinguish between the initial phases of democratisation (phase 1 and 2) and the consolidation of democracy (phase 3 and 4). According to the model of O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986), the success or failure of democratisation depends on the choices made by four types of actors in the third phase: soft-liners and hard-liners within the ruling elite, and moderates and radicals within the opposition. It is believed that a strategic interaction between these actors leads to various regime types (McFaul 2002). Thus, coalitions formed by the regime's soft-liners and the opposition's moderates lead to a democratic outcome, which then has to be consolidated in the fourth phase of the transition. Linz and Stepan define a consolidated democracy as a 'political regime in which democracy as a complex system of institutions, rules, and patterned incentives and disincentives has become, in a phrase, "the only game in town"' (Linz and Stepan 1996a: 15). For democracies to consolidate, they argue, first, there must be a state. Second, legitimate rulers must be governing democratically according to the rule of law. Finally, there can be no consolidation unless democratisation has been brought to completion. For that, the political regime has to meet the seven 'procedural minimalis' of democracy

advanced by Robert Dahl (1989) in his seminal work *Democracy and its Critics*, which I will discuss further in the thesis.

Naturally, explanations of democratic transitions are not limited only to the modernisation and transition approaches. There are theories that either grew out of those approaches or developed to complement their explanatory power. Thus, cultural explanations of democratisation which grew in importance after their emergence in the 1960s are closely related to the modernisation approach and substantially contribute to the transition approach. To illustrate, Lipset's modernisation theory associates a country's socioeconomic development with increases in the public's level of education, which then breeds the public's 'specific political orientations – attitudes toward the political system and its various parts, and attitudes toward the role of the self in the system' (Almond and Verba 1963: 13). For democracy to flourish, these political orientations, or political cultures, must be characterised by the leaders' and citizens' strong support of democratic ideals, values and practices (Dahl 1998). Furthermore, a number of scholars (Almond and Verba 1963; Inglehart 1988; Putnam 1993) argue that countries with high levels of civic culture attitudes, such as 'belief in one's ability to influence political decisions, feelings of positive affect for the political system, and the belief that other citizens are trustworthy, are expected to be more likely to adopt and sustain democracy over time than countries with low levels, regardless of socioeconomic development' (Muller and Seligson 1994: 635). Despite the transition approach's neglect of cultural explanations (Fleron Jr. and Ahl 1998; Potter et al. 1997), both approaches overlap in the place where consolidation of democracy partially depends on society's widely accepted 'belief that democratic procedures and institutions are the most appropriate way to govern collective life, and when support for antisystem alternatives is quite small' (Linz and Stepan 1996a: 16). As we can see then, all

theoretical approaches to explaining democratisation are interdependent, which confirms the statement that democratic transitions should never be explored from just one perspective.

Having discussed the preconditions of democratisation offered by the major theoretical approaches, I now turn to specifying the seven ‘procedural minimalisms’ that the political regime must meet to be regarded as – using the terminology of Dahl – a *polyarchy*. Dahl identifies a polyarchy as a ‘regime with two dimensions: contestation – permissible opposition, public competition; and participation – right to participate in public contestation’ (Dahl 1971: 4). Being the crucial characteristics of polyarchy, their presence or absence defines the typology of a regime. Hence, countries with frequently held free and fair elections and where citizens have voting rights are polyarchies; countries with neither of the two characteristics are labelled by Dahl as closed hegemonies. Contestation and participation are premised on seven conditions:

1. *Control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in elected officials:* this condition presupposes the accountability of government to its citizens who control the government decision-making through elected officials.
2. *Elected officials are chosen and peacefully removed in relatively frequent, fair, and free elections in which coercion is quite limited:* this condition guarantees the accountability of elected officials to the electorate. For elections to qualify as democratic, voters must have fair knowledge about the available choices, no oppositional party or candidate must be excluded from campaigning, electoral process must be free of fraud, and voters must be insulated from violence or threat of it in exercising a free choice (Schedler 2002).

3. *Practically all adults have the right to vote in these elections:* in the contemporary world, democracy demands universal suffrage based on the logic of equality (Dahl 1998; Schedler 2002). No citizen must be formally or informally deprived of his/her right to vote on the grounds of religious, ethnic, racial and any other identity.
4. *Most adults also have the right to run for the public office for which candidates run in these elections:* the right to run for the public office must be guaranteed to all adults except those who fall into special categories such as convicted felons and those afflicted by severe mental illness (Schedler 2002: 40).
5. *Citizens have an effectively enforced right to freedom of expression, particularly political expression, including criticism of the officials, the conduct of the government, the prevailing political, economic, and social system, and the dominant ideology:* in addition to guaranteed political rights, democracies must respect civil rights, meaning citizens can freely express themselves without the danger of severe punishment.
6. *They also have access to alternative sources of information that are not monopolised by the government or any other single group:* because a free and independent mass media enhances the functioning of civil society, democracies must ensure they are protected by law.
7. *Finally, they have an effectively enforced right to form and join autonomous associations, including political associations, such as political parties and interest groups, that attempt to influence the government by competing in elections and by other peaceful means:* this right assures the development of pluralism that is vital for both political contestation and participation.

The political regime can be regarded as democratic to the extent that the country has two dimensions of polyarchy which meet the seven 'procedural minimalists' outlined above. Consequently, a regime which has political competition and participation, and which meets Dahl's seven procedural minimalists of democracy, is more democratic than a regime lacking two dimensions and failing to meet either or all democratic criteria.

However, while it was relatively easy to classify regime types according to such criteria back in the early years of the 'third wave' of democratisation, contemporary attempts at regime classification have become more problematic due to ambiguous democratisation patterns around the globe. Diamond maintains that despite the existence of numerous definitions and indices of democracy which are meant to help classify political regimes, scholars 'still struggle to classify ambiguous regimes' (2002: 21).

On a democratic continuum, ambiguous regimes lie between well-established liberal democracies that meet all seven conditions of democracy and outright dictatorships that meet neither of those conditions. What makes them ambiguous is the fact that they adopt some of the features of democracy such as regular elections and permitted opposition, yet abandon the rest such as respect for civil and political rights. These are the majority of third-wave countries that, according to Carothers, 'have not achieved relatively well-functioning democracy or do not seem to be deepening or advancing whatever democratic progress they have made' (2002: 9). Scholarly attempts have been made to classify them as semi-democracies (Diamond et al. 1989), formal democracies, competitive authoritarian (Levitsky and Way 2002), façade democracies, pseudo-democracies or 'delegative democracies' (O'Donnell 1994). Whichever classification is preferred, the fact is that the democratisation processes in those countries stagnated somewhere at the beginning of the consolidation phase and thus these countries have

entered a political ‘twilight zone’ – a term used by Diamond (1999) to denote transition countries that are neither completely democratic nor authoritarian.

Carothers’ analysis of political twilight zones or what he calls ‘grey zone’ countries asserts that all of them can be characterised by either of two mutually exclusive political syndromes: feckless pluralist and dominant-power. Feckless pluralist countries have a fair amount of political freedom, regular elections and, most importantly, the alternation of power between different political parties. However, regularly changing government and parliament composition does not result in a change to the state’s socioeconomic policies, which are usually ineffective in addressing social grievances in the areas of education, crime prevention and healthcare. Due to this, the majority of people in feckless pluralist systems view politics as corrupt and elite-dominated causing little or no political participation beyond voting. The problem of political participation is further exacerbated by the public’s lack of trust in political parties who are viewed as ineffective in bringing about any change in public policies. Indeed, ‘alternation of power seems only to trade the country’s problems back and forth from one hapless side to the other’ (Carothers 2002: 10). Consequently, the public’s disillusionment with politics and the state’s chronically tenuous socioeconomic policies result in a widening gap between state and society.

Like countries with a feckless pluralist syndrome, hybrid regimes with dominant-power syndrome have a relatively open political system with frequently held elections permitting the participation of opposition groups. However, unlike in feckless pluralist states, the alternation of power is virtually impossible because a country leader or ‘ruling party monopolizes the political arena, using coercion, patronage, media control, and other means to deny formally legal opposition parties any real chance of competing for

power' (Diamond 2002: 25). Such severe monopolisation of the political arena causes a diluting of the distinction between the state and the ruling political party. In contrast to feckless pluralist regimes where elections are usually free and fair, to maintain its stronghold on power the ruling parties in dominant-power regimes manipulate the electoral process to ensure their victory over the opposition. The opposition in its turn has to cope not only with election rigging but also with negative public opinion, which considers it ineffective in challenging the ruling party. In addition, an excessively long period in power for a single political force breeds widespread corruption and clientelism, which weakens the country's economic performance (Carothers 2002). Due to the relative openness of the political system, dominant-power systems try to tolerate and take measures to address public criticism of their policies.

Carothers argues that feckless pluralist countries are mostly concentrated in Latin America – Nicaragua, Ecuador, Guatemala and Panama began their transition to democracy with an already existing set of parties, although the governments of these countries were struggling with underperforming state structures. Despite variations of feckless pluralism in those and many other hybrid regimes, they all 'share a common condition... – the whole class of political elites, though plural and competitive, are profoundly cut off from the citizenry, rendering political life an ultimately hollow, unproductive exercise' (Carothers 2002: 11). Dominant-power regimes proliferated in the mid-1980s across sub-Saharan Africa, the former SU and the Middle East. Thus, Carothers exemplifies South Africa and Russia as countries with a certain degree of political openness and nominal political contestation; however, both of them lack alternation of power and constantly remain under the lengthy rule of a single political force. Both of these situations are quite stable and countries do not easily get out of them as the ruling elite is strongly interested in preserving the political status quo. However,

the presence of certain factors may push these hybrid regimes in either of two directions: toward further democratisation or toward dictatorship. As I argue in this chapter, popular protest mobilisation is one such factor that conditions the fate of democratisation.

To sum up, the chapter began with Karl and Schmitter's definition of democracy. Then I presented two major theoretical approaches to explaining democratisation. Having concluded that democratisation studies should not be restricted only to those two perspectives, I mentioned cultural explanations of democratisation as an important alternative perspective which largely contributes to the explanatory power of the modernisation and transition perspectives. Next, I listed the seven conditions a country must meet to be seen as a polyarchy. I argued that regime classification based on those seven conditions had been easier before the upsurge of third-wave transition countries whose ambiguous democratisation patterns made regime classification a much harder task. Stuck in the transition from dictatorship to liberal democracy, these hybrid regimes entered a political grey zone. Carothers maintains that these countries possess either a feckless pluralist or dominant-power syndrome. According to his classification, a long period in power for a single ruler as well as dubious elections has earned Kazakhstan the status of a dominant-power regime. The next section will trace the evolution of democratisation in Kazakhstan since its independence up to the point where it stalled.

The Unfulfilled Promise of Kazakhstan

Soon after Kazakhstan declared its independence in December 1991, President Nazarbayev stated that the ultimate goal for Kazakhstan was a transition to market economy and democracy. Accepting that no free society with a market economy can be conceived without free democratic and political transformations (Nazarbaev 2006), Nazarbayev urged the adoption of a constitution that would introduce separation of

powers in the government, establish a professional parliament, and guarantee fundamental democratic freedoms (Gleason 2003). These democratic endeavours on the part of Nazarbayev gave Kazakhstan an international reputation as a post-communist country with huge potential to carry out a successful transition to democracy (Gleason 2003; Olcott 2002). Subsequently, around two decades of socioeconomic and political change have shown that Kazakhstan has succeeded in implementing socioeconomic reforms and integrating into the world economy; however, its progress in political liberalisation has been criticised for its declarative character. To illustrate, Kazakhstan's constitution and legislation determine the existence of key democratic institutions such as popularly elected and accountable government, protection of civil and political liberties, and observance of the rule of law. However, as Gleason puts it, the mere presence of these democratic institutions 'do[-es] not necessarily equate with democratic process' (2003: 53). In this respect, using Olcott's (2002) terminology, Kazakhstan has not fulfilled its promise of building viable democratic institutions that would work in practice, but not on paper.

In this section we shall see how the initial democratisation processes set out by the Kazakh government in the early 1990s were soon jeopardised by the reappearance of authoritarian practices and the simultaneous closing up of the political system (Melvin 2009). Taking into account the three major theoretical perspectives dominant in the democratisation literature, I will consider how each of those perspectives views democratic transition in Kazakhstan. Next, using Dahl's procedural minimalism of democracy I will evaluate the 'democraticness' of the political regime in Kazakhstan in the period between 1991 and 1997, which is characterised by the 'starting and stopping' of democratisation.

Democratisation in Kazakhstan from the Perspective of Democratisation Theories

Proponents of the modernisation approach to democratisation posit that a country's socioeconomic development is correlated with the chances that it will sustain democracy. Lipset's classic study (1959) of the social requisites of democracy outlined several indicators of economic development – wealth, industrialisation, urbanisation and education. The average mean of these draws a dividing line between stable democracies and stable dictatorships in English-speaking and Latin American countries. Thus, Lipset concluded that wealthier, highly industrialised and urbanised countries with a highly literate citizenry are more democratic than countries at the other end of the spectrum. By providing empirical evidence of a correlation between the indicators of economic development and democratisation, Lipset's study, however, omitted a discussion of the causal mechanisms connecting his independent variables with democratisation (Potter et al. 1997). To address the scholarly criticism he attracted by this omission, he later published his famous book – *The Political Man* (1960) – where he introduced a set of presumptions regarding the causal mechanism of the socioeconomic requisites of democracy.

According to Lipset, a country's economic development increases the personal *wealth* of citizens, transforming the 'pyramid-shaped social stratification system, in which the majority of the population is lower-class and poor, to a diamond shape, in which the majority of the population is middle-class and relatively well-off' (Muller 1995). The growing middle class is less susceptible to extremist political ideologies and rhetoric and, hence, provides a major support base for moderate pro-democratic political parties. Undoubtedly, economic development directly affects a country's degree of *industrialisation* which, provided that it is advanced enough, contributes to the further

development of information technologies and mass media; '[t]his in turn, accelerates the spread of literacy' (Lerner 1964: 60). The literacy rate is one of Lipset's measures of *education*, which 'presumably broadens men's outlooks, enables them to understand the need for norms of tolerance, restrains them from adhering to extremist and monistic doctrines, and increases their capacity to make rational electoral choices' (1959: 79). Hence, as was mentioned earlier, better-educated citizens are more pro-democratic than those with lower literacy rates. Finally, *urbanisation*, being the product of industrialisation, leads to the growth of an urban middle class, which, according to Huntington, is the 'the most active supporter of democratization'(Gilbert 1999; Huntington 1991: 67).

Each of Lipset's four indicators of economic development had several measures such as per capita income and persons per motor vehicle as indicators of wealth, proportion of males in agriculture and per capita energy consumption for industrialisation, primary and higher education enrollment for education, and percent in metropolitan areas for urbanisation. To assess democratisation in Kazakhstan from the perspective of the modernisation approach, I picked one of the measures from each of the four indicators and matched them with the political rights and civil liberties score assigned to Kazakhstan by Freedom House.

Table 5-1: Cross tabulation of Lipset's development indicators and Freedom House scores for Kazakhstan

Year	Percentage of urbanites	Percentage literate	GDP per capita (USD)	Percentage of males in agriculture	Freedom House score			Status
					Political rights	Civil liberties	Democracy score	
1991	57.3	...	...	...	5	4	...	PF
1992	57.2	...	168	...	5	5	...	PF
1993	56.9	...	696	...	6	4	...	PF
1994	56.1	...	737	...	6	5	...	NF
1995	55.7	98.7	1052	...	6	5	...	NF
1996	55.7	...	1349	...	6	5	...	NF
1997	55.8	...	1445	...	6	5	5.30	NF
1998	56	...	1468	...	6	5	5.35	NF
1999	56.3	99.5	1130	...	6	5	5.38	NF
2000	56.4	99	1229	...	6	5	5.38	NF
2001	56.6	...	1490	36	6	5	5.71	NF
2002	56.8	...	1654	35	6	5	5.96	NF
2003	56.9	...	2062	36	6	5	6.17	NF
2004	57	99.5	2862	34	6	5	6.25	NF
2005	57.1	99	3785	33	6	5	6.29	NF
2006	57.1	99	5362	32	6	5	6.39	NF
2007	57.4	99.6	6748	32	6	5	6.39	NF
2008	53.1*	...	8513	30	6	5	6.39	NF
2009	53.1*	...	...	...	6	5	6.32	NF

*: According to the 2006 Law No. 184-III 'On administrative-territorial composition of the Republic of Kazakhstan' in effect since 1 January 2007, urban villages, which are not in direct jurisdiction to cities of republican, district and regional significance, are transformed into villages.

Source: Kazakhstan Statistics Agency, UN Human Development Reports, and Freedom House country ratings.

As can be seen in Table 5.1, there is an almost-equal distribution of population in cities and villages, which according to Lipset's measure of urbanisation makes Kazakhstan's degree of urbanisation favourable for the success of democratic transition. There has hardly been any change in urbanisation as well as in the literacy rate in Kazakhstan since independence in 1991. Like most post-communist countries which inherited a legacy of high-quality Soviet education, Kazakhstan possesses a highly literate population (Daly 2008; Dave 2010a). In contrast to unchanged levels of urbanisation and education, there is a considerable growth of per capita income from around US\$200 in 1991 to over US\$8,000 in 2008. Plus, the share of males in agriculture has dropped from 36% in 2001 to 30% in 2008. Both of these measures illustrate increases in the country's wealth and

level of industrialisation. Overall, Kazakhstan's socioeconomic development since its independence has witnessed a rapid growth of the middle class, which some scholars estimate to range from 18% to 60% of the population (Daly 2008; S. F. Starr 2006b).

From the perspective of the modernisation approach, Kazakhstan seems to possess all the social requisites for successful transition to democracy; however, a quick glance at Kazakhstan's Freedom House scores in Table 5.1 shows an inverse relationship between modernisation and democracy. Instead of democracy's growth, modernisation caused its decline. As a result of its democracy score being between 6 and 7, Freedom House labelled Kazakhstan a consolidated authoritarian regime. In that respect then, Kazakhstan repeats the fate of some Latin American countries in the 1960s and 1970s whose economic development and inherent modernisation resulted in the decline of democracy (Muller 1995). These are Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mexico in Latin America, Lebanon and Turkey in the Middle East, and Greece in Europe. To address the contradictory relationship between economic development and the level of democracy, Muller (1995) thus suggested income inequality as an additional indicator of economic development that could explain variations in the patterns of democratisation.

As was mentioned earlier, transition scholars stress the paramount role of political actors during a country's democratic transition. As argued by Munck and Leff (1997), the identity of actors who drive the transition process and the strategies they employ define the mode of transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Thus, through the strategies of negotiation, crafting and compromise, soft-liners and hard-liners within the *ancien régime* and radicals and moderates within the opposition set out the terms and characteristics of transition. Although strategic interaction between the incumbent

government and its challengers can produce many transition scenarios, the transition literature has mainly focused on pacted transitions.

At the core of a pacted transition scenario is the distribution of power within the regime. Hence, based on the analysis of the third-wave transitions of the 1970s and 1980s, democratisation scholars maintain that democracy is more likely to emerge if the ‘balance of power between supporters and opponents of the authoritarian regime was relatively equal and also uncertain’ (McFaul 2002: 213). In this case neither of the parties is strong enough to impose its will through coercion on the other party in order to attain its first objective. Because of equal distribution of power and the resulting stalemate, these opposing sides decide to negotiate over power-sharing arrangements – pacts – which are later on institutionalised as a set of checks and balances in a new democracy. For opposing sides’ the decision to compromise and bargain over difficult choices, McFaul labelled this transition scenario a *cooperative* model of regime change. According to this model, pacted transitions are more likely to emerge in democracies than non-pacted ones.

In his article on post-communist transitions to democracy, McFaul (2002) argues that the abovementioned pacted mode of transition is fully applicable to the third-wave transitions of the 1970s and 1980s but not to post-communist transitions of the 1990s, which he views as fourth-wave transitions. Thus, he maintains that ‘the causal pathways of the third wave do not produce the “right” outcomes in the fourth wave transitions from communist rule’ (2002: 221). Unlike in the third wave, fourth-wave transitions are characterised by an unequal distribution of power between the ruling elite and its challengers. Consequently, the fate of democratisation in those countries is largely determined by the ideological orientation of the party advantaged by the imbalance of

power (McFaul 2002: 213-14). Since the unequal distribution of power in fourth-wave transitions results not in cooperation but in confrontation, McFaul classified these transitions into a *non-cooperative* model of regime change, which is made up of three modes of transition: stalemated transitions, transition from below and transition from above.

While stalemated and pacted transitions have resulted in successful democratisation in some Latin American and Southern European states, such transitions have instead led to partial democracy or dictatorship in the post-communist arena. In states like Russia and Tajikistan transition was not a process of bargains between soft-liners and moderates but rather a confrontation between the regime's hard-liners and the opposition's radicals, which fought until one side won (i.e. a zero-sum game). Therefore, democracy emerges in the post-communist arena not as a result of pacted transitions based on a balance of power but rather as a result of open confrontation based on an imbalance of power in favour of opposition (McFaul 2002: 222).

This brings us to the second mode of transition – transition from below or a revolutionary transition – where a greater role is played not by the opposition's moderates and radicals but by the popular masses. The role of popular non-elite mobilisation during the transition to democracy is somewhat controversial and confusing (Bermeo 1997). Thus, the classical transition literature views mass mobilisation as being antithetical to an ordered shift toward democracy (Huntington 1984; McFaul 2002). As such, back in 1990 Karl posited that 'no stable political democracy has resulted from regime transitions in which mass actors have gained control, even momentarily, over traditional ruling classes' (1990: 8: original emphasis). On the contrary, Gill (2006) and McFaul (2002) argue that it was the success of popular mobilisation fuelled by nationalistic sentiments that resulted

in a successful post-communist transition to democracy in Eastern Europe. Overall, while excessive mobilisation of mass actors was detrimental for third-wave transitions, transitions from below were instrumental to the success of democratisation in the fourth wave (e.g. Czechoslovakia, Estonia, East Germany and Latvia).

Finally, in the third-wave setting, transition from above would denote a pacted mode of transition where opposing sides cooperatively opt to steer the country toward democracy; however, in the fourth-wave setting such a transition would mean victory for the *ancien régime* rulers over the opposition – thus resulting in a transition to dictatorship (McFaul 2002). Contrary to the second mode of transition, an asymmetrical distribution of power in this mode favours anti-democratic post-communist governments which stall the early processes of democratisation and result in them reverting to authoritarianism. As can be seen, in all three modes of fourth-wave transition, regime change occurred as a result of non-cooperative strategic interaction between opposing sides with almost no room for bargaining and compromise. In such cases, ‘one side took advantage of its more powerful position to craft institutions that benefited itself more than they benefited the weak’ (Ibid.: 224)

Having discussed various key transition scenarios advanced in the transition literature, I will now examine how the transition approach views democratisation processes in Kazakhstan. According to McFaul, Kazakhstan is a post-communist country undergoing a fourth-wave transition. Throughout its presence in the SU, Kazakhstan’s internal power distribution always favoured the ruling elite; however, in the early 1990s the distribution of power achieved a more or less equal share between the ruling elite and its challengers. Thus, the easing of political repressions, the holding of the first ever semi-competitive parliamentary elections in 1990 (Olcott 2002: 92) and the adoption of the 1993

constitution meeting basic democratic standards indicated a power shift in favour of pro-democratic forces. Numerous political parties (such as 'Azat' and the 'Social-Democratic Party of Kazakhstan') and voluntary and non-governmental organisations (such as 'Green Salvation' and 'Nevada-Semei'), which were established during the last years of the SU, were vociferously pushing the communist leadership of Kazakhstan to declare independence from the SU and pursue political liberalisation. At the same time, the public's growing socioeconomic grievances about deteriorating living standards resulted in simultaneous growth of protest sentiments, which eventually triggered a wave of protest demonstrations, pickets and hunger strikes across the country. Contrary to the opinion of early democratisation writers, these mobilised masses often employed confrontational and uncooperative tactics which promoted rather than impeded democratic change (McFaul 2002: 223). Whatever tactics the masses employed, however, the mere existence of massive popular mobilisation signalled to the incumbent regime that the balance of power was shifting in favour of the opposition. Hence, the regime had to recognise the growing strength of the opposition and let them into the policy-making process via the holding of parliamentary elections in the unicameral Supreme Soviets in 1990 and the Supreme Council in 1994.

However, the period of bargaining and compromise over economic and political reforms did not last long. The first relatively heterogeneous parliament of 1990 started to experience numerous disputes over the implementation of socioeconomic policies. Eventually, the parliament reached a deadlock between supporters of Nazarbayev's reforms and those who favoured the preservation of the Soviet economic system (Gleason 2003: 54-55). Since the 1993 constitution vested President Nazarbayev with a 'decisive voice in agenda setting, policy, budgeting, and dispute resolution' (ibid.), in December 1993 he decided to suspend the parliament, which reportedly was the most

democratic of all parliaments in the history of Kazakhstan (Nurkadilov 2005). The dissolution of parliament marked the end of the country's first experience with coalition politics and the country's shift toward a 'transition from above' scenario. Because '[t]he Kazakh president wanted the legislature to be a rubber stamp for the economic decisions taken by his government' (Olcott 2002: 103), the subsequent parliamentary elections of 1994 were manipulated so as to ensure the victory of only pro-presidential parties (Olcott 1997). Despite the considerable progress made in the area of political liberalisation, '[o]ver time, President Nazarbayev and his close supporters have grown more fearful of the vagaries of political control that are associated with grassroots political parties and voluntary political organizations, not to mention those that result from a competitive political party system' (ibid.: 95). This resulted in the resurfacing of authoritarian practices in the shape of imposed restrictions on freedom of the press and speech and creation of obstacles to the formation and functioning of opposition political parties and independent NGOs. Consolidation of unchecked powers within the presidency was further exacerbated by the adoption of a new constitution in a referendum in August 1995 (Dave 2008; Melvin 2009). Consequently, by the mid-1990s Kazakhstan became noticeably less democratic than Russia (Pomfret 2005). All in all, according to the transition from above scenario, the weakening of the opposition and the strengthening of the anti-democratic ruling elite due to unequal distribution of power meant that Kazakhstan's early progress in democratisation was rolling back to authoritarianism.

According to the cultural approach to democratisation, successful transition to democracy depends on the presence of certain public values, attitudes and beliefs conducive to democracy. Since political cultures may or may not be congruent with the structure of a political system, Almond and Verba (1963) claim that only countries with a civic culture can succeed in building and maintaining democracy. Civic culture can be

broadly defined as a type of political culture wherein citizens believe in their ability to affect policy decisions and are supportive of democratic norms and practices. Additionally, civic culture emphasises citizens' civic engagement, which is usually abundant in societies with high stocks of social capital. Putnam (1993) defines social capital as a set of connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arises from them. By bonding and bridging various different social groups and networks, social capital mobilises solidarity, fosters interpersonal trust, facilitates cooperation and results in the public's active involvement in politics. To test the effect of political culture on institutional performance, Putnam studied Italy's 20 regions. He concluded that the performances of political institutions in these regions depended on regional variation in the political culture. Thus, regions with high levels of social capital had larger instances of civic engagement, resulting in them having better institutional performance than regions characterised by lower levels of interpersonal trust, social cohesion and general sense of civic community (Jackman and Miller 1996).

Another supporter of the cultural approach, Ronald Inglehart (1988), argues that studies of democratisation would be incomplete without due consideration being given to cultural factors. In his 1988 cross-national study of political culture he concluded that countries with higher levels of civic culture – 'a coherent syndrome of personal life satisfaction, political satisfaction, interpersonal trust and support for the existing social order' (Inglehart: 1203) – are much more likely to develop and maintain democratic institutions than those with lower levels. The concept of political culture and its influence on democratisation has been widely criticised for ambiguities surrounding its theoretical, methodological and causal foundations (Muller and Seligson 1994). Nevertheless, the works of the abovementioned authors and scholars working in a similar vein have made

political culture an important and undeniable factor in determining economic and political change.

The mere presence of a society imbued with civic culture values would not necessarily result in a flourishing of democracy. To achieve it, democratic political culture must be congruent with a country's democratic institutional design. According to Eckstein's theory of congruence, '[g]overnments perform well to the extent that their authority patterns are congruent with the authority patterns of other units of society' (Eckstein et al. 1998: 4). In other words, provided that there is a congruence of authority patterns shared by the regime and the public, the government – regardless of its type – performs well. To illustrate, in his study of Russian political culture, Bova maintains that 'Russian authority patterns tend to be described as autocratic, authoritarian, and premised on the overwhelming priority allocated to order (*poryadok*) over freedom' (1998: 182). In a similar fashion, he highlights Russian society's fear of chaos and disorder, which made it willingly accept and internalise the need for authoritarianism. Moreover, 'a strong and largely non-accountable Russian presidency might be viewed as congruent with the Russian penchant for strong, personalized leadership and with the emphasis in the political culture on order and effective government' (ibid.: 190). Due to the congruence of authoritarian political culture and autocratic authority patterns, democracy in Russia still remains as a distant goal. Hence, Eckstein (1996) argues that '*the speed with which democratization can be carried out successfully varies directly with the extent to which preexisting culture and social structure are conducive to it*' (original emphasis: 16).

Having presented the major cultural explanations of democratisation, I will now apply them in the context of Kazakhstan's early transition to democracy. As mentioned before and suggested in the Freedom House data, early political liberalisation stalled by the mid-

1990s and gave way to further consolidation of power in the executive marred by authoritarian tendencies. One of the most cited reasons for the stalling of democratisation is President Nazarbayev's belief that 'as Asians the Kazakhs are not disposed by history or culture to be democratic and that popular rule could empower nationalist demagogues, secessionists, communists, or Islamic radicals and put the future of the nation – not to mention economic reform at risk' (Olcott 2002: 89). Additionally, inspired by the economic and political successes of South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, Nazarbayev in the mid-1990s announced Kazakhstan's adherence to the Asian approach to development, according to which economic transformation should precede political reforms – referred to in shorthand as 'first economics, then politics' (Cohen 2008: 21). The government's adoption of this approach meant a political crackdown on the opposition and independent media. In an attempt to justify growing consolidation of power in the presidency, Nazarbayev argued that, without such consolidation, 'Kazakhstan would fail to develop legal infrastructure necessary to secure private property and attract foreign investments' (Olcott 2002: 21). This, coupled with his belief that local political traditions are not compatible with the workings of democracy, led to the adoption of a more restrictive constitution in August 1995, the dissolution of the 1994 parliament, and extension of the President's terms until 2000 through a public referendum held in March 1995. Interestingly, none of those events hinting at a resurgence of dictatorial practices attracted significant opposition from the population; on the contrary, the Kazakh leadership boasted about its public support by referring to public opinion polls which showed that people were more concerned with the maintenance of public order and stability than with having a strong say in how their country is ruled (Gurevich 1993b; Olcott 2002: 22). Indeed, according to one poll held in the early 1990s, 'only 4–5 percent of the population saw promoting democratic processes

as a top priority, while over 60 percent primarily wanted a stable lifestyle, peace and personal security' (Cohen 2008: 21).

What is behind the public's indifference to the stalling democratic transition of the mid-1990s and its concern with order and stability rather than rule of law and civil rights? The answer to this question lies in the specifics of the local political culture. If so, according to a cultural explanation of democratisation, Kazakhs would not have been indifferent to the breakdown of democratisation had its political culture been characterised as democratic or civic. As was mentioned earlier, people sharing civic culture values believe in their ability to affect policy and are supportive of democratic norms and practices. Since voting in elections is one of the ways through which citizens affect decision-making, the 1995 public opinion poll carried out by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) found that, despite high election turnout in Kazakhstan (73% and 79% in the 1994 and 1995 parliamentary elections respectively), 46% of respondents stated that the people of Kazakhstan cannot change the situation in the country by participating in elections; on the contrary, 42% state that people can affect decision-making through voting. Moreover, the survey showed that voting in Kazakhstan is mainly seen 'as a duty of a citizen, not a privilege or a process whereby citizens can affect decision-making and have a voice in the country's course of development' (Skoczylas et al. 1995: 4). Lack of empowerment and scepticism about elections can be understood by considering the level of public trust in the state's legal institutions in general and in the electoral body in particular. Thus, a nationwide absolute majority of respondents lack confidence in the courts (51%), public prosecutors (52%) and the militia (67%). Moreover, a lack of confidence in the Central Election Commission is evident in the 42% of respondents claiming that post-Soviet elections are still managed

by the same people who managed elections in Soviet times⁶¹ and the 34% asserting that there is a mix of old and new people. Only a minority (8%) believe that new people replaced the old. The lack of a strong civic culture in Kazakhstan in the early 1990s is further evidenced by the weak public support for democratic norms and practices. Thus, a 1995 IFES survey shows an almost-equal split of respondents who agreed and disagreed with the notion that ‘to establish order and discipline, it is necessary to limit democratic rights and freedoms of citizens’ (44% and 45% respectively).

Societies possessing civic culture values are also expected to be actively involved in politics through the expression of interest in politics, regular participation in elections, and identification with political parties and interest groups. A 1996 IFES survey marked a significant rise in the number of people showing no interest in politics from 51% in 1995 to 61% in 1996 (Askeeva 1997). Another indicator of the public’s interest in politics is respondents’ knowledge of their elected deputies. 70% of respondents stated that they did not know the names of the deputies representing their areas, and only 24% could name the deputies they voted for. Such a great level of political alienation is associated with the public’s discontent with the country’s poor socioeconomic situation in the early 1990s and pessimism about one’s ability to improve one’s life through active involvement in politics. Interestingly, politically alienated citizens frequently do take part in elections. However, as was mentioned earlier, despite regular and widespread participation in the national elections, only around 40% of IFES 1995 survey respondents believed that they could influence decision-making through voting. I argued earlier that it is this lack of trust in the elections and state institutions that results in voters lacking a sense of empowerment. It is furthermore this same lack of trust in political parties and various civic society organisations that causes citizens’ low level of identification with

⁶¹ For a thorough overview of elites in post-communist Kazakhstan, see Cummings (2005).

political organisations (Askeeva 1997; Skoczylas et al. 1995) – when asked with which political party one identifies himself/herself, 43% of respondents said that they do not identify themselves with any party. Taken together, a low level of interest in politics, lack of trust in state institutions and weak identification with political organisations highlights the presence of low stocks of social capital, and hence the apparent ‘uncivicness’ of the political culture in Kazakhstan.

Finally, the incongruence between post-Soviet political culture and the first democratic institutions formed during early democratisation in Kazakhstan were used to justify President Nazarbayev’s decision to consolidate power in the presidency and the establishment of authoritarianism. Nazarbayev believed that the complexities of the transition period and the acuteness of people’s socioeconomic grievances on one hand and the weaknesses of public control over the state’s executive and legislative institutions on the other objectively contributed to the growth of presidential powers that should remain above society, political parties and all branches of power by overseeing and coordinating their activities (Likhachev and Frolova 1997: 42). The resulting growth of authoritarian authority patterns did not face any viable opposition from the population, whose ‘uncivic’ political culture meant they were more concerned with order and stability than with freedoms. In this respect, Kazakh political culture closely resembles Russian political culture, which because of its fear of chaos and disorder internalised the need for authoritarianism. Hence, like in Russia, the issue of the congruence of non-democratic political culture with an authoritarian type of government complicates the transition to democracy.

‘Lost in Transition’: Waning Democratisation

Following the dissolution of the SU, the Kazakh leadership declared its adherence to democratic ideals and made considerable steps in carrying out democratic reforms. However, as we have already seen, the political transformations never quite matched the progress achieved in socioeconomic reforms. By the mid-1990s it was evident that early democratic transformations had fallen victim to the regime’s growing authoritarian tendencies.

We have already seen the breakdown of Kazakh democratisation from the perspective of three major democratisation theories. I will now discuss waning democratisation in the first phase from the perspective of Dahl’s seven ‘procedural minimalists’ of polyarchy. Almost all of them showed signs of development soon after Kazakh independence in 1991. However, the country’s gradual slide to authoritarianism resulted in Kazakhstan hardly meeting half of those criteria. Congruence with some and incongruence with other democratic criteria mean Kazakhstan deserves its label of a ‘hybrid’ regime whose exact regime classification is subject to numerous ongoing discussions.

1. *Control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in elected officials:* as in Soviet Kazakhstan, the first constitution of independent Kazakhstan stipulates that control over the executive branch of power in Kazakhstan is in the hands of a popularly elected parliament. However, a closer look at the formulation of policy and decision-making in Kazakhstan reveals that, despite the existence of an independent parliament and popularly elected deputies, the role of parliament in decision-making is at best nominal. The weakening of parliament’s control over the government began with 1) the dissolution of the 1994 multiparty parliament by the President in 1995; 2) the parliamentary elections of 1995 which guaranteed the

majority of seats being allocated to pro-presidential parties; and 3) the adoption of a new constitution in 1995 which expanded the rights of the President and government at the expense of a weakened legislature. As a result, according to Olcott (2002), by the end of the 1990s the president assigned himself a ‘supersystemic’ role in overseeing the work of the legislative, executive and judiciary branches of power. In a practical sense, this meant that no single bill or governmental decision can pass without the consent of the president.

2. *Elected officials are chosen and peacefully removed in relatively frequent, fair, and free elections in which coercion is quite limited:* the frequency of parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan does not raise any concerns; they were held in 1994, 1995, 1999, 2004 and 2007. What really concerns local political activists and the international community is the fairness and freedom of those elections. Although none of these parliamentary elections were coupled with violent protests and confrontation, their credibility has been questioned by numerous elections observation missions in their reports. For example, the OSCE’s Elections Observation Mission reported that the ‘legislative and regulative framework of 1999 parliamentary elections was severely undermined by: (1) illegal interference by executive authorities; (2) unfair campaign practices by parties closely associated with existing power structures; (3) threats of bureaucratic, administrative, and judicial measures jeopardising media operations; (4) bias by lower level election commissions for candidates and parties favoured by regional and local officials; and (5) intimidation and obstruction of the electoral campaign of opposition parties and candidates’ (OSCE and ODIHR 2000). Although there were some improvements in the legislative and regulatory framework of later parliamentary elections, they have nonetheless been constantly criticised for falling short of Kazakhstan’s OSCE

commitment formulated in the 1990 Copenhagen document in regard to the holding of free, transparent and accountable elections.

3. *Practically all adults have the right to vote in these elections:* throughout Kazakhstan's independence there have never been any limitations or restrictions on voter eligibility. Consequently, Kazakhstan seems to meet this democratic criterion. However, in the context of Kazakhstan, I would like to extend this criterion by adding that *all adults also have the right to abstain*. In practice, the employees of state institutions such as schools, hospitals and local governments are forcefully pushed by their employers to participate in elections. Even students at state-owned universities are threatened by department deans and university administration with expulsion in the event of non-participation in elections. What is more disturbing, however, is the fact that public servants are being told by their respective leaders to cast their votes for pro-regime forces. Hence, Kazakhstan meets Dahl's criterion in that all adults irrespective of their gender, religion and race have the right to vote – but at the same time does not meet the additional aspect added to the criterion, as the regime uses its administrative resources to force public servants to make involuntary choices.
4. *Most adults also have the right to run for the public office for which candidates run in these elections:* there are no legal and physical barriers to running for public office as long as the candidate's political platform and programme is compatible with that of the ruling party. However, if the candidate is independent or if he/she is a member of an oppositional political party, he/she will face certain obstacles preventing him/her from winning in elections. Such obstacles include having limited access to the media, difficulties in registering his/her candidacy, facing discrimination by the

elections commission, etc. To illustrate, after resigning from government in October 1997 and forming an oppositional Republican People's Party of Kazakhstan in 1998, ex-Prime Minister Akezhan Kazhegeldin was denied registration as a candidate for the 1999 presidential elections as he did not meet the requirements of the Law on Elections. One of these requirements introduced in the Law on Elections, which was amended in May 1998, states that candidates who within a year prior to electoral registration committed administrative violations could not register their candidacies (Sheretov 2003: 51). Kazhegeldin was tried and found guilty of participating in the meeting of the unregistered 'For Fair Elections' movement (Zhovtis 2000). According to the Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan On Administrative Violations, 'taking part in the activities of an unregistered public association' is an administrative violation. As a result, the OSCE boycotted 1999 presidential elections by refusing to send its Election Observation Mission and criticised the country for its undemocratic elections legislation and infringement of oppositional candidates' rights.

5. *Citizens have an effectively enforced right to freedom of expression, particularly political expression, including criticism of the officials, the conduct of the government, the prevailing political, economic, and social system, and the dominant ideology:* looking at Freedom House's democracy scores for Kazakhstan shown in Table 5.1, we clearly see that Kazakhstan fails to effectively guarantee the provision and protection of political rights and civil liberties. Interestingly, Freedom House assigned a better democracy score to Kazakhstan in early 1990s. Indeed, the early 1990s were a heyday for Kazakh pluralism. The mass media market was saturated with multiple independent newspapers, radio stations and TV channels, which played a crucial role in voicing citizens' various political views regarding the adoption of the first constitution, parliamentary elections and the implementation of socioeconomic

policies. This oppositional media eagerly published the public's and various political parties' materials criticising government policies, state organs and public officials. It was this criticism that caused numerous amendments to be made to the Law on Media, the Criminal Code and the Law on National Security which severely restricted the functioning of the mass media. Thus, according to the International Foundation of Speech Freedom Protection 'Adil Soz', a majority of conflicts in 2000 involving the mass media were initiated by state organs such as local and district municipalities, the Ministry of Culture, Information and Public Accord, territorial offices of procurator, not to mention public officials such as local governors, judges and deputies (Kaleeva 2001). Unhappy with the mass media's evaluation of their work, these parties sue journalists and newspapers for slander. Thus, in accordance with Article 318 of the Criminal Code, in 2006 the Committee of National Security of Kazakhstan sued journalist Kazis Toguzbayev for insulting the honour and dignity of President Nazarbayev. For violating the same article of the Criminal Code, a number of oppositional newspapers – principally 'Dat' and 'XXI vek' – were shut down in 1998. Among other measures taken by the regime to restrict freedom of expression in Kazakhstan are intimidation and beatings of independent journalists, denying or revoking of newspaper registration, exerting pressure on private printing companies to terminate existing printing contracts, suspending electricity, confiscating print runs and arson (Dave 2007a). All in all, the country's deteriorating freedom of expression record is reflected in its ranking on the Reporters Without Borders' Worldwide Press Freedom Index – in 2006 it ranked 128 out of 168, whereas in 2009 it dropped to 142 out of 175 countries (Reporters Without Borders 2009).

6. *They also have access to alternative sources of information that are not monopolised by the government or any other single group:* as was mentioned above, there were numerous mass media outlets in the early 1990s which belonged to all sorts of public entities – private businessmen, commercial institutions, public associations, political parties, interest groups and state organs. Although an absolute majority of respondents (60–70%) in a survey conducted in 1996 by IFES claimed that all major domestic media are ‘somewhat controlled’ or ‘completely controlled’ by the government (Askeeva 1997), none of those owners had an exclusive right to the provision of information. This ensured that citizens had free access to information from various alternative sources which in its turn stimulated interest in politics and public debate. However, the growth of authoritarian tendencies in the mid-1990s negatively affected the development of the mass media. The government aimed at exerting more control over non-state independent media known for its criticism of government policy and publicising corruption in the echelons of power. Thus, knowing that TV is the most popular source of information in Kazakhstan (Askeeva 1997; Reputatsiya 2004), the government took clever measures to usurp independent TV channels as well as privately owned radio stations. Within the framework of a nationwide privatisation campaign, the government announced in 1997 an open auction for broadcast frequencies. The starting bid for television stations was set at US\$150,000 and for radio stations at US\$50,000; around 30 stations that could not raise such funds were forced to close (Olcott 2002: 105). Thus, this auction sorted and sifted the Kazakhstan media market to terminate independent media not loyal to the regime. It also initiated a media monopolisation process whereby the president’s daughter Dariga Nazarbayeva, owner of the state’s largest TV channel ‘*Khabar*’, took over the ‘*ORT Kazakhstan*’, ‘*KTK*’, ‘*NTK*’ and ‘*Kazakhstan*’ channels as well as the

'Hit FM' and *'Kazakhstan'* radio stations. The *'Khabar'* agency was soon renamed *'Khabar'* media holdings, which also included two influential news agencies (*'Interfax Kazakhstan'* and *'Kazakhstan Today'*) and the most popular *'Karavan'* national newspaper. The ongoing monopolisation of TV and radio stations by *'Khabar'* media holdings and a business elite loyal to the regime in addition to constant oppression of oppositional media meant that citizens' access to alternative sources of information was becoming more restricted. Things worsened with the state's growing control of internet space through the state-owned *'Kazakhtelecom'* agency – the country's telecommunications monopoly infamous for blocking users' access to websites with anti-governmental content such as *Eurasia.org.ru* and *respublika-kz.info*. Finally, adoption of the Law on Internet in 2009 put severe restrictions on the last remaining source of alternative information. By classifying internet chatrooms and blogs as media this law enables local courts to block them (Auyezov and Jones 2009). This resulted in a growth of self-censorship not only in traditional media but also on the internet.

7. *Finally, they have an effectively enforced right to form and join autonomous associations, including political associations, such as political parties and interests groups, that attempt to influence the government by competing in elections and by other peaceful means:* the last years of SU rule in Kazakhstan saw a rapid growth of all sorts of autonomous associations, including interest groups, political parties and various professional unions. The declaration of independence in December 1991 contributed to the public's even greater participation in public associations, the majority of which were in opposition to the government. Oppositional parties and interest groups were very active in influencing the government and parliamentary decision-making over political and socioeconomic reforms. It is worth noting that no

oppositional party or public association was oppressed during the early 1990s; however, the regime's stuttering commitment to democratisation in the mid-1990s meant a clampdown on independent political activity. Since there were no legal obstacles to the formation and functioning of political parties, the Kazakhstani authorities relied on the use of intimidation and coercion tactics to control opposition (Dave 2001). The best example of this is the regime's oppression of the Republican People's Party of Kazakhstan (RNPk), founded by ex-Prime Minister Akezhan Kazhegeldin in 1998. To eliminate the threat coming from this radical opposition party, the regime took several measures, including co-opting its leaders by buying them out, initiating tax evasion charges against the leaders, and coercing members and activists to leave the party. For example, throughout RNPk's existence its activists have constantly been threatened by law enforcement agencies and attacked and beaten up by unknown people. Worried about their family members and fearful of repercussions, some RNPk members and activists have left the party. The adoption of the Law on Political Parties in 2002 made party formation even more difficult by harshening the procedures and requirements for opposition party registration. One of these requirements is the presence of 50,000 members in the party. Unable to meet this and other intolerable requirements, the RNPk and Azamat radical opposition parties ceased to exist.

While Dahl's procedural minimalists for polyarchy represent the ideal type of democracy that countries should strive to achieve, no country's political system perfectly meets these criteria. Yet there are some countries in the Western hemisphere whose political systems are better than others in matching Dahl's criteria. As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, countries matching none of those criteria were labelled by Dahl as closed hegemonies. As we can see from the above, soon after gaining independence in 1991

Kazakhstan showed signs of building democratic institutions and this was reflected in its good performance along all seven procedural minimalists of polyarchy. However, '[w]hile maintaining the rhetoric of democratization, [by the mid-1990s] Nazarbayev has backtracked from an initial commitment to political reforms and a transition to democracy' (Dave 2001: 209). The waning of democratisation is evident in each of the seven preconditions of democracy discussed above. As Kazakhstan selectively adopts some features of democracy and ignores the rest, it has been labelled by many as an ambiguous regime that has entered a political 'twilight zone'. Furthermore, since the regime permits opposition, tolerates moderate criticism and holds elections of questionable validity, but does not allow for alternation of power, Carothers labelled it as a dictatorship with a dominant-power syndrome.

Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter aimed at assessing Kazakhstan's transition to democracy soon after its declaration of independence in 1991. The assessment was carried out by examining the preconditions for democratisation in Kazakhstan. According to the modernisation, transition and culture perspectives some of these preconditions were either present or absent, consequently affecting the course of the Kazakh transition to democracy. Thus, the modernisation approach could not effectively address stalling transition because instead of stimulating democratisation, improving modernisation indicators in Kazakhstan such as personal wealth and industrialisation are negatively associated with it. On the contrary, the culture perspective views the absence of such democratic prerequisites as democratically oriented public values, beliefs and attitudes as the key impediment to successful democratisation in Kazakhstan. By stressing the importance of political actors, the transition approach views the early success of

democratisation in Kazakhstan as a result of bargaining between the regime's soft-liners and opposition moderates. However, the growing consolidation of power in the presidency meant that the emerging unequal distribution of power was advantageous to incumbents, who eventually stalled the transition. As the chapter's last section has shown, the starting and stopping of democratisation in Kazakhstan is also evident when we look at how Kazakhstan satisfies Dahl's seven prerequisites of polyarchy. Overall, two decades of Kazakhstan's independence have witnessed a range of successful socioeconomic reforms bringing it even closer to its dream of becoming a New Asian Tiger and entering the club for the 50 most competitive countries in the world (Aleksiev alibekali2005). In regard to political reforms, however, Kazakhstan – being 'lost in transition' – left unfulfilled its promise of becoming a democracy respecting human rights and guaranteeing civil liberties. In the event of further decline of freedoms in Kazakhstan, it risks also entering the club for Freedom House's worst of the worst countries in the world.

Now that we have examined the early birth and abrupt breakdown of democratisation in Kazakhstan, the next chapter will discuss the role played by the public's protest mobilisation during the waxing and, most importantly, waning of democratisation.

Chapter 6

Is Protest Mobilisation a Friend or Foe of Democratisation?

The question of whether popular protest mobilisation is conducive to successful democratisation has a long academic history (Bermeo 1997). As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the recurrent debate is between those who believe that too much popular mobilisation and too much pressure from below is detrimental for the prospects of democratisation (Huntington 1984; Kaufman 1986) and those who consider popular protest mobilisation to be a crucial prerequisite for democratic transition (Garreton Merino 1989; McFaul 2002; Tilly 2004). In line with this thesis's major assumption, I aim to contribute to this debate by arguing that protest mobilisation is an important driving force of democratisation. However, by no means do I claim the exclusiveness of protest mobilisation's influence on democratisation⁶².

This chapter examines the relationship between popular protest mobilisation and post-Soviet transition to democracy in Kazakhstan. It will show how the public's extensive protest mobilisation in the early 1990s connects with a) the government's progress in carrying out early democratic reforms, and b) the regime's consolidation of power and resulting waning democratisation in the mid-1990s. By doing so, the chapter tests study's third hypothesis, according to which democratisation stalled in the mid-1990s in response to a decline in protest mobilisation. I will proceed in the following order: first, I will

⁶² In the previous chapter I discussed the structural, institutional and cultural explanations of democratisation which dominate the democratisation literature. The role of social mobilisation did not receive adequate scholarly attention until a wave of 'colour revolutions' and recent popular upheavals in the Middle East – a gap which this thesis attempts to fill.

discuss the relationship between protest mobilisation and early democratisation in the first phase. Then, by examining the same relationship in the second phase, I will test my hypothesis. Figure 6.1 demonstrates growth of protest mobilisation soon after Kazakhstan declared independence in December 1991 and its decline at the time when the democratic transition halted.

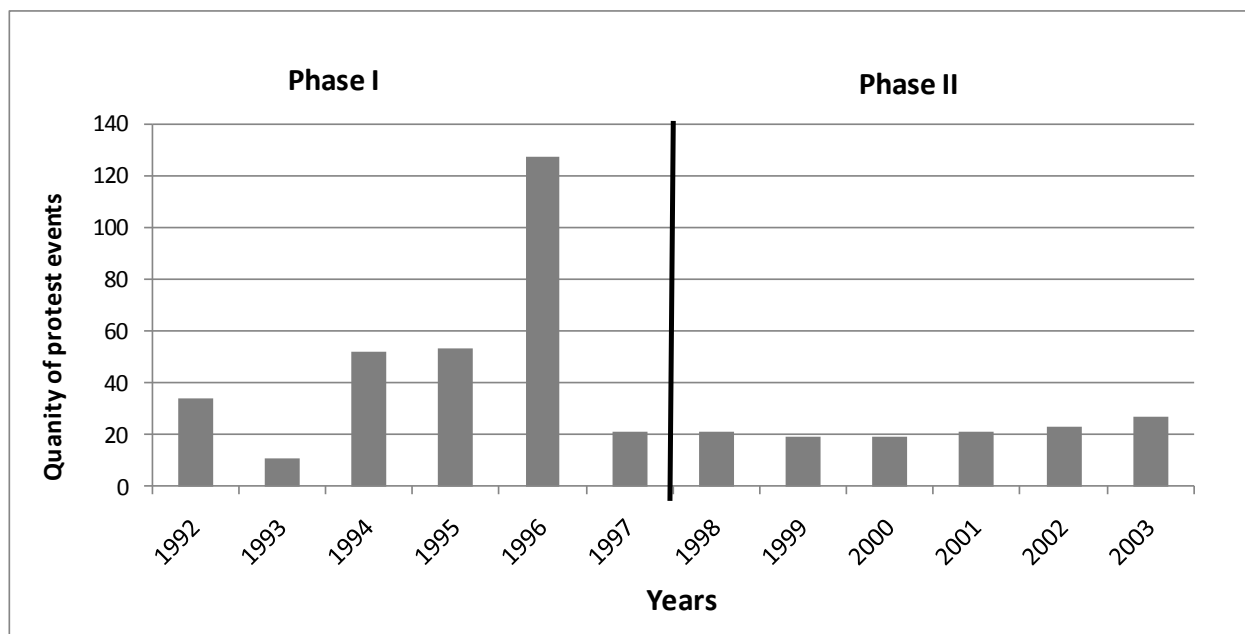


Figure 6-1: Protest mobilisation in phases I and II

Unlike Chapter 4, this chapter does not differentiate protest events by the grievances involved in them. I do this for two reasons: first, here I am adopting a macro perspective on how overall protest mobilisation influences democratic transition. Since the transition to democracy is mainly regarded as a matter of politics, I would be expected to focus more closely on political grievance-driven protests such as demand for free and fair elections, freedom of speech and impeachment of the president. However, my primary interview data as well as secondary sources suggest that all grievances in Kazakhstan in the 1990s were extremely politicised. This is the second reason why I do not differentiate between, say, political and socioeconomic protest events; instead, I look at an aggregate of the four protest types.

In order to test my hypothesis, I picked only those cases that existed in both phases I and II. Consequently, two out of 12 SMO cases – the *Shanyrak* and *Ult Tagdyry* – were intentionally dropped from the analysis because they did not exist in the first two phases to witness the stalling transition to democracy. Semi-structured interviews with the heads of the 10 remaining SMOs provided adequate data to relate protest mobilisation to democratisation in Kazakhstan.

Pushing Post-Communist Incumbents for Democratic Reforms

Employing Lenin's analogy, the collapse of the Soviet Union (SU) represents one of these cases 'when people *no longer wanted* to live in the old way and so did the elite which *no longer could* carry on in the old way' (Lenin 1920). Lenin was writing about the working and upper classes whose unwillingness to live in tsarist Russia was crucial for the prospects of successful communist revolution. Ironically though, 90 years later the popular masses as well as the elites demonstrated their unwillingness to live in the communist SU.

While the tsarist autocracy was replaced with communism through a Bolshevik revolution, post-Soviet democratisation in Kazakhstan was by no means a product of revolution in Lenin's sense. It was one of those rare moments in history when the wishes of the masses and the ruling elite coincided. Both parties wanted rapid reforms and improvement of living standards. Unlike Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Tajikistan, which experienced civil wars soon after gaining independence in the early 1990s, Kazakhstan managed to survive the turbulent years of transition period without major bloodshed.

While I claim that both the masses and post-communist incumbents wanted socioeconomic and democratic political reforms, I do not argue that this unison was a matter of random coincidence. In fact, the regime had its own understanding of democratic political reforms. The following extract from ‘Izvestiya’ newspaper article published in 1991 confirms just that:

“... for Kazakhstan (as well as for most ex-Soviet countries) democracy is yet not a pronounced perspective. One has to realistically evaluate a situation – it is impossible to jump from feudalism to socialism; in the same manner, it is evident that it is impossible to jump from cruel communist regime to democracy. I believe Nazarbayev considers a conclusion of some political scientists that path from totalitarianism to democracy lies through authoritarianism.” (Tolmachev 2000: 11)

Despite this vision of democratic reforms, Kazakh officials do not shy away from endorsing democratic ideals and making official declarations regarding their choosing a democratic course of development. As Tolmachev puts it, President Nazarbayev frequently uses the term ‘democracy’, yet he does not worship it (Ibid.). Aware of the regime’s interpretation of democratic reforms in the early 1990s, the masses as well as the political opposition felt they had to push the country’s ruling elite for *real* democratic reforms, making sure that the elites go beyond making mere declarations regarding the democratising of Kazakhstan.

As we have seen throughout the thesis, growing protest mobilisation at the beginning of the first phase signalled to post-communist incumbents that the balance of power was shifting in favour of the opposition. This scenario closely resembles what McFaul calls transition from below – a mode of transition in which the mobilised masses, through confrontational and uncooperative tactics, promote rather than impede democratic change (2002: 223). Drawing on my theoretical framework in this section I first describe the factors which led to the growth of protest mobilisation in the first phase, and then discuss how exactly such protest mobilisation pushed the post-communist incumbents for

democratic reforms. While I look at how each of these factors contributed to protest mobilisation, in this chapter I am not discussing which of them is more significant than others in affecting protest cyclicity, a task which I accomplished in Chapter 4.

Upsurge of Deprivation and its Politicisation

‘We had nothing to lose!’ – such was the response of two interviewees in respect to growing protest mobilisation in the early 1990s. They represent socioeconomic SMOs defending the rights and interests of pensioners (‘Pokoleniye’) and coalminers (‘Workers’ Movement’). As was discussed in Chapter 3, Gorbachev’s *Perestroika* and the ultimate collapse of the SU led to a massive growth of poverty, unemployment, hyperinflation and crime. Frustration with socioeconomic decay and the government’s inability to address people’s concerns pushed masses to take to the streets. The following protest event slogans⁶³ illustrate the scope and depth of deprivation in each of the four issue areas in the first phase:

- Socioeconomic: *‘A hungry doctor is dangerous to health’; ‘How to survive without any income other than a pension’; ‘I want to live!’*
- Interethnic: *‘If you pant for official Russian language, you are welcome to move to Russia’; ‘Hands off Chechnya!’; ‘Want it? Tolerate. Don’t want it? Leave!’*
- Environmental: *‘Yes to clean air, clean water and clean land! No to radiation, pollution and negligence!’; ‘Down with “Baikonur” – devil incarnate!’; ‘No to Atomic Power Station in Aktau’*
- Political: *‘We won’t let the USSR empire return!’; ‘Birlesu – people’s newspaper. Hands off Birlesu!’; ‘Young heart surgeons are against organised crime and mafia in healthcare’*

The representatives of all of the SMOs mentioned in their interviews that the highest instances of protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan occurred in the first phase – a phenomenon which was never repeated. Thus, in their explanations, the interviewees

⁶³ These slogans were primarily sourced from articles and photos published in newspapers chosen for content analysis. Some of the slogans were recalled and provided by interviewees. Selected slogans are provided in Appendix C.

from 'Lad' and 'Azat' claim that the masses had to 'blow off steam' after shutting off themselves from the world for their whole lives. Thus, every public demonstration of the 'Nevada-Semei' anti-nuclear movement in the first phase gathered more than several thousand protesters. Additionally, besides numerous protests conducted prior to Kazakhstan's independence, the 'Workers' Movement' organised a 500km protest march in 1992 from Schuchinsk to Karaganda that included 6,000 coalminers. An interviewee from the 'Ult Tagdyry' movement formed in the third phase remembers organising 12 political demonstrations in 1991 with an average turnout of 5,000 to 7,000 participants.

Such grandiose protest mobilisation driven by deprivation was also exacerbated by post-independence euphoria marked with the public's growing interest in politics and its elevated hopes for democratisation (Kuttykadam 2010: 51). Members of 'Pokoleniye' and 'Workers' Movement' note that in the early 1990s people were inebriated by newly acquired freedoms and belief in democracy, people's power and government's accountability. Eventually, many citizens were mired in politics. Daily newspapers carried articles debating questions such as: What political model best suits Kazakhstan? How can we best establish strong, independent and responsible branches of power? How can we form a strong and competent government? How can we stop the emigration of Slavic ethnic minorities? How can we put the economy on its feet and improve people's living standards? (Kuttykadam 1994). Discussions of the country's political matters drifted from the private domain of 'kitchen table talks' (where they remained during Soviet times) to the public domains of the mass media and, most importantly, streets and squares. The upsurge of deprivation in addition to the public's growing interest in politics meant but one thing – the politicisation of grievances.

Interviewees from all non-political SMOs highlight an inextricable connection between their respective issue areas and politics. To illustrate this connection, an activist from Almaty-based environmental NGO 'Green Salvation' described an issue they were trying to resolve. For several months, 'Green Salvation' had been complaining to Almaty Local Government about a huge landfill found in Ili-Alatau National Park. Neither the administration of the Park nor the local government took any measures to address an issue which later became heavily publicised. The NGO's own investigation revealed that the landfill was a result of construction waste from a house built nearby by a local high-ranking official. Frustrated by the nonfeasance of local government, corruption, and the double standards of Kazakh officials, 'Green Salvation' had to politicise its activities and protest slogans. Furthermore, the country's first ever social movement to mobilise thousands of people – 'Nevada-Semei' – decided to politicise its agenda soon after achieving its purely environmental objective, i.e. the closure of Semei testing site in 1991. 'We will politicize to ensure the functioning of the law on rehabilitation of victims of nuclear explosions', said the movement's leader, Olzhas Suleimenov (Abilov 1995).

Moreover, it is no secret that many interethnic issues in the first phase were heavily politicised. As was mentioned in Chapter 3, among the most controversial issues were the granting of the Russian language's official status and Russians' demands for dual citizenship (Lidin 1994). Faced with 'nationalistic insults' of titular nation, many ethnic Russians left Kazakhstan (Sytnik 2012). Those who stayed realised that President Nazarbayev planned to maintain interethnic accord by appeasing ethnic minorities. As a result, a poll conducted in May 1993 showed that 89% of Russians would have voted in the presidential elections for Nazarbayev (Giller Institute 1994). This enormous amount of trust in Nazarbayev is based on the abovementioned shared belief that interethnic accord in Kazakhstan is a sole merit of Nazarbayev. It is also based on Russians' fear in

regard to the chaos, ethnic discrimination and intra-elite conflicts which could follow Nazarbayev's resignation or loss in elections (Denisov 2005). Interestingly, while ethnic Russians associate stability and a prosperous future with President Nazarbayev, ethnic Chechens associate it with democracy. 'Until there is no democracy, there won't be a rise of the Chechen nation', said a representative of the Chechen Association 'Vainakh'. War in Chechnya in 1994 led to further politicisation of Chechens' grievances in Kazakhstan (Grigoryev 1996). Sympathising with the Chechens in Russia, 'Vainakh' mobilised people for protests calling upon Russian government to stop bloodshed in Chechnya.

By far the most politicised grievance of all is socioeconomic in nature. As we saw earlier, it is also this type of grievance which was behind the majority of protest events in the first phase. This makes sense because, in accordance with Maslow's (1959) hierarchy of needs, in times of socioeconomic crises, analogous to Kazakhstan's early transition period in the early 1990s, rational individuals are expected to care more about fulfilling their endangered basic physiological and safety needs rather than self-esteem and self actualisation needs, which are higher in the 'needs pyramid'. Witnessing the tremendous protest potential of socioeconomic grievances, political SMOs realised that one way of attracting new followers and increasing political protest mobilisation would be to build bridges with socioeconomic SMOs by politicising their grievances. A member of the RNPk oppositional political party illustrates this process:

"We knew that people cared more about things 'close to their bodies' and/or personal material well-being [i.e. salaries, pensions, employment], rather than abstract principles such as freedom of speech, etc. Hence, we would link people's routine problems to such political issues as the oppression of the mass media and human rights. For instance, imagine a man who is forced to pay a bribe to a local governor to settle some administrative dispute. We approach him by telling him that he would not have faced corruption in local government if the governor (a Mayor) was elected by the local community rather than appointed by the state government. Therefore, we told people that if they want to solve their socioeconomic problems, they inevitably have to get politicised."

This process of politicising grievances, which was carried out by all four SMOs discussed above, can be regarded as SMOs' frame construction activities. All of them framed environmental, interethnic and socioeconomic grievances around respective political issues. There is no guarantee, however, that politically framed grievances will inevitably result in the growth of political protests. Alternatively, we cannot be confident that the man described in the example above will necessarily support RNPK. For that to occur, SMOs needed to ensure that their politicised frames resonate with the public.

Weak Government

In his 'Sweet Wind of Freedom' newspaper article, Kuttykadam writes about the lack of experience in high-level politics and naivety with which Kazakhstan faced independence (1993). 'A [h]istorical wind is currently blowing our sails... but we need to know where we are sailing', maintains Kuttykadam, highlighting the crucial choices in economic and political reforms which have to be made by the state rulers. This period of government disorientation, uncertainty and political anaemia opened excellent political opportunities for the evolution of civil society institutions. Indeed, as noted elsewhere, the early independent years of Kazakhstan were a heyday of pluralism. According to Klyueva (1994), more than 3,900 public associations were formed within four years by 1994. As I will discuss later in the chapter, Kazakhstan's independence also gave birth to hundreds of independent mass media outlets.

This explosion of civic activity would not have been possible without a government which was weak soon after the collapse of the SU. Drawing on Kriesi et al (1992), I define a weak government as one which is open on the input side and incapable of imposing itself on the output side. Moreover, the overall strength or weakness of the state is determined by the internal structure of state institutions – the degree of their internal

coherence or fragmentation (Ibid.: 222). Weak governments' informal procedures and prevailing strategies with respect to challengers are integrative (facilitative, cooperative and assimilative), rather than exclusive (repressive, confrontational and polarising) (Ibid.). In the context of Kazakhstan, the young Kazakh government was in no way a strong one. Here is how Kuttykadam describes it:

“No one had democratic experience. Bewildered political elite did not have practical political experience of building an independent state. That's why they often made mistakes and were very naïve... Political establishment was incapable of making sense of rapidly changing events and adequately reacting to them.” (2010: 51, 68).

Almost none of the political parties, public associations, interest groups and professional unions which emerged during the collapse of the SU (1989–1992) were challenged by the regime's repressive mechanisms (arrests, fines, beatings, killings, etc.). In fact, the government did not create obstacles restricting the formation of these organisations and nor did it attempt to polarise them. Indeed, the integrative strategies of the government toward its challengers in the early 1990s are confirmed by interviewees from the six SMOs which existed in that period.

To a question asking whether they or demonstration participants were exposed to police violence, arrests and prosecution, the representatives of 'Nevada-Semei', 'Workers' movement', 'Azat', 'Lad', 'Green Salvation' and 'Pokoleniye' responded that the law enforcement agencies did not prevent them from organising protest events in the early 1990s. On the contrary, a member of the 'Nevada-Semei' movement said that the government supported and facilitated its anti-nuclear campaign. Furthermore, members of 'Green Salvation' and 'Tabigat' mentioned that their SMOs had cooperated with the government in solving various environmental problems.

Untroubled by the regime's repressions, many SMOs became even stronger by attracting sponsorship from local and foreign organisations. For example, the 'Pokoleniye'

movement was receiving funding from a Dutch donor agency and, despite working on a voluntary basis, the ‘Nevada-Semei’ movement was in receipt of sponsorship funds from sympathetic individuals and private companies. More importantly, some SMOs such as ‘Azat’ founded a similarly named newspaper. The ‘Azat’ interviewee also mentioned that he was frequently invited to the US Embassy, which provided his movement with moral and training support.

Evolution of Independent Media

The last years of the SU’s existence witnessed an enormous growth in legal and illegal – so-called samizdat – newspapers. Thanks to Gorbachev’s Glasnost’ policy many underground newspapers became officially public, which meant that they were no longer suppressed in the Soviet republics. Although an autonomous press was tolerated by the communist governments, in practice none of the printing houses in Kazakhstan agreed to publish anti-governmental newspapers. As a result, newspapers like Mneniye (‘Opinion’) had to be published in the Baltic states and flown over to Kazakhstan (Sviridov and Sviridova 2006).

A turning point in the evolution of independent media in Kazakhstan was the adoption of the USSR ‘Law on Print and Other Media’ in August 1990, which virtually banned censorship and legalised the rights of individuals and groups to establish any type of mass media. As a result, representatives of numerous pro-governmental and oppositional political parties, interest groups and public associations registered their existing and newly founded newspapers. Thus, the ‘Zheltoksan’ party founded Zheltoksan newspaper in December 1990, the ‘Nevada-Semei’ movement the Izbiratel’ newspaper in February 1990, and ‘Azat’ and ‘Lad’ founded similarly named newspapers in May 1990 and 1991 respectively. Highlighting the effect of Glasnost’ and the simultaneous collapse of the

SU on the development of independent media in Kazakhstan, Sviridov and Sviridova (2006) claim that the number of newspapers classed as newly formed in 1987 had increased fourfold by the end of 1990.

We have thus seen above how SMOs became stronger by establishing their own mass media, namely newspapers; however, there were cases when independent media per se empowered SMOs. Thus, two independent TV channels – KTK and Tan, which were established in summer 1991 – quickly gained popularity among the population for their non-propaganda-driven news, also covering the activities of various SMOs. The Max radio station launched in January 1992 similarly became extremely popular for its independent and alternative views on various socio-political issues. Consequently, UNESCO awarded the station an award for being a ‘Radio station promoting democracy and liberal economic freedoms’ (Napol'skaya 2012). Furthermore, striving to provide people and groups with an opportunity to express themselves, the Informburo programme, broadcast on the Totem channel in 1995, frequently invited members of oppositional SMOs to participate.

Unsurprisingly then, none of the six interviewees representing first-phase SMOs complained about any difficulties associated with access to the media. Representatives of ‘Nevada-Semei’, ‘Pokoleniye’, ‘Green Salvation’ and ‘Azat’ reported that they were frequently approached by both pro-governmental and oppositional mass media. All respondents said that their SMOs often held press conferences and distributed press releases in order to publicise their activities and appeal to the public; moreover, press conferences were reported as being very well attended. Illustrative of the media’s interest in SMO activities are recollections of a member of the ‘Nevada-Semei’ movement. She claims that management gave so many interviews to journalists that she cannot even

remember an approximate number. Furthermore, she recalls that, due to their collaboration with ‘KazInform’ state news agency, all of the activities of ‘Nevada-Semei’ – including the holding of marches and demonstrations – were announced by local and republican press.

The Growing Resonance of Collective Action Frames

Obviously, the mere appearance of oppositional SMOs on television or their easy access to print media is not enough to automatically mobilise the masses for protest; as I mentioned earlier, for that to happen SMOs’ collective action frames (CAFs) must resonate with the general public. In turn, for CAFs to ring true with an audience they have to be compatible with society’s cultural stock, consistent with the SMO’s claims and actions, and congruent with people’s everyday experiences. Most of the frames in the first phase met all three requirements, thus contributing to an upsurge in protest mobilisation. The CAFs constructed by ‘Nevada-Semei’ and ‘Azat’ were extremely resonant because they appealed to the nation’s decades-long suffering from nuclear explosions and Soviet tutelage. By framing nuclear explosions at Semei testing site as ‘acts of genocide against the state’s own people’, Olzhas Suleimenov, the leader of ‘Nevada-Semei’, ensured that this frame resonated among all ethnicities living in Kazakhstan. Similarly, a frame devised by the ‘Azat’ movement emphasising Russian imperialism’s usurpation of Kazakh statehood as well as the aggressive Russification of Kazakh culture resonated among ethnic Kazakhs experiencing an enormous growth of nationalistic sentiments.

However, as mentioned before, CAFs risk losing resonance if they are not consistent with SMOs’ claims, actions and beliefs. This is exactly what happened to frames constructed by the ‘Lad’ Russian movement which attempted to extend its purely

interethnic frames to socioeconomic issues. According to the ‘Lad’ movement interviewee, frames based on interethnic discrimination and deteriorating living standards did not resonate as well as frames based purely on interethnic issues. Thus, the followers of ‘Lad’ accused it of being inconsistent in its rhetoric and ‘punished’ it by distancing themselves and/or joining other Russian movements. The ‘Pokoleniye’ movement, on the contrary, was very consistent in its frame construction and articulation activities in the first phase. Its frames were extremely resonant because ‘Pokoleniye’ not only demonised the government’s privatisation campaign, but also took practical measures to fight against privatisation. For example, by investigating pensioners’ monthly electricity bills in Almaty it revealed that ‘Tractebel’, a Belgian energy monopoly operating in Almaty, was fraudulently increasing electricity bills. While publicising its findings, ‘Pokoleniye’ demanded that the government oust this disreputable foreign investor from Kazakhstan.

Finally, SMOs which framed issues around problems that people encounter in their daily lives were more successful in protest mobilisation than SMOs whose rhetoric was irrelevant to people’s immediate grievances. Realising this premise, ‘Tabigat’ constructed frames revolving around local environmental grievances, such as the felling of trees in Almaty rather than framing environmental issues on a republic-wide level, such as the shrinking Aral Sea or growing desertification. Moreover, the interviewed member of ‘Tabigat’ notes that for frames to be resonant they have to not only identify a problem and its source (diagnostic function) but, most importantly, offer a solution (prognostic function). Just like ‘Tabigat’, the ‘Nevada-Semei’ movement also quickly realised that references to nuclear tests in Semei would mobilise more people than talk of nuclear tests in the neighbouring Lob-Nor testing site in China. Additionally, the ‘Nevada-Semei’ activist emphasised the movement’s public credibility and Olzhas

Suleimenov's charismatic qualities in frame articulation and amplification, which they saw as factors significantly affecting frame resonance.

Elite Defection

“Down with CPSU!” – such was a very popular slogan across Soviet republics in the days following the failure of the Moscow coup in August 1991. Five days after Yeltsin signed a decree on the suspension of CPSU activity in Russia, on 28 August 1991 Nazarbayev resigned as General Secretary of the Central Committee of Kazakhstan Communist Party. The long-running confrontation between the regime's reformists and conservatives ended within a few days with the fall of what had previously seemed to be an indestructible colossus (Kuttykadam 1991b). The future fate of the Kazakhstan Communist Party was discussed at an extraordinary emergency congress convened by Nazarbayev in September 1991. Aiming at distancing himself from his communist past, Nazarbayev ensured the Communist Party was renamed the Socialist Party. Unhappy with this outcome, vociferous communist incumbents formed a post-Soviet Communist Party of Kazakhstan in December 1991, which was in opposition to the government (Abdakimov 2003). ‘We were witnessing incredible political transformations – yesterday's ranks of “partycrats” split into irreconcilable conservatives [regime's hard-liners] and “democrats” [soft-liners], later “democrats” evolved into defenders of authoritarianism, then some of the regime's builders converted into its uncompromising critics’, recalls Kuttykadam (2010: 51-52).

The political death of the CPSU not only led to the formation of new political parties and movements but also contributed to the strengthening of existing movements. Dissatisfied with the slow pace of economic and political reforms, many Soviet soft-liner incumbents had to defect to the opposition camp. The ‘Azat’ civic movement, which is one of my

political cases, was in opposition to the government. Two of its three co-leaders – Mikhail Isinaliev⁶⁴ and Marat Shormanov⁶⁵ – defected from government to wage anti-communist and pro-independence campaigns. Undoubtedly, ‘Azat’ benefitted a lot from ex-communist leaders who brought with them great organisational qualities and lasting connections to the government establishment (Kuttykadam 1991a). Thanks to its ex-communist leaders, ‘Azat’ was very successful in constructing highly resonant frames around nationalistic sentiments. According to an interviewee from ‘RNPK’, a political SMO which emerged in the second phase, the presence of regime defectees not only helped mobilise a larger number of people for protest but also recruit new members. ‘There is a larger effect on recruitment when an ex-public official or a famous celebrity rather than an unknown figure joins the opposition’, claims my interviewee. People feel empowered and motivated to join oppositional SMOs knowing that it is led by a famous and influential leader whom they can trust.

History also shows that elites defected not only from the government but also from the opposition. They did so for various reasons: some left when SMOs achieved their objectives; some had to leave as a result of internal conflicts within SMOs and create their own organisations; and some completely defected from the opposition and joined the government. According to Sergei Duvanov, a co-leader of the Socialist Democratic Party of Kazakhstan (SDPK), soon after the republic gained independence the regime started to address issues that SDPK had been raising before. ‘We had a feeling that life goes ahead of us and we were no longer on the edge. Everyone started to search oneself in other domains’, recalls Duvanov (Sviridov and Sviridova 2006: 228). Some started business, some established NGOs and others went into journalism. Next, clashes between the opposition’s moderates and radicals led to splits within SMOs such as ‘Azat’,

⁶⁴ Ex-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakh SSR (1988–1989).

⁶⁵ Ex-Second Secretary of Almaty City Committee (*gorkom*) of CPSU

‘SDPK’ and ‘Zheltoksan’. For instance, according to the interviewee representing ‘Azat’, a split occurred in early 1992 between the movement’s moderates (who favoured gradual political reforms) and radicals (who demanded Nazarbayev’s resignation and sweeping reforms). Being an adherent of the latter group, my interviewee claims that the moderates led by Sovetskazy Akataev were lenient toward the regime because they believed that such a tactic would gain them seats in the republic’s Supreme Soviets. Finally, there are many instances of oppositional leaders joining government. To illustrate, disillusioned with the split of ‘Azat’, Mikhail Isinaliev left it and returned to state diplomatic service. In addition, a current political advisor to President Nazarbayev – Yermukhamet Yertyspaev – defected from the oppositional Socialist Party of Kazakhstan in 1994 and accepted the president’s invitation to join his team (Karavayev 2012).

Making Democracy Work

As we have seen so far, waxing of protest activity in the first phase benefitted a lot from various contributing factors, such as the rising deprivation and its politicisation, the growth of various mobilisation resources available to SMOs, the subsequent strengthening of SMOs, and government’s low propensity for repressing protests. The question I address in this section is how extensive popular protest mobilisation translated into the government’s undertaking of democratic reforms. Of course, as I mentioned earlier this agency-driven explanation of democratic transition does not necessarily mean that the regime’s decision to democratise was solely an outcome of extensive protest mobilisation. One must continue to keep in mind those structural and institutional factors discussed in previous chapters, which also condition and constrain incumbents’ decision-making choices.

Thus, taking note of the deep economic stagnation during the collapse of the SU, the government realised it had to conduct wide-ranging economic reforms represented by the liberalisation of the market and the creation of a legal and institutional base for market relations. In 1993, the Supreme Economic Council, the President's Administration and the government launched a Programme of Emergency Anti-Crisis Measures and Deepening of Socio-Economic Reforms, which ensured the launching of a national currency, sufficient production of consumer products, departure from the principles of a command economy, and, most importantly, the preservation of socio-political stability (Kazakhstan Embassy in Belarus 2013). The government was aware that neither successful economic reforms nor socio-political stability could be achieved without political liberalisation; hence, it was decided that economic liberalisation would be accompanied by political liberalisation.

In regard to institutional factors, the dissolution of the CPSU in 1991, the growth of independent civil institutions such as political parties and public associations and the holding of the first open presidential and parliamentary elections in 1991 and 1990 respectively constrained the policy choices available to post-communist incumbents. Few, if any, politicians among the ruling elite considered the authoritarian path of development to be a credible political course for Kazakhstan. Even so, they refrained from taking any action against ongoing political reforms for they knew that the balance of power between them and their challengers was not in their favour. This imbalance would have resulted in their 'political death' should they desire to intervene in the democratisation processes. As a result, the country-wide discrediting of the CPSU, the institutionalisation of a multiparty system and cooperation between the opposition's moderates and the regime's soft-liners pushed the regime incumbents to initiate early democratic reforms.

Last but not least, international factors also exerted an influence on incumbents' strategic choices. For instance, under international pressure from the US and other major powers Kazakhstan had to relinquish its nuclear arsenal inherited from disintegrated USSR in return for key states' (Russia, the US and China) security guarantees and generous international aid (Abazov 2002; Werner and Purvis-Roberts 2006). Additionally, western countries and inter-governmental organisations pressed the Kazakh leadership to conduct democratic reforms. Nazarbayev, who in the early 1990s was in pursuit of prestige, self-legitimation and international recognition, sought partnership with the US not only on security and economic grounds but also on ideological grounds (Bukkvoll 2004). As a result, adopting a democratic course of development and cooperation with the West in democracy promotion efforts were some of the key policy outcomes promulgated by President Nazarbayev soon after Kazakhstan declared independence.

As we have seen in the introductory chapter, both the structural and institutional approaches to democratisation are not without flaws, such as being over-deterministic (Snyder and Mahoney 1999) and paying too little attention to grassroots-level protest mobilisation. Hence, studying democratic transition from the protest mobilisation perspective will not only contribute to the structural and institutional approaches but will also highlight the significance of an agency-driven explanation of democratisation.

Considering the significant growth of protest mobilisation in the first phase, the puzzle I am trying to address is similar to one studied by Bermeo (1997): 'why do members of the old dictatorial coalition give in to demands for democracy when immoderate forces elevate its risks?'⁶⁶ (314). The expansion of civil liberties, adoption of democratic legislation and inclusive strategies toward the opposition may work to their disadvantage.

⁶⁶ By 'immoderate forces' Bermeo means radical popular organisations – what I call SMOs – demanding immediate radical reforms.

Thus, as part of their agenda, soon after gaining power new political elites represented by the opposition's radicals endeavour to ensure the elimination of post-communist incumbents. Aware of such a possible scenario, pivotal elites' decision on whether to cooperate with the opposition and accede to democratic reforms is based on a calculation of the costs of suppressing protest mobilisation and the cost of tolerating it. Quoting Dahl's seminal work *Polyarchy*, Bermeo claims that the 'likelihood of democratization increases as the cost of suppression rises and cost of toleration declines' (1997: 315). Therefore, for anti-regime forces to succeed in pushing post-communist incumbents for reforms, they need to increase popular mobilisation and attacks on dictatorship. By doing so, they raise the regime's costs of suppression. This tactic is bound to fail unless the regime's costs of toleration are bearable: pivotal elites must be sure that they will be safe if they permit democratisation.

According to Bermeo (1997), believing that dictatorial elites give in to the opposition's demands only because of the low costs of tolerating protest mobilisation is a sign of short-sightedness. It is not the presence or scope of extremist activities that pushes incumbents to cooperate with the opposition but rather their estimates of what the effects of extremism will be (*ibid.*). Bermeo argues that elite projections about the effects of extremism can take three forms, where each projection results in a different scenario for democratic transition. As can be seen in Table 6.1, in the first scenario pivotal elites reject democratisation because they foresee an ultimate victory for the extremist opposition which would destroy them once they gain power.

Table 6-1: Elite forecasts of the effects of extremism and the resulting scenarios for transitions to democracy

Scenario	If pivotal elites forecast...	they...	Because they see democracy as...	As happened in...
I	Extremist victory	will reject democracy	an intolerable threat	China, 1989
II	Extremist defeat and moderates' victory	may accept democracy	a means of escape	Peru, 1977 Greece, 1975
III	Extremist defeat and their own victory	may accept democracy	a form of legitimization	Portugal, 1974 Spain, 1976

Source: Bermeo (1997)

In the second scenario, incumbents may accept democracy because they no longer want to bear the high costs of suppressing protest mobilisation. By foreseeing the electoral victory of the opposition's moderates over radicals, the incumbents thus choose to cooperate with the former rather than maintain a fragile status quo. Finally, if pivotal elites believe that they will win in transition elections over extremist opposition then they would opt for democratisation as a way to legitimise their rule.

What were the post-communist incumbents' calculations in regard to the costs of suppression and toleration that drove their decision to cooperate with the opposition over democratisation? Did the rise of protest activity in the first phase help or hinder early democratisation in Kazakhstan? Interviewees from 'Azat' and 'Workers' Movement' highlight the regime's enormous fear of protest activities in the early 1990s. 'Government was so weak and we were so powerful that we could have easily taken over if we had "sharp teeth"', said an activist from the Karaganda-based 'Workers' Movement'. Perceiving chronic strikes by coalminers as a major threat, the government was shocked at the growing strength of 'Workers' Movement' and had to frequently meet their demands. The same interviewee remembers, 'By striking for 37 days, in January 1991 we managed to force Prime Minister Tereschenko to visit us and accede to

our demands – we won unprecedented concessions from the government in the form of salary increases, food vouchers, etc.’ In a similar fashion, the regime often met the demands of other SMOs including ‘Azat’, which among other things demanded the immediate release of political prisoners and the republic’s declaration of independence.

Popular frustration with deprivation and acute political, environmental and interethnic grievances made people fearless of the regime’s repressions. To illustrate, representatives of ‘Azat’, ‘Workers’ Movement’ and ‘Pokoleniye’ unanimously state that people had nothing to lose and were readily protesting despite the risk of repression. ‘What should we be afraid of? We are mortal pensioners; the young ones would have feared, but we did not...’, said a ‘Pokoleniye’ activist. Similarly, the ‘Workers’ Movement’ activist recalls: ‘Who we were back then? Happy, begging, harmless insects. We did not have cars, houses, wages, nothing. What did we have to lose? Proletarians we were!’

Unprecedented protest mobilisation across the republic, people’s readiness to resort to any form of protest and protesters’ absence of fear in the face of repressions increased the regime’s cost of suppressing the upsurge in protest activity. Emphasising the significance of protests in influencing government, the ‘Azat’ interviewee says: ‘The democracy that we have now is all because of you, but let’s respect the law – the government was pleading with us. I responded by saying – where was your law when you were persecuting us? The next day they enacted a decree and released two prisoners’. Wary of civil unrest and bloodshed in neighbouring countries in the first phase, the political establishment of post-Soviet Kazakhstan was unwilling to employ coercive measures against protesters and risk losing power. Suppressing the protests was not an option also due to the population’s still fresh collective memories of the government’s coercive repressions against student protesters in December 1986 (Taukina 2005b) and ethnic

minorities in June 1989 (Ryskozha 2009). We have seen so far that anti-regime forces increased regime's cost of suppressing protests. For democratisation to take off, they must also decrease regime's cost of toleration.

In line with Bermeo's argument, the regime's cost of tolerating protest mobilisation depends on its perception of what the effects of extremism will be. Let us look at each of the three scenarios in more detail. First, while the post-communist incumbents were heavily attacked by the opposition and the popular masses, they did not perceive any major threat from radicals and extremists. As I mentioned earlier, many of the strong oppositional SMOs suffered from internal cleavages making their rhetoric and programmes inconsistent and vague. For instance, the originally powerful 'Azat' movement split in two in 1992, thus becoming weaker and unable to seriously compete in transition elections. Several radical Cossack organisations such as the 'Cossacks' Union of Steppe Region' and the 'Vozrozhdeniye' Committee that formed in the early 1990s posed a serious threat not only to ruling elites but also to the territorial integrity of Kazakhstan (Andreev 2012; Omarova 2001). However, internal conflicts as well as confrontations with Kazakh nationalistic organisations rendered them harmless to the regime. As we can see then, the first scenario is not applicable to Kazakhstan because extremists had no chance of winning in elections. Speaking of the second transition scenario, this would have been plausible if the opposition's moderates had won presidential elections or a majority of seats in parliament. The 'Azat' interviewee who competed with Nazarbayev in the 1991 presidential elections recalls: 'These elections were conducted illegally and featured numerous violations. According to law, candidates have one month to collect signatures in order to register their candidacy. In practice, only 10 days were allotted. On the last day, our headquarters was destroyed by militia. That's when all the signature lists disappeared and I could not register my candidacy' (Sviridov

and Sviridova 2006: 292). The first parliament of independent Kazakhstan elected in March 1994 mostly consisted of pro-governmental deputies: 80 out of 177 seats were taken by the pro-governmental 'People's Unity of Kazakhstan' Union, 70 seats went to various oppositional parties, and 25 seats were allocated to centrist deputies (Kuttykadam 2010). Such a parliamentary layout brings us to the third scenario, which best matches the democratisation pattern seen in Kazakhstan in the first phase.

Confident of its victory in transition elections and unwilling to bear the high costs of repressing protest mobilisation, the Kazakh post-communist incumbents decided to cooperate with the opposition in undertaking democratic reforms in order to legitimise their rule. The regime's confidence stemmed primarily from the public's trust in President Nazarbayev. As I mentioned earlier, numerous opinion polls show that people perceived Nazarbayev as guarantor of interethnic and political stability, peace and public accord (Abdakimov 2003: 354). Indicative of this trust are the presidential elections of 1991, in which Nazarbayev received 98.7% of the votes, and the 1995 referendum on the prolongation of president's term until 2000, which was approved by 95.4%. Furthermore, a national poll conducted in July 1993 showed that if presidential elections were held today, then 87% of respondents would have voted for Nazarbayev (Gurevich 1993a). Since Nazarbayev supported the pro-governmental 'People's Unity of Kazakhstan' Union, it enjoyed greater public support than oppositional parties (Giller Institute 1995a), guaranteeing it a majority of seats in the 1994 parliament. All in all, popular support for Nazarbayev's course of socioeconomic and political reforms legitimised the post-communist incumbents' rule (Kuttykadam 2010; O'Beachain and Polese 2010; Schatz 2006).

My interview data illustrates changes in the regime's strategies toward protest mobilisation and the opposition. It is through such tactics of cooperation versus confrontation and inclusion versus exclusion that the regime portrayed its willingness to democratise and obtain legitimacy. Speaking of the softening of repressions, the 'Pokoleniye' activist says: 'Previously we were jailed for protesting, but then [1994] they preferred to fine us instead of imprisonment'. The 'Azat' interviewee explains the regime's growing lenience toward protesters: 'If previously the regime would have sent the Special Police Force to suppress protesters, then they would not do that because they knew that the state was unstable and lacking legitimacy. In fact, they themselves were afraid of strictly punishing us'. The leader of 'Workers' Movement' adds that the regime stopped the open and public repression of protesters. Almost all interview respondents claim that the regime started to openly cooperate with the opposition. Thus, the 'Green Salvation' activist says that state organs invited them to consult on various environmental matters, while the 'Vainakh' Chechen Association member noted that since 1995 the association has been represented in the Assembly of Nations. The member of 'Azat' informed me that he was invited by President Nazarbayev in 1998 to discuss the struggle against widespread corruption and other political matters. Finally, the 'Pokoleniye' activist proudly states: 'Government soon realised that we act as buffers between them and the people. Without us, there would have been total chaos. That is why they often invite us to the government and listen to us'.

The regime's cooperation with oppositional SMOs and civil society institutions resulted in the significant democratic reforms mentioned in the previous chapter. Thus, Kazakhstan did more to democratise in the first five years of independence than in the 22 years of its sovereign existence. Many scholars agree that the 1993 constitution as well as

the 1994 parliament were the freest and most pluralist of all (Dyrdina 2007; Kuanyshalin 2012; Kuttykadam 2010).

Waning Protest Mobilisation: What Went Wrong?

According to the moderation argument advanced by Bermeo, ‘radical popular organizations threaten democratic transitions if they fail to moderate their demands and behaviour as the moment of elite choice approaches’ (Bermeo 1997: 305). However, as we have seen, moderation theory does not hold in Kazakhstan’s case where the regime accepted democratisation despite extensive protest mobilisation. By presenting ample evidence against the moderation argument, Bermeo emphasised the role of what she calls the ‘costs of suppression axiom’ in explaining many democratic transitions which evolved alongside extremist popular challenges. This axiom fits well in describing the Kazakh elite’s acceptance of democracy in the face of growing protest mobilisation in the first phase. Will this theory prove useful in explaining the stalling of democratisation that occurred in the second phase?

This section analyses the relationship between protest mobilisation and stalling democratisation in the second phase. I hypothesise that democratisation stalled in response to waning protest activity. Starting out by describing the factors that led to the decrease in the number of protests, I will then discuss the role of popular protests in the breakdown of democratisation.

Weakening of Oppositional SMOs

The country’s first parliamentary elections and the regime’s ingratiation with members of oppositional SMOs challenged the opposition’s organisational integrity. As was mentioned earlier, on the eve of the 1994 parliamentary elections the ‘Azat’ movement

split in two: radicals and moderates. The moderates, led by Akatayev, left and established a Republican Party 'Azat', which functioned in opposition to the similarly-named radical Civil Movement (Kuttykadam 2010). My interviewee representing the 'Azat' movement claims that since Akatayev and his followers hoped to enter the parliament, 'they never went beyond soft criticism of Nazarbayev'. Furthermore, during his work in the 'Azat' movement, my interviewee also ran the 'Zheltoksan' National Democratic Party. He says that Amanzhol Nalibayev – an ex-policeman and member of the 'Zheltoksan' party who was closely connected with government elite – later created a homonymous public association (Zona.kz 2004) and incited the government to close 'Zheltoksan'. Another example of such a betrayal is presented by a leader of the 'Lad' Slavic movement: 'We thought that Zakharov – a leader of the 'Russian Commune' – was with us... but we were wrong. He asked us to join the 'Otan' Party [pro-governmental] by telling us that they would give us money to pay for office. We refused because we don't dance to somebody's whistle!'

All interview respondents agree that the major problem facing the Kazakh opposition since the 1990s is its disunity (Bowyer 2008; Kamziyeva 2007). Comparing the opposition in the first and second phases, the leader of the 'Shanyrak' public association remembers: 'previously the opposition was more consolidated: common campaigns and projects. Later, because of the lacking democratic spirit, the opposition got atomised; everyone was on his own'. The co-leader of the 'RNPK' party quotes numerous requests from the oppositional electorate: 'whenever I visit remote villages I hear people asking the opposition to unite around a single idea which they will definitely support'. Every respondent calls for the unification of the opposition for the sake of organising protests and waging powerful election campaigns against pro-governmental forces. According to a leader of the unregistered 'Alga' party, 'without unification, the opposition will not be

able to pose a serious threat to the regime; until this happens the regime will not perceive us as serious contenders for power’.

Popular Disillusionment with Reforms

A national opinion poll conducted in 1995 by the Giller Institute revealed that a significant majority of respondents was disillusioned with the state’s market reforms (Giller Institute 1995b). Therefore, half of the respondents wanted a return to a state command economy. Such trends make sense if one considers the fact that 78% of respondents are unsatisfied with life; ‘Economic reforms without concrete and well-thought strategies of their attainment took too long, exhausted people, bred a sense of nostalgia for communist past’ (Kuttykadam 1996). Thus, only 9% of respondents stated that life in Kazakhstan had improved since independence; 22% thought it remained the same and 65% felt life had deteriorated. Indicative of public disillusionment with the government’s reforms are following slogans of the day:

- *‘We won victory for a better life’* [chanted by pensioners and veterans of World War II]
- *‘Deputies! Since August 1994 you cannot adopt a law on indexation of people’s bank deposits! There is no trust in you; Deputies! You betrayed the most unprotected people’*
- *‘Capitalism is bankrupt! Long live socialism’*
- *‘Issue the president the salary of a teacher!; Inauguration in the time of plague’*
- *‘No to the bloody “democracy” of the regime’*
- *‘Shame on Nazarbayev’s justice’*
- *‘Freedom to Kazakh mass media; today closure of media – tomorrow GULAG; today they took away our freedom of speech – tomorrow they take away our lives!’*
- *‘This regime must step down!’*

As in the first phase, people chanted slogans related to poor living standards, which had not improved significantly by the end of the 1990s. We can also observe that in comparison to the first phase, protesters started attacking the president, which could be taken to indicate a decline of trust in Nazarbayev. Moreover, people explicitly showed

their distrust in parliament and its policies. All these observations are given increased credibility by reference to numerous opinion polls and scholarly works. Such an overwhelming disillusionment with the state organs justifies the public's longing for a socialist past. More importantly, protesters voiced their concerns about the state of political reforms, emphasising repressions and violation of freedom of speech and rule of law, all of which coincided with the stalling democratisation seen in the second phase.

Many interviewees attested to a decline in popular trust in government and disillusionment with its reforms. The leader of 'Lad' claims: 'people realised that democratic transition is absolute nonsense! They became demoralised and fell into prostration... they no longer think they can change anything by protesting or other means'. The founder of 'Green Salvation' adds that people lost faith in the government and its effectiveness; the common people simply do not feel the existence of government when their rights are violated. In addition, the 'Azat' activist says that the regime alienated people by not keeping its promises: 'people stopped believing in the government's promises to eliminate corruption, which has now become even more widespread'. Speaking of trust in Nazarbayev, he mentioned that in the early 1990s Nazarbayev promised to rule on issues pertaining to Kazakh nationality in the nationalists' favour, but by breaking his promise he dissatisfied many of his followers.

The Public's Declining Trust in SMOs

Witnessing constant conflicts between and within SMOs, many people lost faith in their ability to represent their interests and wage a powerful anti-regime campaign. Due to this, a poll showed that with the exception of the pro-governmental Kazakhstan Party of People's Unity and the now-oppositional Communist Party, none of the parties and SMOs enjoyed significant popular support (Giller Institute 1995b). Kuttykadam argues

that in a period of socioeconomic crisis only those parties ‘which are genuinely interested in improving people’s welfare, which are ready to serve people and can provide them with the faith in the leader and themselves’ (Kuttykadam 2010: 72) can win people’s hearts and minds.

Unfortunately, none of the SMOs present at the end of the 1990s met the abovementioned criteria. Thus, an activist from the ‘DCK’ oppositional party formed in 2002 contends that many SMOs in the second phase lost their authority. Since people did not recognise them as viable challengers to the regime, they did not support them. In this vein, the leader of ‘Pokoleniye’ complains: ‘We have seen so many parties in our age; all of them disappear soon after elections’. Additionally, according to the ‘Workers’ Movement’ activist, political parties exploit people in their interest without even knowing what people want: ‘instead of finding out people’s genuine needs, the parties just guess. In doing so, the opposition produces frames which do not resonate with the masses. As a result, they face public apathy and indifference’.

Decreasing Frame Resonance and Growing Political Apathy

Based on the interview data, I revealed two major factors explaining the waning of protest mobilisation in the second phase. First is the resolution of grievances which, although resonant in the early first phase, rendered many existing CAFs outdated and ineffective. Second is the abovementioned public disillusionment with state reforms and weak opposition, which demotivated people from participating in protests. I begin by discussing the first factor.

The regime’s cooperation with the opposition in the first phase resulted in various reforms that addressed issues raised by protesters. Interethnic grievances were addressed

by forming the Assembly of Nations in 1995, which gave greater representation to ethnic minorities. As I mentioned earlier, a member of the ‘Vainakh’ Chechen Association took pride in his association being represented in the Assembly. According to environmental SMOs, the government listened to their concerns regarding illegal felling of trees, water pollution, desertification, etc. Thus, the leader of ‘Green Salvation’ noted several improvements benefiting the environment of Kazakhstan, including the ratification of various international environmental conventions, the creation of national parks and the adoption of environmental legislation. Furthermore, an activist from ‘Nevada-Semei’ expressed her satisfaction with the government’s support for her organisation’s activities in its international anti-nuclear campaign. The most acute grievances – i.e. those of a socioeconomic nature – also benefitted from early reforms. The ‘Pokoleniye’ movement, for instance, received favourable treatment from the government, which readily listened to the movement’s concerns about growing inflation, low pensions and rising utility bills. ‘Workers’ Movement’ achieved not only payment of accrued payroll, but also increase of wages and other benefits. Despite some major policy miscalculations, the regime was clearly trying hard to address socioeconomic grievances. Interestingly, none of the two political SMOs present in the first two phases said anything positive regarding the regime’s resolution of political grievances, an anomaly I will return to later in the chapter.

So, many CAFs that were resonant in the first phase lost their public appeal in the second phase because the issues raised in these frames were resolved. To illustrate, the ‘Lad’ interethnic and ‘Azat’ political movements were very successful in first-phase protest mobilisation due to the resonance of the state’s ‘recognition of the Russian language’ and ‘release of political prisoners’ frames respectively; once the Russian language was granted the status of an official language and prisoners were released, both of the frames

lost resonance and this led to a decrease in protest moods. All of the interviewees who said that their issues were resolved in the second phase mentioned that they had to devise new action frames for old ones became obsolete. It is worth noting that the ‘Nevada-Semei’ movement gradually lost its followers once the Semei testing site was closed. It tried to construct new frames (unrelated to nuclear testing), but they proved to be ineffective in popular mobilisation because people associated ‘Nevada-Semei’ primarily with the issue of the testing site. The leader of the ‘Tabigat’ movement noted that the resonance of frames varies between local and national frames. Upon resolution of local environmental issues, local frames quickly lose their resonance; national frames, in contrast, are more persistent.

The second reason for the waning protest activity is the public’s disillusionment with the government’s incompetence and the opposition’s inconsistency, which drove people to states of apathy and political alienation. As the leader of ‘Lad’ put it: ‘people were so demoralised ... that they could not react to anything, be that an advertisement or call for action’. One skill that many people developed as a result of constant perturbations in government and opposition is a ‘nose for demagogy’ (Kuttykadam 2010: 72). Thus, it is now much more difficult for SMOs to mobilise the masses for protest; people now think twice before either joining a SMO or participating in a protest. Experience has nevertheless taught them how to distinguish a trustworthy SMO from another and, aware of that, the ‘Alga’ political party has invested lots of effort in winning people’s trust. ‘The most precious resource that we have is people’s trust. People do not just trust us; they know that we are the organisation that will help and protect them. As a result, our adherents readily support us and take part in our protest events’, the leader of ‘Alga’ told me. Consequently, organisations that lack people’s trust and support cannot produce resonant action frames, leading to the failure of their protest mobilisation efforts.

Some disillusioned people decided to completely distance themselves from SMOs and government. According to the 'Tabigat' movement activist, the Kazakh population in the second phase grew to be extremely tired of nationwide protest activity; they had countless other problems to focus upon, such as unemployment and deteriorating living conditions. Looking inward to address their private problems, they turned their backs on public issues.

Stalling Democratisation

By utilising the ‘costs of suppression axiom’, we have seen how protest mobilisation facilitated the regime’s acceptance of democratisation in the first phase. Can Bermeo’s theory help explain a causal relationship between protest mobilisation and stalled transition in the second phase? According to this axiom, democratisation takes place when a dictatorial regime finds it too costly to suppress growing protest mobilisation. At the same time, anti-regime forces must ensure that the regime’s costs of tolerating protests are kept low. If so, then an anti-democratic regime which desires to stay in power would prefer to suppress protest mobilisation but only when the costs of doing so are bearable and the costs of tolerating it are not. Matching this scenario to the Kazakhstani case, we can see that Bermeo’s theory works.

Challengers’ waning protest activity in the second phase decreased the regime’s costs of suppressing weakly organised oppositional SMOs. The strong popular support enjoyed by President Nazarbayev also indicated that suppressing the opposition would not be too risky for the regime. Foreseeing its imminent victory over the opposition, the regime thus started a ‘soft’ struggle against it. It had to start its anti-oppositional campaign as soon as possible as the costs of toleration were rapidly increasing.

The strengthening of newly elected legislative and judicial branches as a result of democratic reforms increased the regime’s costs of toleration. Kuttykadam writes that an extremely pluralist and heterogeneous parliament with half of the seats occupied by the oppositional block posed serious threats to Nazarbayev (2010). This 1994 parliament was genuinely independent of the executive and often criticised the government and president as well as the course of their socioeconomic reforms. To survive, the regime urgently needed to tame the uncontrollable parliament and judiciary. Ideally, it had to replace

these bodies with loyal elites and consolidate power in the presidency. This is exactly what happened – the 1994 parliament was dissolved and a new ‘pocket’ parliament was elected in 1995 with serious violations highlighted by various international elections observation missions. For example, the uncooperative Constitutional Court which was reluctant to grant dissolution of the 1994 parliament was soon replaced with a marionette Constitutional Council in 1995. Thus, ‘between dissolution of 1994 parliament and elections of 1995 parliament, Nazarbayev adopted 130 decrees with the power of law, thanks to which he built such a monumental and monstrous regime of personal power’ (Kuanyshtalin 2012). In the temporary absence of a parliament, President Nazarbayev established the Assembly of Nations as his rubber stamp for approving two referenda: one on the prolongation of the president’s term of office until 2000 and the second on the adoption of a new 1995 constitution, which enormously expanded his powers at the expense of the legislature and the judiciary.

Returning to the costs of suppression, the regime started its cooptation of the opposition in the middle of the second phase (i.e. the end of the 1990s) when protest mobilisation was minimal. Although some measures to fence off the opposition were taken in the first phase, these measures were mostly ineffective until they were combined with the cooptation strategies of the second phase. The interview data suggests various strategies implemented by the regime were aimed at demoralising, polarising, sabotaging and oppressing oppositional SMOs and their activists. Most oppressed of all were the political SMOs ‘Azat’ and ‘RNPK’. Thus, the ‘Azat’ leader says that the KNB (Committee of National Security) wanted to destroy them because of their criticisms of the regime. ‘They were afraid that I would attract many people, and created homonymous organisations to offset my movement... I remember how I was publicly attacking Nazarbayev and was then approached by Sultanov [the president’s aide] who asked if I

needed a flat or anything else’, said my interviewee. The regime considers political SMOs and their protest events as the most threatening of all. This could explain why the regime is so reluctant to resolve political grievances which could have a short- and long-term negative impact on its survival. The ‘RNPK’ co-leader claims that, besides bribing its activists, the KNB practiced strategies of intimidation, threats and oppression against adherents. All of the interviewees are wary of the regime’s provocative tactics aimed at splitting and destroying SMOs, embroiling the leadership and disrupting protest events. Finally, a leader of ‘Workers’ Movement’ states that the 1995 Law on Freedom of Assembly and Demonstrations was adopted in response to workers’ growing protest mobilisation. It put strict limitations on organising and running protest events in Kazakhstan.

Conclusion

To sum up, protest mobilisation played a facilitative role in the early democratic transition in Kazakhstan. Due to extensive protest mobilisation in the first phase, post-communist incumbents could not bear the high costs of repressing protesters. By ensuring that the regime’s costs of toleration were low, anti-regime forces envisaged that pivotal elites would choose to democratise.

Elites’ calculations regarding the democratic transition scenario depended on their forecasts in regard to extremists’ chances of victory in transition elections. Confident of the public’s support and of the extremists’ defeat in the elections, the regime chose to accept democracy as a way to legitimise its rule. The regime’s cooperation with the opposition’s moderates resulted in the first democratic reforms, which can be represented by the adoption of liberal legislation, the easing of repressions and the guaranteeing of basic civil rights.

Protest mobilisation started to wane at the beginning of the second phase. This happened for two reasons: 1) public disillusionment with reforms and the opposition, and 2) the resolution of various grievances. By that time it was evident that the transition to democracy had started to experience troubles.

To address the puzzle, I employed Bermeo's 'costs of suppression axiom', which I used in the first section of the chapter to explain the positive relationship between mobilisation and democratisation in the first phase. It appears that post-communist incumbents desiring to stall democratisation turned to the elimination of challengers and usurpation of parliament and the judiciary. In accordance with Bermeo's theory, the best time to attack anti-regime forces is when the costs of repressing them are low (i.e. during minimal protest mobilisation). Confident of public support in the second phase, Nazarbayev started co-opting the opposition. This endeavour was also fuelled by the growing risks to the survival of the regime being posed by the powerful pluralist parliament elected in 1994. All in all, considering the facilitative role of protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan's transition to democracy in the first phase, we can claim that the waning of protest activity in the mid-1990s had a negative effect on the pace of democratic reforms.

As a result of the co-opting of the opposition and the usurping of the legislative and judiciary branches, President Nazarbayev started to consolidate power in the presidency by passing the controversial 1995 constitution and extending his term in office until 2000.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

In his December 2012 address to the nation, President Nazarbayev stated that Kazakhstan had successfully accomplished its aim of taking its place in the list of the world's 50 most competitive states (Baimanov 2013)⁶⁷. By outlining his country's major achievements in socioeconomic reforms, industrialisation and foreign policy, he set a new strategic goal – a place on the list of the 30 most developed countries by 2050. The Global Competitiveness Index is based on 110 variables, most of which relate to countries' micro and macroeconomic development as well as advances in technological innovation and social reforms. What this index does not include, however, is any reference to countries' observance of human rights and provision of political liberties. Both of these dimensions form the basis of another very influential list; the 'Freedom in the World' index compiled by Freedom House. A recently published 'Nations in Transit' report by this organisation highlights a stark deterioration in Kazakhstan's 'democraticness' score, labelling it a 'consolidated authoritarian regime' (Karsybekov 2013). Both of these ratings serve to confirm President Nazarbayev's vision of the country's current priorities: "First – economics, then – politics".

It is due to this formula, which formed the foundation of Kazakhstan's strategic development plan announced by Nazarbyaev in 1997 – the so-called 'Kazakhstan 2030' document – that all political and/or politicised grievances in Kazakhstan have been

⁶⁷ The Global Competitiveness Index, designed by the World Economic Forum, assesses the competitiveness landscape of 148 economies, providing insights into the drivers of their productivity and prosperity (World Economic Forum 2013). According to the recent 2013–2014 Global Competitiveness Report, Kazakhstan ranks in 50th place among the 148 countries.

ignored or repressed. The year when the strategy was adopted coincided with the period of stalling democratisation (1995–2000). Furthermore, the adoption of a pro-authoritarian constitution in 1995 (Masanov 2002) and a number of anti-democratic legislative changes put an end to vibrant civic activity and, most importantly, contributed to the waning of extensive protest mobilisation seen in the early 1990s. After a brief lull, however, protest mobilisation again started to grow in the early 2000s, reaching another peak in 2008. Nevertheless, the early progress in democratisation which was reversed by the regime in the mid-1990s never regained its momentum.

The present thesis has pursued two goals: 1) identify which of four social movement theories best explains the cyclicity of protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan; and 2) examine the relationship between protest mobilisation and the stalled transition to democracy in the 1990s. The present concluding chapter will proceed as follows: first, I will identify the gaps in the social movements and democratisation literature this dissertation attempted to address. Next, I will re-state the central points of the thesis, followed by some comments on the study's limitations. The last section will highlight areas for future research.

The nature of the questions I posed required me to review the social movements and democratisation literature. Until the 1990s, the structural theories of social movements underestimated the role of psychological factors in mobilising individuals to protest. By pointing out cases when people protested despite the absence of social movement organisations' (SMOs) framing work and vice versa, critics have allotted the collective action frames (CAF) perspective a secondary role in the explanation of protest mobilisation. In Chapter 4, the thesis aimed to give due credit to the CAF perspective by advancing it to the forefront of social movement research. Convinced of its theoretical

plausibility and applicability to Kazakhstan based on my personal observation and interviews with political experts, I used its major propositions to hypothesise that the cyclicity of protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan is due to the changes in the resonance of frames. It was also envisaged that this principle emphasis on the CAF perspective would test critics' claim regarding the secondary role of ideational factors in protest mobilisation.

Although not purely a social movement theory, Olson's (1971) theory of collective action also deemphasised the role of individuals' moral incentives in predicting collective action. Arguing that individuals protest not only due to economic incentives but also due to their moral motives, the thesis again highlighted the significance of the CAF perspective, further contributing to Olson's theory of collective action.

Just like the literature on social movements, the democratisation literature is heavily biased in favour of structural and institutional explanations of democratic transitions, thus downgrading the role of popular mobilisation. Although many of its variables (e.g. income inequality, a small middle class and the 'resource curse') fit the explanation of stalled democratisation in Kazakhstan, the structural approach to democratisation is not without faults. Besides being overdeterministic, the structuralists' approach to democratisation is also accused of being apolitical, ignoring the crucial role played in a democratic transition by political actors' strategic choices and, especially, the society in focus. Taking into account the controversial role of popular protest mobilisation in democratisation, Chapter 6 contributed to the recurrent debate between proponents and opponents of the 'democratisation from below' scenario by studying the relationship between protest mobilisation and democratisation in Kazakhstan.

Although not as overdeterministic and apolitical as the structural explanations of democratisation, the institutional approach also ignores grassroots mass mobilisation in defining the success of democratic transition. For democratisation to occur, institutionalists argue, post-communist incumbents must have limited access to power resources that would prevent them from suppressing the opposition and curtailing political freedoms. The fact that political actors' institutional choices in building either pro- or anti-democratic institutions depend not only on access to power resources but also on grassroots mobilisation has been somewhat overlooked. Chapters 5 and 6 addressed this gap by placing popular protest mobilisation at the centre of the understanding of democratisation in Kazakhstan.

In addition to the abovementioned literature gaps, the thesis also contributed to an existing small pool of studies on democratic transitions in Central Asia in general and in Kazakhstan in particular. The focus of these studies is primarily on formal and more recently on informal institutions (Isaacs 2009), and such studies often fall short of adequately addressing republics' transition to democracy. The 'Tulip Revolution' in Kyrgyzstan in 2005, the violently suppressed public demonstrations in Andijan (Uzbekistan) in the same year and growing protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan suggest that scholars should pay more attention to contentious regional politics and to its influence on the stranglehold of authoritarian regimes.

The study's first research objective was addressed in the empirically focused Chapter 4, which began with the operationalisation of the theoretical variables that were introduced in Chapter 2 and depicted in four causal diagrams. Then, matching interview data obtained from the leaders of 12 SMOs to those theoretical causal diagrams, I process-traced the variables' effects on protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan. The empirical

evidence did not match the theoretical predictions of the CAF perspective, thus leading to a rejection of the study's first research hypothesis. The CAF perspective was compromised by one of its previously documented and major problems, which is related to its inability to explain instances of protest mobilisation where SMOs' framing work was either minimal or absent. Moreover, none of the remaining perspectives – with the notable exception of political opportunity structures (POS) – was able to perfectly predict the cyclicity of protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan throughout the three identified phases. The theoretical fit of the POS perspective suggests the prevalence of such structural variables as the openness of the political system, the presence of elites, the stability of elite alignments and the state's capacity for repression. In regard to the thesis's second research question, interview data rejected the second hypothesis, according to which socioeconomic protests are more frequent than political or politicised protests due to the fact that the cost of participation in the former is much lower than in the latter. Although the POS perspective's *propensity for repressions* variable was able to predict the prevalence of socioeconomic protests in phases II and III, it failed to address variation of protest mobilisation across issue areas in the early Phase I period, which was marked by minimal instances of the regime repressing the protesting public and SMOs. The RD perspective's *intensity of deprivation* and *justification for collective action* variables, as well as Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs' theory, proved the public's prioritisation of socioeconomic issues over other issue areas as a strong argument explaining the prevalence of the socioeconomic grievance-driven protests of the early 1990s. Considering the weaknesses of a purely POS- and RD-based explanation of protest variation across issue areas, Chapter 4 called upon the development of a more sophisticated social movement theory that would link RD's micro to POS's macro explanations of protest cyclicity.

The second part of the thesis dealt with the study's second objective. Before analysing the relationship between popular protest mobilisation and democratisation, I felt it was necessary to assess the democratisation processes in Kazakhstan. Thus, by employing the modernisation, transition and culture perspectives of democratisation, as well as matching the political system of Kazakhstan to Dahl's procedural minimalists of democracy, Chapter 5 concluded that the transition to democracy initiated soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union (SU) stalled in the mid-1990s and the country slowly reverted back to authoritarianism. The interview data presented in Chapter 6 supported the study's third hypothesis, according to which the success and failure of early democratisation processes in Kazakhstan were affected by the waxing and waning of protest mobilisation. Utilising Bermeo's (1997) 'cost of suppression' axiom, I explained post-communist incumbents' decision to democratise in the early 1990s and the subsequent stalled transition in the mid-1990s.

There are three major limitations affecting this study. The first is related to its methodology. On numerous occasions, the measurement of certain variables required responses not from protest organisers (i.e. SMO leaders and activists) but from protest participants. For instance, the relative deprivation (RD) theory's micro-level 'utilitarian justification for collective action' and the POS theory's 'incentive to participate' variables required direct responses from individuals. Lacking such survey or interview data, I had to rely on elite interviewees' descriptions of individuals' motivation to protest. Although such a method is an acceptable approach, researchers need to be aware that SMO leaders might intentionally or unintentionally report false information relating to the public's justification for protesting. Another closely related methodological limitation is some interviewees' susceptibility to social desirability bias, which potentially could lead to misrepresentations appearing in the interview data. Thus, when

asked to evaluate his SMO's growth in Phase III, the leader of 'Lad' hesitantly responded by saying that 'Lad' has grown, although in his previous responses he implied there had been a weakening. To address such contradictory statements and ensure their credibility, I triangulated interviewees' response with additional primary and secondary sources.

The second limitation pertains to theoretical plausibility of the POS perspective. Although it was selected as the theory with the most fitting explanation of protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan, the rejection of the study's second hypothesis warns that the reader should nevertheless approach its predictions with caution. According to Opp (2009), individuals' incentive to protest may not always be affected by changes in POS. Hence, individuals may decide to participate in protests due to pre-existing incentives that are not affected by macro changes. Disregard for the existence of such incentives could potentially lead to misleading results. Furthermore, there are other problems with the POS perspective, which are mentioned in Chapter 2 and that must be kept in mind throughout. One way to solve these problems would be a synthesis of POS and Olson's (1971) collective action theory. Opp (2009) argues that both theories have so many common features that their integration could easily address many criticisms⁶⁸.

Overreliance on Bermeo's 'cost of suppression' axiom in the discussion of the relationship between protest mobilisation and democratisation could be regarded as another limitation. Taking into account the many theories and preconditions of democratisation, by no means did Chapter 6 attempt to claim the exclusivity of an agency-driven approach to democratisation. As was seen in chapters 3 and 5, post-communist incumbents' institutional choices in the aftermath of the SU's collapse were not constrained and dictated only by popular protest mobilisation; factors such as the burgeoning economic crisis, acute social problems, deepening intra-elite cleavages, weak

⁶⁸ For further details on this theoretical integration, see Opp (2009), p. 198.

political institutions, an undemocratic political culture, an absence of democratic neighbours and even international pressure were also shaping elites' propensity to carry out democratic reforms. I justified the focus on grassroots mobilisation in Chapter 6 by referring to: a) the abovementioned neglect of popular protest mobilisation in the democratisation literature; and b) the nature of the thesis's research questions.

As we have seen so far, all social movement theories – including the most favoured POS perspective – have certain theoretical weaknesses that must be addressed in future research. POS perspective's inability to account for protest variation across issue areas during the times characterised by regime's low propensity for protest is one such weakness. By scrutinising these weaknesses, Opp (2009) advances a synthesis of existing approaches (e.g. RD and POS perspective) – a *structural-cognitive model* (SCM) – which is aimed at developing and testing the micro–macro explanations of protest mobilisation. All theories, Opp argues, implicitly suppose the existence of a micro–macro level mobilisation, but none of them provide a clear micro model that would explain 'how exactly does individual action translate into collective action' (330). Figure 7.1 illustrates the causal argument of SCM with special emphasis placed upon the micro–macro explanation.

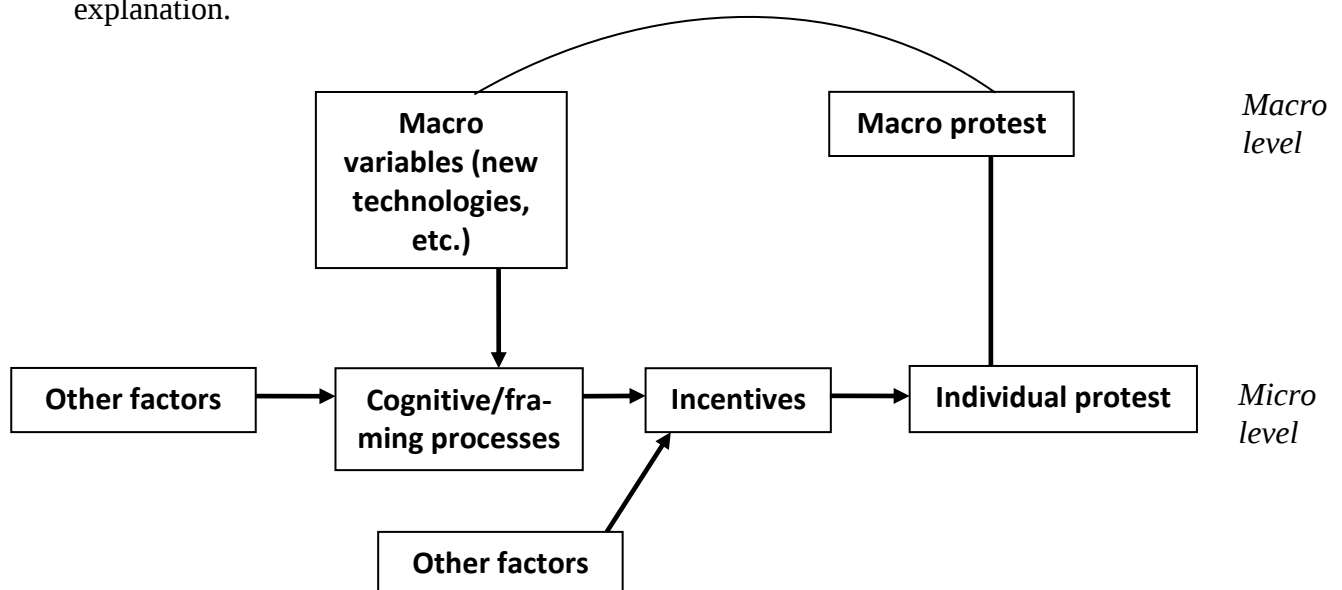


Figure 7-1: Causal diagram of SCM theory adapted from Opp (2009)

A significant role in the SCM is allotted to ‘other factors’, which determine not only framing processes but also the incentives to protest. Framing work is not exclusive to SMOs’ framing on the macro level; individual actors can also communicate frames on a micro level. The same logic applies to incentives which are also not exclusively affected by macro variables; SMO activities are no longer the only source of frames, as new technologies such as social networks and message boards now make a decisive contribution to frame construction. These as well as other propositions of SCM have to be researched further to test their claims. It is yet to be seen whether SCM explains protests events better than existing theories (Op cit. : 336).

Considering the facilitative effect of protest mobilisation on democratisation and witnessing the wave of social upheavals in the Middle East as well as the growth of protest mobilisation in Kazakhstan in recent years, one could ask quite an obvious question: what are the hopes for re-democratisation in Kazakhstan? In order to answer this question, I would like to quote an extract from Isaacs (2010), who outlined the primary reasons why Kazakhstan is less susceptible to a colour revolution:

“First, elites are generally consolidated around the president. Those oppositional elites who do exist are cut from the same cloth as the ruling elite and are unwilling to agitate public uprising against Nazarbayev. Second, the opposition is generally weak. While some parties are well financed they have little public support, are marginalised from political process (due to sanctions) and lack sufficient will to challenge the regime. Third, external agents are more interested in their hard security and economic interests (terrorism and energy) than liberal democratic normative socialization. Pressure for reform from the international community, while present, remains weak and poorly enforced. Fourth, civil society is weak and ground down by repressive sanctions and as well as being co-opted by the government. Lastly, a large degree of the population is seemingly passive and uninterested in politics. Many possess a psychological reverence to Nazarbayev based on the perceived material benefits he has brought the nation.” (197).

As we can see, Isaacs’ reasons closely coincide with the present study’s interview data, according to which closed POS, ineffective CAFs, underfunded SMOs lacking societal support and muted political grievances in the third phase complicate the growth of political protests, thus diminishing hopes for democratisation in the near future. On top

of that, the regime continues to enjoy the low costs of suppressing protests, making it even more immune to political challengers.

Appendix A

Semi-structured interview schedule

Introduction

I am carrying out this interview as part of my doctoral research at the University of Oxford, UK. The research focuses on the democratisation processes underway in Kazakhstan. In particular, I am looking at the ways in which changes in popular mobilisation determine the prospects of democratisation in Kazakhstan. It is envisaged that the research findings will eventually contribute to the strengthening of civil society and to the further institutionalisation of democratic institutions in Kazakhstan.

First of all, I would like to thank you for providing me with the opportunity to interview you. Your comments and views are very valuable and important for the thorough and in-depth investigation of the research subject.

The interview will last for approximately one hour. Its design and format have been approved by the University of Oxford's Ethics Committee, which means that the interview follows principles of confidentiality and anonymity. All the information will be protected and stored in a safe place with all references to names and locations changed and/or anonymised. Only the researcher and the University examiners will have access to the interview transcripts. Having said this, I would also like to tape record your answers. Would you mind if I do so?

Please let me know if you have any questions regarding the subject and format of the interview.

Start

1. How long have you been heading/working in (did you head/work in) the XYZ organisation?
2. Around which issues does/did your organisation (XYZ) usually mobilise the [specific sections of society] for mass demonstrations, gatherings, and acts of protest? [*probe in relation to political issues, environmental issues, interethnic relations, socioeconomic problems, etc.*]
3. What are the types of mass gatherings organised by XYZ? What are the most common? [*probe in relation to demonstrations and protests, marches, sit-ins, making collective petitions, etc.*]
4. Has XYZ or its supporters ever been subject to violence during an act of public protest? If yes, why and how often? [*probe in relation to damage to property, confrontation with police, etc.*]

5. How often does/did XYZ mobilise people for mass gatherings? *[in the past year, month; since its formation; since the interviewee commenced work at XYZ]*
6. In your opinion, what factors influence the frequency and scope of XYZ's mass mobilisation? *[in terms of contributing to an increase and/or decrease in the number of protests]*
7. Historically speaking, has XYZ been more successful or less successful in mobilising people in [one of the phases depending on the case] compared to now [or a later phase]? Why? *[probe in relation to resources, XYZ's image in society, political context, presence/abundance of motivational ideas, etc.]*
8. What tactics does/did XYZ employ to mobilise the general population for mass gatherings? *[e.g. distribution of pamphlets and leaflets, announcements in mass media (press conferences, interviews, publications, internet, etc.), mailing lists, word of mouth, formal and informal networks, formal and informal speeches, confrontation with law enforcement agencies, public acts of self-mutilation, singing, wall posters and graffiti, banners, etc.]*
9. Which of the abovementioned tactics has proved to be more effective compared to others? Why?
10. What motivational idea (-s)/rationale (-s) does XYZ use in its slogans, public speeches and calls to action in order to mobilise the public for mass gatherings? *[e.g. preserving the cultural and historical heritage, protecting national identity, free and fair elections, freedom of speech, fight against corruption, preserving nature for future generations, state's failure to provide citizens with welfare, etc.]*
 - a) Which of these ideas have been more successful than others in mobilising people? Why?
 - b) What's wrong with other ideas?
11. Have motivational ideas/rationales for action changed over the years (especially since the previous time phase)? If yes, what influenced the change? *[probe in relation to waning of rhetoric, XYZ's image in society, pressure from 'above', etc.]*
12. Coverage of an issue in the mass media is believed to attract public support and consequent public mobilisation. What does XYZ do to attract publicity in the mass media? *[e.g. probe in relation to organising protests, resonant slogans, hunger strikes, disruptions of public order, convening press conferences, interviews, etc.]*
13. What obstacles does XYZ face when organising and mobilising the public for mass gatherings? *[e.g. not given permission by local government, fear of arrests, criminal prosecution, limited financial and/or human resources, skills, public apathy/indifference to an issue, no motivational ideas, etc.]*
14. What type of resources does XYZ employ in order to mobilise the population? *[probe in relation to financial and human resources, external support and services, skills, etc.]*
15. Do social unrests like the ones in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan in 2005 (so called *revolutions*) influence the mobilisation efforts of XYZ in Kazakhstan? If yes, how?

End

These are all the questions I wanted to ask. Is there anything else you want to add that you feel would be important to my research?

Thank you very much for your time and assistance. I really enjoyed talking to you.

Ask the interviewee if he/she needs a transcript of the interview. If yes, take down an address for where to send the transcript.

Inform the interviewee that I may contact him/her in the future for any clarification or additional details as necessary.

Appendix B

Profiles of newspapers selected for content analysis

Birlesu: The newspaper was founded in September 1990 by the professional union “Birlesu”. The union aimed at representing and protecting the interests of rising entrepreneurial movements in Kazakhstan. Its editors were among the first *‘neformaly’* (informals) in the country, who were emerging at the end of the 1980s. Due to its independence from the state and backing by various businesses the newspaper was able to provide objective news coverage. In June 1993 its circulation had reached 15,000 copies, the majority of which was disseminated in the then capital of Kazakhstan, Almaty. Although it could not compete with the circulation levels of the state-owned press, it quickly became popular for its democratically oriented thinking and publication of critical and provocative articles (Sviridov and Sviridova 2006). Despite its oppositional stance to the government, Birlesu – like other independent press outlets in the early 1990s – did not experience barriers to publication and distribution. As a result of the union’s dissolution, however, the newspaper ceased to exist towards the end of 1993.

Karavan: The most successful private newspaper in the 1990s was Karavan, which was founded in July 1991 by the businessman Boris Giller. By building a professional team of the best journalists in Kazakhstan it became ‘a tabloid-style newspaper that was attracted to scandals’ (Olcott 2002: 104). Thanks to its low price, publication of private advertisements and appeal to all segments of society, by February 1994 Karavan had become very popular and had the largest circulation numbers in the republic – 300,000 copies. However, its growing politicisation and support for oppositional parties alarmed the regime, who saw the newspaper as an increasing threat (Sarmurzina 1998). Thus, during the state’s monopolisation of the media campaign in 1998, Giller received such a generous offer for Karavan that he was compelled to sell it. Gradually, Karavan was transferred to the state-owned “Khabar” media holding. As a result, in early 1999 many journalists with pro-oppositional views left Karavan and either joined other newspapers or created their own.

Karavan-Blitz: Karavan newspaper was often criticised for being too ‘yellow’ in its attempts to appeal to all segments of society. Its 100 pages of content ranged from world pop star gossip to coverage of legislation debates. Sviridov and Sviridova (2006) believe that Karavan-Blitz – Karavan’s satellite daily newspaper – was launched in 1994 to address such a criticism. Karavan-Blitz did a better job than its ‘bigger brother’ in reporting the ‘hard news’ surrounding protest events. Since it was issued on a daily basis, it also contained more coverage of protest events. Like the Birlesu newspaper, however, Karavan-Blitz was short-lived (1994–1996).

Vremya: The first issue of Vremya newspaper was published in May 1999. Interestingly, the editorial board and journalists of Vremya had previously worked at Karavan. As was mentioned above, after Karavan became part of the state’s media holding, many of its journalists and a chief editor, Igor Melzer, left; some of them joined Vremya and continued the traditions of Karavan in terms of its critical views towards the regime and voicing of opposition rhetoric. With a growing number of readers across the republic,

Vremya's current circulation stands at 180,000 copies. Some experts claim that Vremya belongs to businessmen affiliated with oppositional political parties, which partially explains the apparent anti-regime bias in its publications and regular coverage of protest events (Omarova 2002).

Svoboda Slova: The most radical of the newspapers in my sample, Svoboda Slova was founded in March 2005. Since its foundation it has given a voice to all the oppositional political parties, public associations and social movements in Kazakhstan. For this reason, it has been constantly attacked by criminal and libel lawsuits, and psychological and physical intimidation of its journalists. Despite that, the chief editor, Gulzhan Ergalieva, has always managed to ensure the newspaper is published on time and reaches its readers. It has been suggested⁶⁹ that Svoboda Slova is financed by the oppositional party 'Azat'. Like Vremya newspaper, Svoboda Slova is well known for voicing various public grievances in its regular coverage of protest events in Kazakhstan. In fact, among all the print media in the country, it currently has the highest percentage of protest-related coverage.

⁶⁹ An anonymous person among the leaders of a rival party told me in October 2011 that "the Svoboda Slova newspaper belongs to the Azat oppositional political party". This is certainly possible as it is not clear how this newspaper is financed, especially since it has almost no commercial advertisements on its pages – a major source of revenue for many newspapers in Kazakhstan.

Appendix C

Selected protest event slogans

Slogans are categorised according to the issue area and represent all three phases. As a result of the translation of slogans from Russian and Kazakh into English, note that the original meaning and rhetoric of some slogans could potentially be distorted. This is related to the fact that some of the words used in the slogans are characterised by linguistic lacuna whereby, for instance, a certain word in Kazakh does not have a recognised English translation (Dashidorzhieva 2011). Where possible, I have tried to preserve the original tone, style and rhetoric of the slogans.

Environmental

1. No to nuclear war! (*Net yadernoi voine!*)
2. Yes to clean air, clean water and clean soil! No to radiation, pollution and negligence! (*Da – chistyí vozdukh, chistaya voda, chistaya zemlya! Net – radiatsiya, zagazovannost', khalatnost'!*)
3. Students are against the Atomic Power Station in Aktau! (*Studenty protiv AES v Aktau!*)
4. No to animal abuse! (*Net izdevatel'stvu nad zhivotnymi!*)
5. Every 'Buran' spaceship launch is a national tragedy for the Aral District. Down with Baikonur – a living fiend. (*Kazhdyi vzlet korablya 'Buran' – natsionalnyi traúr Priaralya; Doloí Baikonur – ischadiye ada.*)
6. Hands off our trees and gardens! (*Ruki proch ot derev'yev!*)

Interethnic

1. Those grieving at the status of the Russian language – you have the choice to emigrate to Russia! (*Kto toskuyet po gosudarstvennomu russkomu yazyku – volen ekhat' v Rossiyu!*)
2. Tolerate if you want; leave if you don't want. (*Khochesh – terpi; ne khochesh – ukhodi.*)
3. Only vandals destroy the sacred! Basis! Earth the hole and return the square! (*Svyatoye razrushayut tol'ko vandaly! Basis! Zaroí yamu, verni ploshchad'!*)

Political

1. Local government sells; court judges protect corrupt public officials. (*Akimat prodayet; sud'i kryshuyut.*)
2. Kazakhstan – not a free country. (*Kazakhstan – nesvobodnaya strana.*)
3. Shame on the anti-constitutional, anti-public judicial system! (*Pozor anti-konstitutsional'noi, anti-narodnoi sudebnoi sisteme!*)
4. The time has come to replace the powers that be! Long live DCK (2001–2002)! (*Pora menyat' vlast'! Da zdravstvuyet DVK (2001-2002)!*)
5. I am protesting against totalitarianism! Amendments to the Constitution – path to authoritarianism! (*Protestuyu protiv totalitarizma! Popravki v Konstitutsiyu – put' k avtoritarizmu!*)

6. So much for robbing people! Kazakhstan deserves real democracy and freedom of speech! (*Khvatit grabit' narod! Kazakhstanu – nastoyashchuyu demokratiyu i svobodu slova!*)
7. Change the policy or we will replace you. (*Pomenyaite politiku ili pomenyaem vas.*)
8. Let's defend freedom of speech! Without an independent press there are no free elections! You can't intimidate us! (*Zashchitim svobodu slova! Bez nezavisimoi pressy net svobodnykh vyborov! Nas ne zapugat'!*)
9. We are for the cloning of the first president! The first to be cloned was Dolly the sheep; that is why our symbol is a sheep! (*My za klonirovaniye pervogo prezidenta! Pervoi byla klonirovana ovechka Dolli; poetomu nash simvol – baran!*)
10. Mr. President! Tame your 'dogs'! (*Gospodin Prezident! Ugomonite svoikh 'psov'!*)
11. No to the regime's bloody 'democracy'! (*Net krovavoi 'demokratii' rezhima!*)
12. Freedom for an independent media in Kazakhstan! The closure of the independent press today is the GULAG tomorrow! Today they took away our vote – tomorrow they will take away our lives! (*Svobodu SMI Kazakhстана! Segodnya zakrytiye SMI – zavtra GULAG! Segodnya u nas otnyali golos – zavtra otnimut zhizn'!*)
13. Prevent the return of the Soviet empire! (*Ne dopustit' vozvrata imperii pod nazvaniyem Soyuz!*)
14. Deputies! Since August 1994 you can't adopt a law on the indexation of public deposits! No trust in you! (*Deputaty! S avgusta 1994 goda vy ne mozhetе prinyat' zakon ob indeksatsii vkladov naseleniya! Net very vam!*)
15. Kazakhstan – a police state. (*Kazakhstan – politseiskoye gosudarstvo.*)
16. Freedom to Galymzhan Zhakianov! We demand the immediate release of Galymzhan Zhakianov. (*Svobodu Galymzhanu Zhakiyanovu! Trebuyem nemedlenno osvobodit' Galymzhana Zhakiyanova.*)
17. Let's collectively destroy corruption! Democracy fights against corrupt bureaucrats! Who are the judges? (*Dostoino vrezhem po korruptsii! Demokratiya voyuyet s korruptsionerami! A sud'i kto?*)
18. Birlesu – a people's newspaper! Hands off Birlesu! (*Birlesu – narodnaya gazeta! Ruki proch ot Birlesu!*)
19. For freedom of speech, for independent media, for fair courts, for a just Kazakhstan! We demand fair elections! (*Za svobodu slova, za nezavisimye SMI, za chestnye sudy, za spravedlivyi Kazakhstan! My trebuyem chestnye vybory!*)
20. Everyone must have access to free Internet! (*U kazhdogo cheloveka dolzhen byt' svobodnyi dostup v Internet!*)

Socioeconomic

1. Utility companies! Stop sucking consumers' blood! (*Kommunalshchiki! Khvatit sosat' krov' potrebitelei!*)
2. For social progress! For workers' rights! For labour union solidarity! (*Za sotsial'nyi progress! Za prava trudyashchikhsya! Za profsoyuznuyu solidarnost'!*)
3. The housing programme is a failure of government! Current bank interest rates are a slip knot for people. (*Zhilishchnaya programma – proval pravitel'stva! Deistvuyushchiye bankovskiye protsenty – udavka dlya naroda.*)

4. Feed our children! Pay out salaries on time according to your legal requirements! (*Nakormite nashikh detei! Zarplatu v srok soglasno nashim zakonom!*)
5. Banks, construction companies, bureaucrats and rent seekers – you are torturers of our families; we demand a moratorium. (*Banki, zastroishchiki, chinovniki, mzdoimtsy – dusheguby nashikh semei; trebuyem moratoriya.*)
6. We demand fair distribution of money to the people. (*Den'gi narodu po spravedlivosti.*)
7. Fair tariff – transparent tariff. (*Spravedlivyi tarif – eto prozrachnyi tarif.*)
8. Right to choose a car = free country!!! (*Pravo vybora rulya = svobodnaya strana!!!*)
9. Mayor, ensure the supply of gas to our flats! We want to live! (*Akim, obespech kvartiry gazom! My khotim zhit'!*)
10. Took away property, will take away lives! Financial Police, eh? Destiny of interest holders' families – destiny of the country! (*Otnyali sobstvennost', otnimut zhizn'! Finpol, au? Sud'ba semei dolshchikov – sud'ba strany!*)
11. We demand quarterly indexation of pensions due to growing inflation. Teachers' salaries for parliamentarians! (*My trebuem ezhekvaral'no provodit' indeksatsiyu pensii v svyazi s rostom tsen. Parlamentu – zarplatu uchitelei!*)
12. Masimov! Be responsible for your promises. Return land and power to the people! (*Masimov! Otvet' za svoi obeshchaniya. Vernut' zemlyu i vlast' narodu!*)
13. Almatyzher – enemy of the people! STOP demolitions! My house – my castle! (*Almatyzher – vrag naroda! STOP snos! Moi dom – moya krepost'!*)
14. Water! Electricity! Heating! (*Vody! Sveta! Tepla!*)
15. Position of labour unions – poverty is unacceptable! Metallurgists must be given a well-deserved wage! (*Pozitsiya profsoyuzov – nishcheta nedopustima! Metallurgam dostoinuyu zarplatu!*)

Appendix D

Interviewees and organisations

The following table gives the details of my interviews with the heads of 12 selected social movement organisations categorised by four issue areas. Additionally, it provides a brief outline of these organisations' profiles.

Interviewee's position, interview date and location	SMO's title and profile
<i>Environmental</i>	
Chief activist, 8 October 2009, Almaty	<u>Nevada-Semei (1989–present)</u> : Founded by a prominent Kazakh poet, Olzhas Suleimenov, the movement advocated immediate closure of Semipalatinsk nuclear test site, and within two years managed to mobilise thousands of people for numerous marches and demonstrations across the republic. As a result of unprecedented protest mobilisation, the site was closed in August 1991. Having achieved its primary objective, Nevada-Semei laid the foundation for the formation of numerous smaller public associations and social movements, many of which still exist today. At the peak of its popularity, Nevada-Semei founded the 'Kazakhstan People's Congress' political party that existed up to 1999. The party's mission was to advance market reforms and improve citizens' living standards. Presently, Nevada-Semei is involved in various environmental as well as civil society development projects.
Director, 1 October 2009, Almaty	<u>Green Salvation (1990–present)</u> : A non-profit organisation established in 1990 to protect the public's human rights and clean up the environment. Unlike Nevada-Semei, the movement was never very active in protest mobilisation. In fact, it did not work to mobilise people in the 1990s; on the contrary, people who witnessed the achievements of Green Salvation in addressing various environmental issues approached it with requests to organise a series of protest campaigns on their behalf. Reluctant to decline such requests, Green Salvation took various measures (lawsuits, press conferences, etc) to help people attract the state's attention to their environmental concerns. However, it rarely resorted to protest mobilisation as a means of pressing the regime.
Head, 21 September 2009, Almaty	<u>Tabigat (Nature) (1989 –present)</u> : Established in the same year as Nevada-Semei, this movement raised concerns about environmental disasters in the Aral sea basin and water pollution in Balkhash Lake and the Caspian Sea. Despite the acute nature of the environmental concerns in the abovementioned areas, none of them could match the public resonance of the nuclear explosions in Semipalatinsk. With varying levels of success in

	terms of protest mobilisation in the early 1990s, Tabigat aimed at resolving environmental issues by cooperating with officials instead of confronting them via means of protest.
Interethnic	
Head, 10 September 2009, Almaty	<u>Ult Tagdyry (<i>Nation's Destiny</i>) (2005–present)</u> : A Kazakh non-radical nationalist movement promoting the Kazakh language, traditions and culture. Its support base is small, preventing it from staging large-scale protest events. Due to limited financial resources, Ult Tagdyry heavily relies on various donor agencies' funding. Although independent in nature, it frequently receives funding from state bodies to run projects aimed at promoting the learning of the Kazakh language and organising cultural events.
Head of the Almaty District branch, 9 February 2010, Taldykorgan	<u>Vainakh (<i>Our people</i>) (1990–present)</u> : One of the oldest interethnic SMOs in Kazakhstan, which strives to spread Chechen traditions, customs and language among the members of the Chechen diaspora. During the interethnic clashes between Chechens and Kazakhs it often played an active role in conflict mediation. Vainakh supports the president-proclaimed programme of maintaining interethnic accord and fostering of interethnic ties. However, a massacre in Malovodnoye village in 2007 that resulted in the murder of Makhamakhanov family members disillusioned many Chechens in relation to their treatment in Kazakhstan.
Head of the Almaty City branch, 6 October 2009, Almaty	<u>Lad (<i>Harmony</i>) (1993–present)</u> : Since its foundation, Lad has promoted the equal treatment of Slavic ethnicities in Kazakhstan, including their effective representation in state bodies and right to use the Russian language in all spheres of public life. Lad was most active in protest mobilisation at the beginning of the 1990s, when the interests of ethnic minorities were endangered by growing anti-Russian sentiments among Kazakh nationalists. In spite of the fact that it had achieved its programmatic goals by the mid-1990s, it never disappeared from the social movements' scene by keeping an eye on observance of Slavic ethnic minorities' rights by the state. Although the Slavic population in Kazakhstan has significantly decreased since the early 1990s Lad remains the largest and most developed Slavic movement to date, enjoying trust and recognition by both the government and people.
Political	
Co-leader, 17 September 2009, Almaty	<u>RNPK (<i>Republican People's Party of Kazakhstan</i>) (1998–2001)</u> : The party was established by ex-Prime Minister Akezhan Kazhegeldin to struggle against the regime's growing authoritarian tendencies by promoting transparency, accountability and free/fair elections. It was the first genuine oppositional party to be created after the regime's clampdown on anti-governmental parties in the mid-1990s. Soon after its formation, RNPK quickly became popular among the masses and recruited many followers. Its protest events were always very well attended and extensively covered in the mass media. Due to its heavy anti-regime rhetoric, RNPK as well as its newspapers (' <i>XXI Vek</i> ' and ' <i>SolDat</i> ') were brutally repressed and banned.

Chairman, 11 September 2009, Almaty	<u>Alga (Forward) (2005–present)</u> : Although technically the formation of Alga was officially announced in 2005, in reality Alga is a successor to the famous Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DCK) party, which was banned in January 2005. Building on the popularity of DCK, Alga enjoyed large public support among representatives of all ethnicities and social classes. Aware of its potential political challenge to the regime, state organs have long refused Alga official registration based on various politically motivated reasons. Unlike many other oppositional parties, Alga is known to have a very clear socio-political agenda, and views protest events as a strong vehicle through which to press the regime for radical reforms.
Ex-head, 25 September 2009, Almaty	<u>Azat (Freedom) (1990–1994)</u> : This SMO started its anti-Soviet propaganda as a small group of dissidents during the moratorium on political movements imposed by Gennadii Kolbin, the Secretary of the KSSR, after the 1986 riots in Almaty. When the CPSU replaced Kolbin with Nazarbayev in 1989, the political climate softened and this resulted in the formation of the Azat movement, along with many other anti-governmental organisations. Azat was an extremely powerful movement that demanded independence and sovereignty for Kazakhstan. Drawing on nationalist rhetoric, within a short period of time it garnered the support of many people, which is evident in the scope of the protest events organised by Azat. However, as a result of intra-elite cleavages and rumours of Azat's connection with post-communist incumbents, it became discredited and lost public support.
Socioeconomic	
Ex-activist and founder, 22 September 2009, Karaganda	<u>Workers' Movement (1991–1997)</u> : The evolution of the Workers' Movement was inspired by the creation of workers' committees in various mining industries. The organisers of the Workers' Movement saw a need to unite these smaller autonomous workers' committees so as to better represent their interests in dealings with employers and the government. Hence, founded on the eve of Kazakhstan's independence and in conditions of deepening economic crisis, the Workers' Movement quickly gained popularity for its successes in the indexation of coalminers' wages and overall improvement of labourers' working conditions. This would not have been possible without its frequent protests mobilising thousands of workers in Karaganda, Satpaev, Zhezkazgan and other industrial towns.
Head, 16 September 2009, Almaty	<u>Pokoleniye (Generation) (1992–present)</u> : Originally designed to advance the interests of pensioners, by the end of the 1990s the Pokoleniye movement became popular among school teachers, doctors, disabled individuals and war veterans. This SMO's projects revolve around the movement's strategic slogan: "For a dignified life!" Pokoleniye acts as a watchdog in relation to utility companies, which often raise the costs of utility bills, and government, which sometimes disregard the hard living conditions of pensioners and other socially vulnerable groups. The leadership of Pokoleniye does not shy away from organising pickets and demonstrations to pressurise the government if other

	means of influencing it prove ineffective.
Chairman and founder, 14 September 2009, Almaty	Shanyrak (<i>Home</i>) (2006–present): This SMO was established immediately after the violent clashes between police and property owners in Almaty’s Shanyrak district in the summer of 2006. Convinced that the government had adopted the wrong approach in its dealings with property owners (most of whom are labour migrants), the creators of the Shanyrak movement saw a need to establish a non-governmental body that would mediate between state organs and a public aggrieved about various socioeconomic issues. Within a few years it has grown into a body effectively assisting the public in the resolution of socioeconomic grievances through consultations, legal aid and lobbying. Like Pokoleniye, the Shanyrak leadership and its members view protests as a last resort in attaining their collective goals.

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