

Discursive Framing Manipulation through Social Media and Public Statements by the Authoritarian Regime: the Case of Kazakhstan

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Abstract

The use of discursive framing by the authoritarian regimes, especially in the post-Soviet countries, is not an understudied phenomenon. Multiethnic composition of the population, proximity to authoritarian Russia with its geopolitical ambitions in the post-Soviet region and absence of a well-established political system determined a complicated, at some points contradictory, set of legitimation strategies adopted by the countries. In this thesis, I aim to shed some light on the legitimation strategies adopted in contemporary Kazakhstan. In particular, the study focuses on the use of social media, Twitter in particular, and presidential statements and addresses in shaping political discourse in the country. Consulting various bodies of literature, including studies on authoritarian legitimation, digital authoritarianism, framing and international linkages, I research the case of Kazakhstan and advance a theoretical argument on how one can understand the dynamic changes in discursive framing used by the authoritarian regimes in response to salient political and social issues concerning the citizens of the country. From a methodological point of view, I try to capture the change in the dynamics of the use of discursive framing using a dictionary analysis and interrupted time series techniques to analyze the content of the tweets and public statements made by the President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.

Even though the results of the quantitative analysis are not statistically significant, the study exposed a couple of revealing trends. The first is that the periods of internal crises witnessed a heightened activity of President Tokayev in social media and traditional channels of information distribution. Secondly, statements communicating the stance of the regime on issues were made not only by the president, but also by the officials who have allegedly also taken part in affecting the framing advanced by the regime as a whole.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Figures	iv
List of Tables	iv
List of Abbreviations	iv
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Literature Review and Theoretical Background	7
1.1. Legitimacy and authoritarian legitimation	7
1.2. Use of technology in authoritarian countries	10
1.3. International linkages	14
1.4. Framing	15
1.5. National identity building in the post-Soviet space	17
Chapter 2: Research Design.....	21
2.1. Hypotheses	21
2.2. Data collection and time frame	22
2.3. Descriptive statistics.....	24
2.4. Analysis Methods.....	25
2.5. Limitations of the design.....	28
Chapter 3: Theoretical arguments and empirical findings	30
3.1. Linkages to Russia	30
3.1.1. Russian foreign policy and Kazakh nationalism.....	32
3.1.2. Dictionary analysis results	40
3.2. National identity.....	42
3.2.1. Dictionary analysis results	43
3.2.2. Limitations	45
Concluding remarks	47
Reference List	49

List of Figures

Figure 2.2.1. Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan.....	23
Figure 2.3.1. President Tokayev’s tweets frequency over time.....	24
Figure 2.3.2. President Tokayev’s public statements frequency over time.	25
Figure 3.1.1. President Tokayev’s tweet dated December 18, 2020.....	35
Figure 3.1.2. President Tokayev’s tweets published on March 3, 2022.	40
Figure 3.1.3. Frequency of words from ideological and rational choice dictionaries in Tokayev’s statements mentioning Russia.....	41
Figure 3.2.1. Frequency of use of civic and patriotic framing in the tweets made by Tokayev in the period between October 1, 2021 and May 20, 2022.	44
Figure 3.2.2. Interrupted time series (ITS) analysis results.	45

List of Tables

Table 2.1. List of words associated with Russia.	26
Table 2.2. Dictionary of words associated with rational choice and ideological linkages to Russia.	26
Table 2.3. Dictionary of words associated with patriotic and civic framing of the national identity.	27

List of Abbreviations

CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
ITS	Interrupted time series

Introduction

In January 2022, Kazakhstanis witnessed violent protests that erupted in a number of cities of the country and resulted in numerous deaths of civilians, with the exact number of deaths unknown up to this date. The civil unrest is the result of dissatisfaction with the long-lasting rule of Nursultan Nazarbayev, former president of the country, characterized by endemic corruption, nepotism and repression of opposition (Mallinson 2022). Even after leaving his office in 2019 and appointing Kassym-Jomart Tokayev as an heir, Nazarbayev was staying and pulling the strings behind the scene (Long 2022). The protests officially erupted due to the sudden increase in prices for car gasoline in the oil-rich western part of the country, with demands gradually expanding and including political reforms. The unrest in the western part of Kazakhstan later spread all over the country, with the greatest number of protesters going out to the streets in Almaty, the second largest city of the country and former capital (Crisis Group 2022).

To curb the protesters, Tokayev deployed numerous armed troops and requested more from the members of the Collective Security Treaty Organizations (CSTO), with the largest number of soldiers provided by the Russian allies (The Diplomat 2022). Tragic events produced much criticism against Tokayev's rule and his actions in respect to protesters, whom he claimed to be "terrorists" (The Diplomat 2022). That was serious damage to Tokayev's reputation, who made efforts to present himself as a pro-democratic and reform-oriented leader, who would gradually democratize Kazakhstan after almost thirty years of the authoritarian rule of Nazarbayev (Niyazbekov 2020). Among his initiatives were creating the National Council of Public trust consisting of prominent public figures and activists, adopting a notification system for organizers of public protests who no longer need to ask for permission from authorities and

lowering threshold of members for registration of new political parties from 40,000 to 20,000 and recently from 20,000 to 5,000 members (Satubaldina 2019; Kumenov 2022). Moreover, Tokayev proposed adopting amendments to the Constitution which would forbid close relatives of the president to hold important political posts (Kumenov 2022).

The reforms proposed by Tokayev and the period of his presidency, in general, are well received by some citizens and treated with suspicion by others. However, what differentiates the current president from his predecessor is that Tokayev gained significant support from the population by actively using the Internet and social media in particular for political discourse. Tokayev has been actively posting on Twitter since 2011 and created an Instagram account in April 2019, right before the presidential elections which followed Nazarbayev's resignation (Kumenov 2019). At this moment, Tokayev has more than 234,000 followers on Twitter and 2.1 million followers on Instagram. The point of the whole introduction on the context of the recent events in the post-Soviet space as well as details about Tokayev's presidency is in illustrating that the current president is susceptible to the public mood in society, which is mainly translated via his activity in social media. Tokayev also actively uses social media to convey messages to the citizens of the country and the foreigners as well. By doing so, he engages in political discourse by explicitly or implicitly voicing his stance on various issues, which, unlike messages delivered on television or radio, is less likely to be taken out of context or changed the meaning.

There are numerous studies discussing the Internet and democratic governance. Jackson and Lilleker (2011) find that UK MPs enhanced the feeling of democratic representation of their constituents by actively using Twitter. Vergeer (2015), in turn, suggests that Internet platforms may appear as one of the ways to tackle the communication deficit which stems from the democratic deficit. The active use of Twitter by President Tokayev in that sense more aligns with

a latter strategy of restoring democratic communication. Democratic communication is also established through active monitoring of the public discourse taking place in social media and engaging with the problems voiced over virtual platforms. However, what is not discussed in the literature to the same extent is how social media is instrumentalized by authoritarian regimes to legitimize their power and gain the support of the citizens.

The novelty of this topic lies in its complex and versatile view of the use of social media in non-democratic countries. When scholars usually discuss the use of social media in the authoritarian context, the debate largely revolves around the mobilization power of social media and authorities' attempt to deprive the protesters of this powerful tool of communication and coordination. Indeed, during the tragic events in January, as Accessnow restores the chronology, people started experiencing problems with Internet access since January 2, day one of the protests, with a total Internet blackout taking place on January 5 when Tokayev announced a state of emergency and keeping television nearly as the only source of information for the majority of citizens (Accessnow 2022). Disruption of Internet communication not only made it impossible for citizens to reach out to each other but also prevented journalists to report about the violence occurring on the streets on time (Sorbello 2022). Satariano, Mozur and Hopkins (2022) note that the Internet shutdowns also took place in Sudan, Yemen and Burkina Faso and based on Access Now data, highlight that 155 Internet disruptions occurred in 29 countries in 2020. In that sense, the Internet is perceived as a platform where opposers of an authoritarian regime can mobilize and challenge the autocrat (Kyriakopoulou 2011). Then, it is not clear how the autocrat decides on the 'right' balance between Internet endorsement and suppression actions.

Scrutinizing the case of Kazakhstan, I dive into a discussion of how one can understand Tokayev's risky strategy of endorsing Twitter as a means of communication with the public, given that it simultaneously enables discussions negatively affecting his public image and the regime's legitimacy. I also attempt to capture a change in political discourse translated by the president in his social media posts and official statements. Namely, what this research is going to focus on is how the authorities frame existing issues through the channels of communication. As Maerz and Schneider (2019) mention, the choice of topics by the heads of states shapes public discourse. I hold that not only are heads of governments capable of shaping discourse via public communication but can also frame existing issues to communicate their position to a broader audience.

There are several issues widely discussed in public that are going to be analyzed in this research. Firstly, linkages of Kazakhstan to Russia appear as such an issue. Apart from the cultural ties and constant migration flows, call from Tokayev to re-orient of *Bolashak* national scholarship program to send students to Russia appears as a signal of increasing linkages to Russia in the education area (Bohr 2022). At the same time, much discontent was expressed by the citizens of the country in respect to Tokayev's silence and neutrality on the escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (before February 24, 2022) and the full-scale military invasion of the Russian troops afterward. In that sense, social media served as the source of information about the public mood of the Kazakhstani citizens on the ties with the northern neighbor. Even though the Russian invasion is not going to be analyzed in this study, the public attitude among Kazakhstanis toward Russia has arguably worsened, as it is going to be further elaborated on. Given that there is no clear answer on how linkages to Russia can be evaluated, one of the questions this thesis aims to answer in the broader context of social media use in authoritarian

countries is: How has President Tokayev's discursive framing of Kazakhstan's linkages with Russia and Kazakh nationalism changed after the January 2022 unrest? To answer this question, I will analyze President Tokayev's publications on Twitter and statements delivered via traditional media by applying dictionary analysis method and look for other indicators suggesting that the regime distances itself from the Kremlin.

I suggest that cooperation with Russia has been largely presented as a strategic alliance, with a particular emphasis made on economic partnership. This is expected to be particularly vivid after January events when CSTO troops, which included the Russian military, were deployed to maintain order during the January 2022 unrest. This, according to my analysis, has undermined the legitimacy of Tokayev and demonstrated that he, as an autocrat, cannot rely on repression, one of the pillars of autocratic stability, according to Gerschewski (2013).

The second issue widely discussed in Kazakhstani society is of a direct relevance to the Russian expansionist foreign policy and nationalist discourse reinforced in Kazakhstan in the light of the public outburst that occurred in early January 2022 as a result of the accumulation of discontent among the population with socio-economic and political injustice the citizens faced during the long rule of the first president of the country Nursultan Nazarbayev. The violent response, as human rights activists and journalists reported, resulted in numerous cases of detention of peaceful protestors and torture with the aim of getting confessions about participation in violent activities (Kudaibergenova and Laruelle 2022, 9). A number of civil society initiatives were established to investigate, collect evidence and report on the human rights violations on behalf of the military and security forces during and after the protests (Human Rights Watch 2022). This has also inflicted damage to Tokayev's legitimacy. Given the international condemnation and demands for investigation and public discontent with the actions

of the security forces within the country, I am going to explore how has President Tokayev's discursive framing of nationalism changed after January 2022? I suggest that after the January 2022 events Tokayev started to advance rhetoric revolving around patriotism more frequently to mobilize support and shift attention away from the violent acts of security forces. To capture the change, I am also going to conduct a dictionary analysis and ITS to capture if there was a change in the frequency of words after the tragic events.

Summing up the aims of this thesis, to shed some light on empirical and theoretical puzzles discussed earlier, this study, firstly, aims at exploring the phenomenon of instrumentalization of social media in an authoritarian context by applying Gerschewski's framework of authoritarian legitimization. Secondly, the study aims to test how public communication process is carried out by Tokayev's regime via social media and traditional channels. Namely, I conduct a dictionary analysis to grasp a change in state discourse on social and political issues after the January events.

The thesis structure goes as follows. The first chapter provides a theoretical framework for analysis, overviewing the existing literature in the fields which are relevant to the study and identifies the existing theoretical gaps that this thesis aims to fill. The second chapter gives a detailed explanation of tweets and public statements data collection process and dictionary analysis and Interrupted time series (ITS) methods deployed in the study, as well as complications that were faced during the fieldwork stage of the study. The third chapter contains the results of the conducted analysis and supplementary evidence that was brought in to make up for shortcomings in the initial analysis approach.

Chapter 1: Literature Review and Theoretical Background

This chapter covers various bodies of literature that explain and contribute to the understanding of discourse framing by the heads of states on social media platforms and beyond. I start with section 1.1, in which I overview the literature on the concepts of legitimacy and authoritarian legitimation. In section 1.2, I highlight literature on the use of technology in authoritarian countries, which is closely associated with the term ‘digital authoritarianism’. In section 1.3, I discuss theory on international linkages and what are the ways they can be both conceptualized and measured. In section 1.4, I turn my eye on framing literature, as the study focuses less on the evaluation of the strengths of linkages, but rather on the way how they are framed and presented by the head of a state. In section 1.5, literature on national identity in the post-Soviet space and Kazakhstan, in particular, is presented. In the final section of a chapter, I develop a theoretical explanation of the changes in the discursive framing of two issues, linkages to Russia and nationalism in Kazakhstan, by President Tokayev.

1.1. Legitimacy and authoritarian legitimation

The main theoretical basis on legitimacy and legitimation in this study is Gerschewski’s (2013) theory on authoritarian legitimation. Gerschewski conceptualizes legitimacy in the “Weberian tradition”, free of normative judgement on what legitimacy is (2013, 18). According to this view, legitimacy is the characteristic ascribed to a regime by the population rather than the result of an objective evaluation predicated on normative judgement (Gerschewski 2013). To ensure the regime is legitimate in the eyes of citizens, the autocrats deploy both rational reasoning approach and an assertive, hegemonic way of legitimation, in which the current political order is presented as a given state of things that is not a subject for contestation (March

2003). The threat to such a regime is a “crisis of authority”, the state when a large portion of the population no longer accept the ideology and do not believe in what hegemons constructed (Gramsci 1971, 276). March argues that to prevent such a scenario, the regimes use rhetorical strategies to make other conceptions of order unimaginable to people and construct and maintain a popular consensus on the existing order (2003, 308). However, I contend that the construction of consensus is not the exclusive way to maintain order and contain rival views. I theorize that absorption of contending viewpoints and claiming them as yours is another, not mutually exclusive approach to maintaining the order. I relate this approach to the concept of responsiveness, which Dukalskis and Gerschewski characterize as one of the dimensions in which the legitimation of an autocratic regime takes place (2017, 13). That is, the regime, using a range of tools and mechanisms, creates an image of itself as a political structure that is susceptible to concerns and issues that people in a society face and are capable of addressing these issues. As scholars further note, if back in the past the non-democratic regimes had to make effort to collect information about citizens’ concerns, today responsiveness or the perception of responsiveness can be more easily achieved by the authoritarian regime thanks to the existence of online platforms where individuals usually voice their discontent (Dukalskis and Gerschewski 2017, 13). Even though there is no elaborated response to the question what the exact mechanisms of public opinion collection in authoritarian countries are, I hold that social media platforms appear as one of the most widely used and information-rich sources of public opinion on the issues already debated and concerns of the population that the regime is yet unaware of. Placing my argument in a theoretical framework of authoritarian legitimation, I suggest departing from the classic theoretical discussion of the concepts of legitimacy and legitimation which usually revolves around the issues in democratic countries. As Du Boulay and Isaacs note,

the problem with applying democracy-oriented conceptualization of legitimacy in authoritarian context is that it can be hard to measure the popular consent as a form of legitimation, given that it is most vividly expressed during the times of turmoil, when citizens explicitly communicate their dissatisfaction with the governance (2018, 22). At the same time, the sub-field of authoritarian legitimation is also problematic. Omelicheva (2016), for example, notes that many scholars fail to distinguish between legitimacy of political institutions and legitimacy of the ruling elite, thus weakly analyzing the use of democratic elements in authoritarian context. Another problem, besides a lack of structured theoretical approach to the studies of authoritarian legitimacy, a number of causal explanations, especially on strategies of legitimation, are missing. This is partly explained by how creative autocrats are in inventing new ways to legitimize their regime, including those who actively use social media, as the study shows. Being a part of a theoretical framework discussed by Dukalskis and Gerschewski's (2017), my argument can be placed in a narrower part of the authoritarian legitimacy and legitimation debate which is self-legitimation process discussed in du Boulay and Isaacs' (2018) article. According to them, self-legitimation implies "the strategies, stories, discourses and narratives which the regime tells about itself in the hope that it produces legitimacy" (de Boulay and Isaacs 2018, 22). Omelicheva theorizes this as the execution of "social power relationships [that] are manifested in discursive interaction" (2016, 485). That is, presuming the state has power over what information citizens consume, the authoritarian governments legitimize themselves by fostering certain discursive frames that are needed. However, what this theoretical explanation misses is the discussion of how the necessary frames are chosen. I argue that the government does not come up with discursive frames necessary for

legitimation itself, but rather monitors public opinion in society and aligns the frames of its rhetoric to those which are the least harmful to the regime's legitimacy.

1.2. Use of technology in authoritarian countries

Even though the theoretical explanation of self-legitimation of authoritarian regimes through discursive framing is not a brand-new approach to study of legitimacy, this study also pays close attention to the literature on technology in authoritarian countries in general and digital authoritarianism in particular. The academic debate on the liberating effect of social media and technologies in non-democratic countries is vigorous. When it comes to the discussion of use of technology in authoritarian countries, scholars mostly discuss the multitude of ways authoritarian regimes can build physical barriers to people's abilities to manifest their own rights and freedoms by limiting access to objective information, organizing mass surveillance of the citizens, launching disinformation campaigns within and outside the country (the case of Russian intervention to the US elections), etc. (Michaelson and Glasius 2018). Polyakova and Meserole (2019) characterize this phenomenon of state attempts to repress and manipulate local and foreign population using digital technologies as digital authoritarianism. The distinction they make between China and Russia is that the former primarily uses technology for social control and social engineering, while the latter primarily aims at exporting low-tech tools, such as disinformation methods, to less resource-rich non-democratic countries (Polyakova and Meserole 2019, 2). The explanation for such diverging strategies of using technology in these two countries is primarily tied to both states' resources and capabilities available to them. Namely, the Internet penetrated Russia later and remained heavily regulated by state (Polyakova and Meserole 2019). This conceptualization of authoritarian strategies in respect to digital

technologies which is based on Russian and Chinese models is useful and illustrative, as it makes a noticeable distinction between more sophisticated and expansive state control via technology as opposed to more primitive and repressive use of technology. However, there is insufficient explanation for the demand for different models of digital authoritarianism in other non-democratic countries. Polyakova and Meserole (2019) view attractiveness of the Russian model due to its relative inexpensiveness and low costs. This simplification serves as a basis for criticism and at the same time opens a space for theoretical explanation of another approach to the use of social media in authoritarian countries, which is engaging with public and improving its democratic legitimacy in the eyes of citizens and foreign observers. Namely, Polyakova and Meserole (2019) consider only material costs of using cheap repressive measures manifested in the Russian model of use of technology, overlooking political costs associated with such a strategy. In that sense, discursive framing change which is discussed as a part of my argument has to deal with the Russian approach of low-cost technology use, when it comes, for example, to creating the illusion of public support through manufactured support of ‘trolls’ (Linvill and Warren 2020).

Another notable contribution to the understanding digital authoritarianism practices in general, and Internet shutdowns in particular, is made by Wagner (2018) in their case study of Internet shutdowns in Pakistan. Firstly, Wagner (2018) reconceptualizes the Internet shutdowns as a phenomenon in authoritarian regimes’ toolkit. Unlike Michaelsen and Glasius (2018), Wagner views Internet shutdowns as a phenomenon in sociotechnical lifeworld, expanding the effect of the shutdowns on the freedoms of people in the digital realm, such as freedom of expression and freedom of expression of privacy, to the rights such as freedom of movement and freedom of assembly (2018, 3922). Namely, this revision of Internet shutdowns as a concept

allows for a broader discussion of the impact of this action on the manifestation of rights and freedoms of the people, which appears important to distinguish between the use of various technology strategies in non-democratic countries. As for the case study itself, Wagner (2018) finds that while short-term Internet shutdowns, usually for one day, are explained by the attempt to prevent mobilization, the long-term shutdowns usually take place in the marginalized parts of the country and can be viewed as a punitive measure to ouster the local population. The relevance of this case study lies in its distinction between the reasons for varying Internet shutdown approaches of the Pakistani government. Wagner (2018) holds that the region of Balochistan which appears as a target of long-term shutdowns seeks political independence from the center which irritates the authorities. Even though the author does not aim at theorizing the explanation for this outcome in a broad range of cases, the differential treatment of protesters appears as a theoretical gap to explore. One can suggest that a harsh stance in regard to Balochi ethnic minorities in Pakistan is explained by the low political costs or local nature of protests. Thus, the strategy of using technology either for repression or legitimization of one's regime is contingent on the repressive capacity and associated political costs for a regime. I will further argue that Tokayev lacks this repressive capacity as in Pakistan due to the peculiarities of a national identity in Kazakhstan, which condemns marginalization of ethnic minorities, and lack of loyalty from the repressive state apparatus. I also argue that even though Kazakh authorities did organize a large-scale Internet shutdown at the beginning of January 2022, this scenario will unlikely repeat in the near future because the regime is not going to rely on repression due to the legitimacy damage it faced when violence was used last time.

As one can note, there are numerous approaches adopted by authoritarian regimes in regard to use of high technology, depending on the state capacity for repression, specific aims

the regime is pursuing and internal political and social processes that influence the response from the state. An important systematization of these theoretical approaches is introduced by Greitens (2013), who distinguishes between three broad dimensions to analyze regime response: control, surveillance and regime activism. I place Tokayev's active use of Twitter in the framework of regime activism, the lens through which I will explain Kazakh regime's strategic use of technology, and social in particular. An important caveat to note here is that these three distinct dimensions presented by Greitens (2013) are *not mutually exclusive*. Earlier discussion of the January 2022 unrest clearly indicates that control and surveillance strategies were also used by the regime to contain uprising. However, what is lacking in Greitens' (2013) conceptualization and systematization of digital authoritarianism practices is exhaustiveness of tools available to the state to execute their actions in three aforementioned dimensions. Namely, Greitens (2013) distinguishes between technological and regulatory tools, with former implying various software and hardware that enable the regime to deploy its strategy and latter manifested in the practice of legislative power of the state to prohibit certain activities. As was mentioned before, these approaches and frameworks take regime's repressive and political capacity for granted, leaving aside cases when the state might not have enough material resources to afford high technology for total control of the digital sphere or might face significant political costs for the extensive use of legislative regulatory rules to limit activities in the digital realm. These limitations are particularly relevant for new types of autocracies, which are discussed by Guriev and Treisman (2020) as the regimes which adopt a strategy of state control explained by their theory of informational autocracy. According to a theory, the regimes rely less on violent repressions and imposing ideologies, but more on state and co-opted media to improve their public image by mimicking democratic practices and presenting themselves as efficient decision-makers (Guriev

and Treisman 2020). This phenomenon can also be presented as efficiency-based mode of legitimation in the literature on authoritarian legitimacy. It can also be presented in a broader sense as a tool that I want to conceptualize as *engagement*, which implies adoption of communication tools, such as social media, distinctive for politicians from democratic countries. Overall, the literature on the use of technology rarely discusses the interplay between various dimensions of the use of technology such as repressive approach (e.g., Internet shutdowns) and regime activism (Greitens 2013).

1.3. International linkages

The literature on cross-country linkages is multidisciplinary. In political science, the concept is known thanks to Levitsky and Way's (2010) studies where they introduced the concept of linkage to explain and systematize the knowledge on existing mechanisms of democratization pressure. They defined linkage as the "density of ties (economic, political, diplomatic, social, and organizational) and cross-border flows (of capital, goods and services, people, and information) among particular countries" (Levitsky and Way 2010, 43). It is further supplemented by ethnic linkages dimension which discusses how linkages of the dispersed ethnic groups with the countries, in which these groups form a titular nation, can affect democratic stability (King and Melvin 1999). This way to categorize linkages is relevant when one is conducting an observational study and aims at measuring and operationalizing various dimensions in which linkages are present but gives little insight into the nature of the existing linkages. To address that issue, I suggest taking a step back to a higher level of abstraction and borrowing Jennissen's (2007) categorization of linkages from migration studies. Jennissen (2007), in their theoretical framework, faces a similar problem of a multitude of types of linkages

and their discussion in different contexts. In the end, they come up with a theoretical framework in which linkages are presented in two categories: rational choice (distance between the countries and costs of travelling) and cultural (historical and colonial past, common language, etc.) (Jennissen 2007, 417). The same categorization but in a different context can be applied in this study. The main justification for such a categorization is not in possibility to measure these linkages, but in how they can be framed and presented to the general public. In fact, linkages, in Levitsky and Way's (2010) view, are determined by a number of factors, including colonial past, geopolitical alliance and proximity, which are grouped and categorized as 'cultural' ones in Jennissen's (2007) work. Another reason why conceptualizing linkages at a higher level of abstraction is justified is because linkages between Russia and Kazakhstan have been strong for centuries and trying to capture changes will not result in unexpected revelations. On the other hand, there is a particular value in trying to observe how anti-Russian sentiments triggered by the Kremlin's aggressive foreign policy affect the discourse on linkages with Russia by Kazakh officials, and the framing of these linkages on their behalf.

1.4.Framing

Another relevant theoretical framework to consider is how cooperation in a broader sense, and linkages, are framed by various actors, the government in particular. The importance of the concept of framing is explained by Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) who argue that characterization of issues has a considerable effect on how the audience understands the events. Thus, as the research discusses the communication of linkages by the head of a state, then framing is a tool used to influence the audience on social media platforms. Sosale and Rosas-Moreno (2016) divide studies on news framing into two large categories: interpretive, sociological approach and critical, public arena approach. The distinction between these two

ways of looking at framing studies is that the sociological approach argues that the meaning of information delivered by an actor is shaped by the context and story narration on behalf of the information provider (Sosale and Rosas-Moreno 2016, 759). In that sense, journalists' values influence the interpretation of the news, and the frames transcend the single story having a potential to resonate with the frames in other stories, thus emphasizing the important role of journalists in public discourse along with politicians (Sosale and Rosas-Moreno 2016). Indeed, as Kosicki and Pan argue, political actors have a great power to skew the information the audience consumes by using discursive means, which include framing and translating this presentation of reality through media which are often associated with certain groups of the ruling elite (2001, 35). In that sense, the classic understanding of discursive framing in political life is more complex than the contemporary one, where journalists play a weaker role with the rise of social media presence in the public deliberations on socio-political issues.

Another theoretical perspective highlighted by the authors is the public arena approach. Public arena interpretation of framing implies a considerable role of multiple actors, including journalists, state and public, in constructing the meaning of complex social and political issues (Sosale and Rosas-Moreno 2016, 759). Even though I am going to refer to this approach in my thesis, there is a theoretical gap in the framework which I am going to fill. Sosale and Rosas-Moreno (2016) note that according to public arena perspective, the power distribution among actors and their ability to construct the meaning through framing is uneven. However, the authors do not explain what conditions and circumstances determine the distribution of power and the mechanisms of exertion of this power. On a more fundamental level of theoretical analysis, I suggest that state use of social media as a communication channel empowers its role in constructing meaning on publicly discussed social and political issues. At the same time, it can

also empower various actors in construction of the frames to a different degree. This, however, is not a part of the discussion as it goes beyond of the scope of this study.

The stages of framing process are also a subject for reconceptualization in this paper, given the context of the active use of communication technology by the government. De Vreese (2005) breaks down the process into three steps: frame-building, frame-setting and consequences. Frame-building stage is characterized by De Vreese as “a continuous interaction between journalists and elites and social movements” (2005, 52). This equation is no longer as powerful as it was before. The communication between elites and social movements, and public, is becoming more linear, with a lesser role played by the journalists. The reference to Vergeer (2015) can be made about the role of social media in allowing politicians to interact directly with a public, avoiding journalists as intermediaries. Thus, the power to frame issues is to a lesser extent is in the hands of journalists, but of the politicians themselves and public who can interact and engage in public discourse on social media. Although Vergeer (2015) holds that the communication on social media may be one-way only, with politicians not responding to the comments of the public, it does not diminish the role of the public in ascribing meaning to the messages of politicians, as followers still engage in discussions with other users and derive meaning from other people’s interpretations as well, of political pundits in particular. Thus, the whole process of frame building, described by De Vreese (2005), is a subject to reconsideration in a digital era.

1.5.National identity building in the post-Soviet space

Nationalist appeal is aimed at gaining sympathy and support of the population. However, the classic understanding of nationalist frames and nationalist rhetoric does not apply to the case

of Kazakhstan because prior to that, one has to discuss how national identity has been constructed there after the demise of the Soviet Union. This discussion would help to build up a categorization of nationalist frames used by President Tokayev.

Theoretical basis for analysis of nationalist frames refers to Smith's statement that "every nationalism contains civic and ethnic elements in varying degrees and different forms" (1995, 13). Thus, as Ó Beacháin and Kevlihan (2011) note, Roger Brubaker's concept of 'nationalizing nationalism' is problematic in respect to national identity building process in Kazakhstan as it overemphasizes ethnocentric tendencies while advancement of one's 'nationness' might entail both civic and ethnic elements (Ó Beacháin and Kevlihan 2011, 1). Even though the dichotomy of civic and ethnic elements of nationalism is going to be used in this thesis, it is important to distinguish between the expressions of nationalism which one is going attribute to either of these two categories. For this, one has to analyze various concepts which are closely related to manifestation of nationalism.

The discourse about nationhood also revolves around the issue of territorial integrity, which is one of the soft ways to express nationalism. Going back in time, the nationalist rhetoric based on territorial attachment is manifested in the works of modern Kazakh historiographers. Smith, for example, discusses primordial perspective, which is expressed in 'Conception of the Establishment of a Historical Consciousness in the Republic of Kazakhstan', attaching modern Kazakhs to the historical lands and emphasizing that the modern Kazakhstan is the continuation of khanates and nomadic empires that occupied these lands from the very early times, thus legitimizing the existing state borders and the state itself (1998, 146). Later, the rhetoric of territorial integrity and importance of sovereignty would appear important in response to the Russian doubts about the nature of the modern Kazakhstan. Thus, even though the frame of

territorial integrity does not explicitly refer to ethnocentric reasoning of Kazakh entitlement over the lands, it implies argumentation based on primordial elements of Kazakh nationalism. In that sense, the frames of territorial sovereignty can be referred to as a manifestation of ‘ethnic’ nationalism.

Sovereignism as a concept is also applicable to the analysis of countries’ capacity to manifest their own will and right to self-determination (Jenne 2021). Although the term ‘sovereignism’ is largely used to characterize movements calling for secession and self-determination, the same approach can be applied in the analysis of state nationalism opposed to a wider integration (Jenne 2021). The complexity of that theoretical approach in the context of other theories explaining identity politics in Kazakhstan after the demise of the Soviet Union is that it might be overlapping with ethnonationalist view of mobilization in Kazakhstan, but not necessarily emphasizing the utter importance of ethnicity as a basis for political mobilization. The conceptual understanding of sovereignism can also go beyond the issue of actual sovereignty and self-determination. For example, Anceschi (2014), in his study of identity-making through foreign policy in Kazakhstan, emphasized the tension which existed between the narrative of celebration of national sovereignty and integrationist rhetoric that welcomed the idea of Eurasianism in the post-Soviet space. Indeed, the latter idea solidified and turned into the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), thus making the tension more pronounced. This dichotomy is another way to distinguish between the frames that can be used to express the position of a head of state regarding country’s foreign policy agenda, with Russia in particular. The dictionaries that are created as a part of the fieldwork in this study are based on an interplay of various representations of Kazakh national identity building in the post-Soviet era. As it was noted several times earlier, applying the traditional dichotomy of ethnic and civic nationalism

would be utterly wrong, even though certain elements of this dichotomous view are present.

Therefore, I would go with the terms of ‘civic’ nationalism and ‘patriotic’ nationalism to make sure the readers do not endorse a mistaken view that Kazakhstan’s national identity can be ethnicity centered. Even though some policies and state programs are directed toward the members of the titular nation, it is never labelled and portrayed so by the regime.

Chapter 2: Research Design

In section 2.1 of this chapter, I present the hypotheses I aim to test in this study. In the next section 2.2, I provide details on how the process of data collection took place. Namely, I list R packages that were installed and used to conduct web-scraping as well as what was the time frame of the tweets and statements collected. In section 2.3, I present descriptive statistics of the both tweets and statements that were collected using web-scraping technique. In section 2.4, I present analysis techniques that were used as well as what motivated one or another approach selected. I present the list of words that comprised each dictionary that is used to conduct dictionary analysis. Finally, in section 2.5, I point out to the limitations of the research design used in the study.

2.1.Hypotheses

The main findings are derived from the dictionary analysis of the collected tweets and official statements. Namely, the dictionaries of words are created, and the frequency of the dictionary words is measured in the tweets and statements.

Hypothesis 1: *President Tokayev's framing of linkages with Russia has become more rational choice(material) after the January 2022 uprising.*

Hypothesis 2: *President Tokayev's framing of nationalism has become more ethnic after January 2022 uprising.*

To test hypothesis 1, the dictionary is comprised of the words to classify the tweets indicative of either rational choice or ideological linkages with Russia. To test hypothesis 2, the dictionary is comprised of the words expected to evoke 'patriotic' nationalist or 'civic' frames. The dictionary is composed of the words in Russian and Kazakh languages as Tokayev usually

tweets and makes statements in these languages. The change in the framing is going to be captured through measurement of relative frequency of words, belonging to one of the dictionaries, before and after the trigger event indicated in hypotheses.

2.2.Data collection and time frame

The main purpose of the research is to trace changes in the discourse of President Tokayev's Twitter account and his statements delivered via traditional media. The first stage of the research process involves data collection using API (Application Programming Interface), "a set of routines and programming standards that allows accessing an application / platform" (Dutt-Ross and Cruz 2021, 182). The data collection from Twitter is executed through *twitterR* R library which is connected to Twitter platform via API (Dutt-Ross and Cruz 2021). The collected dataset contains the text of the tweet, exact time when tweet was created, the id of the author, the device from which the tweet was made, the number of likes and the number of retweets.

The data collection process of statements and addresses made by Tokayev was executed using *rvest* library in R software. As can be observed on Image 2, the webpage with the speeches of the president contains titles and dates when the speech was delivered. The data collection process starts with scraping all the titles, dates and URL addresses of the speeches. Next, the loop navigates to every collected URL address and extracts the content of each statement. Finally, the data frame containing the title, URL address, dates and the content of the speech is created. Importantly, the dates column was cleaned, and values were converted from String to Date using *stringi* library.

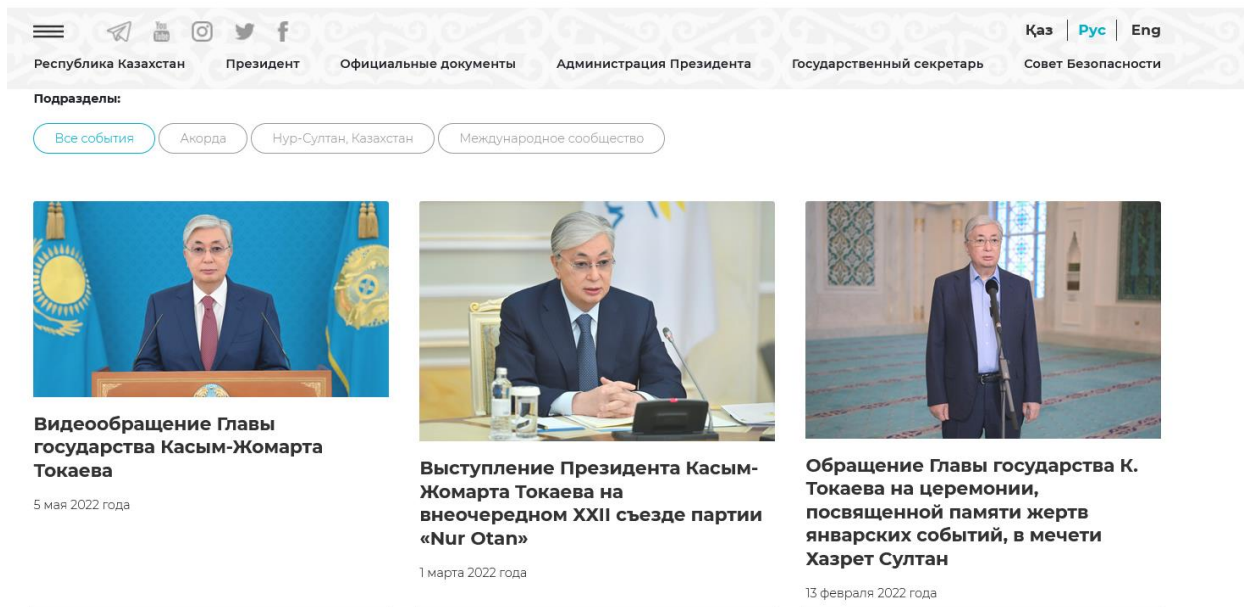


Figure 2.2.1. Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Overall, 2204 tweets and content of the 76 statements delivered via traditional media (4 of them are addresses to the nation) made by Tokayev were collected. The earliest tweet collected was made on March 21, 2019, the next day after he took over the office of the president. Among 72 statements made by Tokayev and broadcasted on television, the earliest one dates back to May 1, 2019 and the latest one was made on May 5, 2022. Four addresses to the nation were made by the second president of the country since he acceded to the presidency, with the earliest one taking place on September 2, 2019 and the latest one delivered on March 16, 2022.

2.3.Descriptive statistics

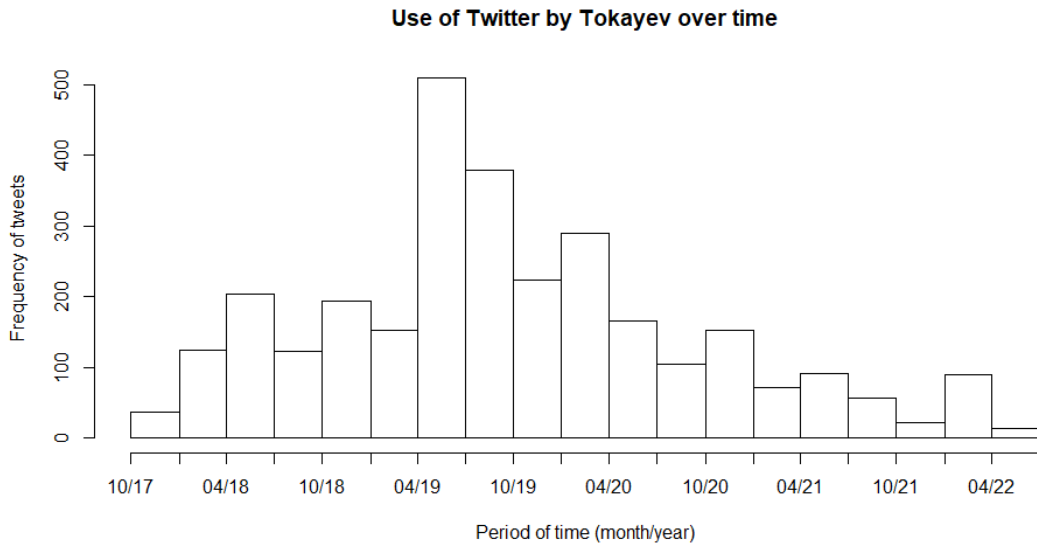


Figure 2.3.1. President Tokayev's tweets frequency over time.

As it can be noticed in figure 1, Tokayev's activity on Twitter rose significantly right after his accession to the presidency in March 2019. Another spike was witnessed in the first quarter of 2020 when coronavirus pandemic outbreak took place. Active communication with the population via social media platforms appeared as one of the strategies to maintain legitimacy in the period of socio-economic and global health crises.

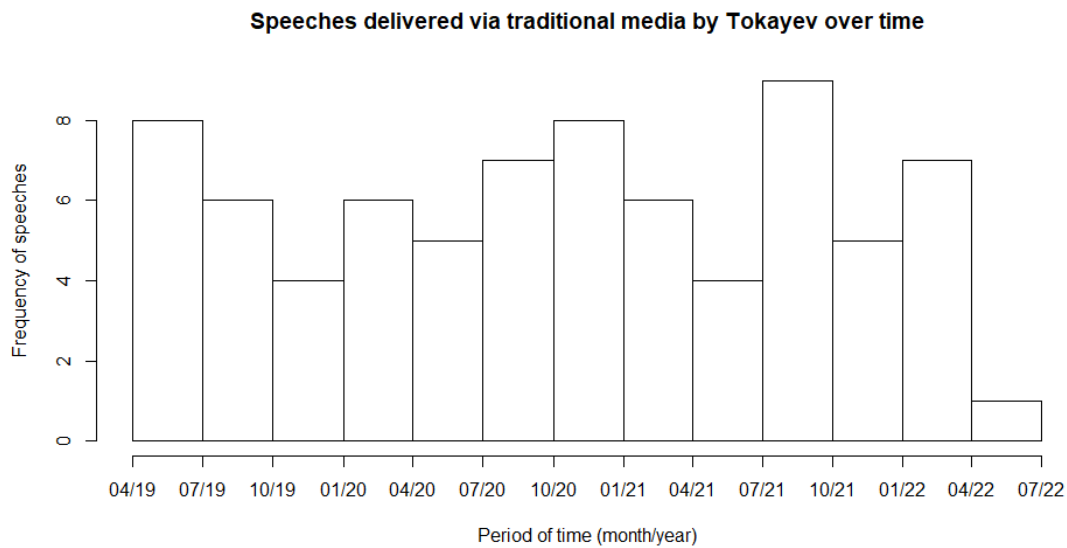


Figure 2.3.2. President Tokayev's public statements frequency over time.

When it comes to the use of traditional media to communicate statements, as can be noticed in Figure 2, Tokayev has been consistent over time, periodically delivering speeches and addressing the nation. These statements are usually broadcasted on state television.

2.4. Analysis Methods

To capture the changes on public communication on social media, I further analyze the tweets and statements made by President Tokayev by adopting a quantitative dictionary analysis technique and Interrupted Time-Series (ITS) analysis using R.

Firstly, I create a corpus from the data frames containing tweets and statements using *tidytext* library. Next, I introduce a data frame with the stop words using *stopwords* library and manually edit the dictionary adding and removing some of the words. After that, I preprocess collected data, removing punctuation marks and stop words that can potentially create noise.

I use dictionary-based technique to label the words indicative of a particular framing used by Tokayev or specific agenda raised in the tweets and statements. Namely, two dictionaries

were created with the words being included in Russian and Kazakh languages. English words are not included because while public statements are usually delivered in Kazakh and Russian (approximately half of the content in each of the languages), content in English is usually either translated later or absent.

To analyze the tweets related to Russia, I filtered the dataset of the tweets made by Tokayev, to subset the ones anyhow mentioning Russia. The full list of words used to filter tweets is presented in Table 1. Note that the list of words presented in the table contains only English translation of the words, while the original dictionary contains the words in English, Russian and Kazakh languages. The dictionary was created in such a way that cognates are also detected during the filtering process. These words were selected as they are likely to be used if any reference to Russia was made. The name of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov is motivated by his position and likelihood to be mentioned in the foreign policy discourse as compared to other Russian political figures except for Putin.

Table 2.1. List of words associated with Russia.

Words	Russia, Russian, Putin, Moscow, Lavrov
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Table 2.2. Dictionary of words associated with rational choice and ideological linkages to Russia.

Rational choice	Ideological
Strateg(-ic), vector, develop(-ment), partner(-ship), econom(-ic), trade, cooperation, invest(-ment), project, work, quality, product, advantage(-ous).	Union, brother(-hood), histor(-y), neighbor, united, together, peoples, bonds, centur(-ies), culture, common, unity, friend(-ship).

Dictionary 1, which is related to framing linkages with Russia, consists of two lists of words, indicative of ideological and rational choice linkages. As well as in the previous list of words and further ones, the words were translated into three languages and included cognates. The list of words from the rational choice dictionary list is supposed to include words that are associated with the benefits and pragmatic benefits of linkages to Russia, mostly in the context of discussion of bilateral and multilateral (EAEU, CSTO) partnership, while ideological list contains the words that can be mentioned in the same context, but representing a different, ideological, discursive framing of linkages to Russia. Words such as brotherhood imply going beyond the rational choice foundation of the linkages and partnership, while the mention of history accentuates the givenness and incontestability of the existing order. Dictionary 2 is related to the nationalist agenda advanced in Tokayev's tweets and speeches. The dictionary consists of two lists of words, one of which is meant to raise patriotic feelings and another one containing words related to civic nationalist agenda, which is more neutral and less emotionally appealing. The patriotic list of words appeals to ideological foundation of one's support of the state, in which the regime is equalized to the state and the country. Thus, I expect the words such as land, which implies common ownership, and ancestors, which appeals to one's family roots, to be used to evoke the feeling of patriotism. At the same time, the topic of sovereignty, as was mentioned earlier, was the one that had tension with the integrationist foreign policy agenda advanced by Nazarbayev's regime in the 1990s (Anceschi 2014).

Table 2.3. Dictionary of words associated with patriotic and civic framing of the national identity.

Patriotic	Civic
Nation, land, saint, ancestors, blood, vast, motherland, fatherland, duty, protect,	Citizen, provide, social, fellow citizens, inclusive, multiethnic, ethnicity, culture,

independent, Kazakh, Kazakhstani, language, foe, integrity, sovereignty, unity, spirit, threat, territory, colonial, imperialist, khanate, batyr (knights in Kazakh folklore).	nationality, Kazakhstanis, Eurasian, religion, representatives, identity, secular, equality, assembly, people, development, friendship, each.
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The selection of words in the dictionaries was predicated on a theoretical basis of civic and ethnic nationalism dichotomy along with the logical approach. It is worth noting though that this method is criticized for being highly subjective and susceptible to the choice made by the researcher. Yet there is no way to fully overcome the subjectivity criticism in case of use of this method, I argue that in this study, the creation of dictionaries was predicated on the theoretical frameworks discussed in the literature review chapter of the thesis, thus is not a product of a fantasy of the author, but rather a theoretically motivated approach.

In the second stage of the analysis, to capture changes in trends and features related to the topics raised and discussed by the public official before and after particular events that were supposed to serve as triggers for change in public communication strategy, Interrupted Time-Series (ITS) is conducted. Namely, the event i.e., trigger is an Independent Variable coded as ‘0’ for the period before event took place and as ‘1’ for the period after the event.

2.5. Limitations of the design

The main limitation of the research is the selection of the words to the dictionaries. Namely, the dictionaries consisting of words do not consider the fact that the words might change meaning depending on the context. On the other hand, the presence of n-grams in the dictionaries would significantly reduce the number of occurrences of the phrases in the analyzed

texts. Secondly, there is a limited access to Twitter posts that is equal only to 3,200 most recent ones (Dutt-Ross and Cruz 2021). However, there is no need to analyze all the tweets made by Tokayev since 2011, but rather the recent ones only, especially those made after he took over the office in 2019. Thirdly, there is a fuzziness of a pre- and post- event changes in framing of issues. That is, two events that are discussed to be a trigger for change of framing of linkages with Russia and nationalist appeal are not fully indicative of a causal underpinning of the changes in framing. Therefore, analytical and explanatory part complements the fieldwork and illustrates the causal explanation behind the observations. Yet more complex quantitative and qualitative methods were not adopted for robustness check and triangulation, the theoretical arguments, as well as the empirical analysis, were supplemented by the collection of particular pieces of evidence that support the argument. Although this approach is not applicable to any study, in this particular case, the direct evidence, such as Timur Suleimenov's interview to *Euractiv* outlet, was unequivocal.

Chapter 3: Theoretical arguments and empirical findings

In this chapter, I provide the causal mechanism of how self-legitimation is achieved through discursive framing of linkages to Russia (section 3.1) and national identity (section 3.2) in tweets and public statements made by President Tokayev. I also demonstrate the results of the dictionary analysis and interrupted time series analysis.

3.1.Linkages to Russia

Even though the ties between Kazakhstan and Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union are characterized by extensive cooperation in many areas, including economy and security, the discursive framing of these linkages is twofold. On the one hand, linkages to Russia have been in place for centuries and deemed by the Kazakh elites as something inherent due to ideological affection to Russia. On the other hand, as Ancheschi (2014) notes, aspiration toward integration with the neighbors was presented as a compromise to national self-determination. Russia rents Baikonur Cosmodrome in the southern part of Kazakhstan, making it a potential military base in case of urgent need (Stevens 2020). As it was mentioned earlier, Russia and Kazakhstan are a part of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) free trade agreement (Stevens 2020). The economic ties between the countries have also been constantly evolving since the 1990s. After the CIS project did not turn into a meaningful platform for partnership, leaders of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan launched Customs Union in 1995 (Stevens 2020, 1154). The integration moved on with the creation of a single economic space in 1999 which later transformed into Eurasian Economic Community (Stevens 2020, 1154). The final stage of the post-Soviet integration was the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015, the institution which aimed at replicating the European

Union (Stevens 2020, 1154). Initially created by Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus, the free trade agreement was later joined by Kyrgyzstan and Armenia (Stevens 2020). Although Stevens (2020) notes that Nazarbayev was the one who actively promoted the idea of the Eurasian integration, with the first suggestion on integration being voiced by him back in 1994, leaders of Kazakhstan and Belarus publicly insisted that the realm of partnership within the Union must be solely economic (Busygina and Filippov 2021, 481). Busygina and Filippov rather perceive this type of cooperation as a compromise between Russia and other post-Soviet states in exchange for rapid integration, which was supposed to present Russia as a center of a new political and economic bloc and invite Ukraine to cooperate in early 2010s (2021, 478).

Nevertheless, one can note that the rumors about political aspirations of Putin behind the EAEU project are not baseless, given the institutional architecture of the Union which resembles the one of the European Union, with the supranational institutions such as Eurasian Economic Commission and the Court of the Eurasian Economic Union (Busygina and Filippov 2021). However, Busygina and Filippov (2021) do not see much importance in these institutions given that actions taken on behalf of the EAEU are superseded by the bilateral bargaining process taking place between Russia and other member states. At the same time, one should not forget about the agency of other countries in their foreign policy choice dilemma of integrating with Russia. While Fawn (2004) believes that pragmatism rather than ideals have been mainly driving foreign policy preferences of the Kazakh leadership with Russia, Stevens argues that colonial experience under the Tsarist and Soviet rule, along with the absence of “political understanding of national consciousness”, created an ‘ally’ image of Russia in the mindset of Kazakh political elites, including then-president Nazarbayev (2020, 1154). The problem with both of these views

is that they do not distinguish between various areas in which cooperation takes place and how countries frame cooperation with the neighbor.

While scholars such as Stevens (2020) believe that perception of Russia as an ‘ally’ dictates the conditions of cooperation, others, including Busygina and Filippov (2021), emphasize the limitations of such cooperation. On the one hand, as was discussed earlier, Lukashenko and Nazarbayev were trying to explicitly denote the economic motivation of the integration in the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union. On the other hand, political motives standing behind the regional integration aimed at altering existing power balance in the world were in place (Khitakhunov et al. 2017). Recalling Putin’s thoughts on Eurasian integration as of 2011 which he expressed in his article for *Izvestiya* magazine, Duncan (2015) emphasizes that for Putin, the cooperation of the countries was supposed to take place in both economic and social realms based on shared Soviet economic and cultural legacy. These expectations can be traced, for example, when Russia was insisting on countersanctions from Belarus and Kazakhstan after the annexation of Crimea (Khitakhunov et al. 2017). Bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and Russia also cannot be described as purely economic. Thus, the linkages can be characterized by interdependence in many areas, with the degree of agency of actors being constantly discussed and speculated about.

3.1.1. Russian foreign policy and Kazakh nationalism

In that dichotomous representation of linkages to Russia as a choice dictated either by a necessity or ideology, what matters more is not the actual policy choices but rather the discursive framing used to present these linkages. The choice of framing, in turn, is largely predicated on the public opinion and the effect of any policy choice on the legitimacy of the regime. Along

with that, aggressive imperialist foreign policy of the Kremlin also significantly affects the choice of discursive framing adopted by the Kazakh regime.

Russian foreign policy agenda with respect to Kazakhstan is determined by the strong linkages and by the essence of Russian national identity. The amalgam of historical, demographic and political factors determined the existence of a stable migration system and constant migration flows taking place in the post-Soviet region (Ryazantsev and Korneev 2013). As Ryazantsev and Korneev (2013) mention, over 20 million people changed their residence after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which is indicative of the relative ease of migration given that knowledge of Russian appears as a facilitating factor for such a mobility. Saari (2014) notes that the large presence of Russian ethnic minorities in neighboring countries allowed Russian policymakers to view public diplomacy in the post-Soviet space differently. For example, ‘near abroad’ term was introduced to characterize post-Soviet states and, thus, present Russian foreign policy in respect to these countries differently rather than to any other foreign state (Saari 2014).

At the same time, foreign policy strategy near abroad is also dictated by the way how Russian nationalism is defined. For example, when justifying annexation of Crimea in 2014, Vladimir Putin, president of Russia, referred to the “divided nature of the Russian nation” and moral responsibility to protect them beyond the territorial boundaries of the country (Laruelle 2015, 88). The calls for more aggressive foreign policy in the post-Soviet space were voiced by Zyuganov from the Communist Party and Zhirinovskiy (now deceased) from the Liberal Democratic Party back in Yeltsin period of rule and later by Dmitriy Rogozin who created ‘Rodina’ (Homeland) party in 2003 (Laruelle 2015). ‘Rodina’ called for one state consisting of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan and was pushing the bill on accession of new subjects to the Russian Federation (Laruelle 2015).

The way how Russian post-Soviet national identity is built appears as a source of concern for the Kazakh regime to the same extent as the potential internal legitimacy crisis. January events have sparked a new wave of resentment against alliance of the country with authoritarian Russia. When Tokayev addressed the CSTO with a request for military support against “terrorists” putting at risk the stability and security of the country, many Western pundits became concerned about the threat of invasion of the Russian troops (Kudaibergenova and Laruelle 2022). Although the troops did not stay for a long period of time and did not anyhow interact with the protesters, as Kudaibergenova and Laruelle note, some local media outlets described this precedent as a case of colonialist oversight on behalf of Russia that might weaken Tokayev’s legitimacy in the long run (2022, 14). Previously, Stevens (2020) conceptualized the Kazakh-Russian relations, but in the realm of a national security, with the help of an image theory borrowed from IR studies and rational choice explanation. The approach I adopt in my thesis is somewhat similar to what Stevens (2020) has done in his paper. To test the hypotheses, he conducted a content and discourse analysis of the speeches of the ex-president Nazarbayev in *Kazakhstanskaya pravda* newspaper in the period between 1992 and 1994 (Stevens 2020). According to his findings, national security policies in early years of independence of the country were better explained by image theory, according to which Nazarbayev, in his discussions of relations with Russia, was expected to refer to the “shared historical density and experiences of Kazakhs and Russians” while the criticism of the past was supposed to be contextualized with a parallel story of common suffering (Stevens 2020, 1173). At the same time, the regime does not tie ideological foundation of ties to policy decisions. For example, as demonstrated in Image 1, Tokayev not only makes an emphasis on cooperation with the CIS countries, but also stresses differences in historical and geopolitical views. Here, I presume the

continuity between Nazarbayev's and Tokayev's regime, as the tweet was made at the end of 2020 when Nazarbayev still held a position of the Chairman of the Security Council. Secondly, when Tokayev refers to the Commonwealth of Independent Countries (CIS), he implies ties to Russia. Thus, the wording used by the authors of publications is of no less importance than the general topic of the tweet.



Figure 3.1.1. President Tokayev's tweet dated December 18, 2020.

I also scrutinize public statements made by the current president of the country, but on top of the manual qualitative analysis of the statements, I adopt a quantitative approach, constructing dictionaries to measure the discursive framing used by Tokayev.

In this sense, I offer a different perspective to analyze and measure Kazakh-Russian foreign ties, which includes elements of theories on discourse in the context of authoritarian legitimation and framing. The weakness of Stevens' (2020) study is that the method of discourse and content analysis of authoritarian leader's speeches plays a little role in explaining the real reasons behind the national security or any other policy choices. However, the analysis of the statements made both in the virtual dimension (social media) and in the traditional media (usually statements on television) is insightful to understand the image the regime wants to create about itself which, in turn, is important for self-legitimation in non-democratic countries.

Thus, the question that offers a room for investigation is how authoritarian leader can respond to address the legitimacy concern that became an issue after January events. As Kudaibergenova and Laruelle articulate, one of the suggested reasons for ‘Islamist insurgents’ version of the events circulated on state media is that it was expected to divert the attention of the public from the tensions within the elites and alleged participation of the security forces in these events (2022, 12). The security forces, according to Kudaibergenova and Laruelle (2022), never played as significant role in authoritarian structure of the state as in Russia or Karimov’s Uzbekistan. Nevertheless, during the January events, escalation and inability to contain violence on behalf of the authorities were partly explained by the fact that security forces in a number of places, including Almaty and Taldykorgan cities, gave up on their duties to protect important administrative infrastructure such as municipal buildings and airports (Kudaibergenova and Laruelle 2022, 12). This, in turn, questions violence as a source of autocratic stability in Kazakhstan, as the events demonstrate that repressive structures were not under the full control of an autocrat. In fact, the repressive pillar of authoritarian stability is not fully based on the actual repressive power of an autocrat, as Gerschewski (2013) argues. It can also be sustained by the meaning ascribed to a situation by the public. Thus, Tokayev’s portrayal of January events as a terrorist act with the deployment of 20,000 armed terrorists serves two purposes. Firstly, it aimed at portraying the competitors to the current political order as enemies (Gramsci 1971). Secondly, it aimed at shifting the focus away from the failure to mobilize the security forces, which are Tokayev’s repressive tool. Nevertheless, the deployment of the CSTO troops was a vivid demonstration of Tokayev’s failure to mobilize his repressive apparatus.

In the absence of a possibility to rely heavily on repression and violence as a source of authoritarian stability the authoritarian leader has to regain legitimacy in the eyes of citizens

through other, softer mechanisms. The first mechanism is the one I described in the previous paragraph, which is construction of reality through discursive framing adopted by the regime. Tokayev used both Twitter and statements made on television to translate the meaning he ascribed to January events. In that sense, Internet has appeared useful mechanism for an autocrat to translate his message in the early stages of the protests, when a large portion of the citizens had access to network. As Vergeer (2015) notes, the Internet has allowed the politicians to avoid journalists as intermediaries between the political figures and people. At the same time, Twitter (and Instagram as well), by being non-reciprocal has become a handy platform for politicians to translate their messages, but not necessarily to reply and engage with the responses (Vergeer 2015). Even though this was not a feature unique to social media communication, along with the television addresses, tweets ensured the wider reach of his statements.

Secondly, I argue that the concept of authoritarian “responsiveness” advanced by Dukalskis and Gerschewski (2017), in conjunction with the Gounari’s (2018, 213) characterization of social media as a promoter of a ‘one-dimensional discourse’, is helpful to explain the nature of political discourse regarding linkages to Russia chosen by Tokayev after January events. When Gounari discusses Twitter and social media as a new dimension for ‘doing politics’, they hold that the limitation in the number of characters of a tweet deprives the content of a context and complexity, presenting the message as a fact and established truth (2018, 213). This is one of the mechanisms authoritarian leader Tokayev can influence political discourse in the country as a strongman whose statements represent the stance of a regime. This is where the studies on the use of social media in democratic and non-democratic countries overlap. For example, Jackson and Lilleker, in their empirical study, observe that Twitter serves as a great platform for self-promotion and improving public image of the UK MPs (2011).

The second mechanism of self-legitimation that is relevant to the argument is the use of presidential addresses (and general statements). Kudaibergenova (2019) classifies these addresses and statements made by the ex-president of a country Nazarbayev as a ‘compartmentalized ideology’ which consists of a presidential discourse and several other ones. As can be noticed, this mechanism of self-legitimation was inherited by Tokayev from his predecessor. Yet I accept Kudaibergenova’s (2019) conceptualization of an ideology in a Kazakh regime as compartmentalized, which is consisting of several discourses important for different groups of a population, I disagree on how it is translated to the audience. Kudaibergenova (2019) argues that the regime constructs several discourses which are part of a whole discourse system that allows one to place themselves in a desired framework, thus legitimizing the regime. Namely, the scholar brings the example of a nationalist discourse aimed at ethnic Kazakhs and inter-ethnic stability discourse appealing to ethnic minorities living in the country (Kudaibergenova 2019, 147). However, Kudaibergenova’s (2019) statement that the regime addresses various groups of the population in two different languages, thus advancing two separate discourses is nothing but an assumption that must be backed up by empirical data. Moreover, the language divide in the country is an exaggerated phenomenon because most of the population can understand both Kazakh and Russian languages. In my argument, I shift attention to the discourse which has a significant role in sustaining the legitimacy of a regime – the national identity. Previously, I have already presented an argument in which I demonstrate that linkages to Russia and discourse on linkages serve as a proxy for regime’s perception of its agency. I demonstrated that the need to deploy foreign (predominantly Russian) military troops in January undermined the public image of Tokayev regime’s agency and autonomy.

I also argue that there is another way to manifest own agency and attempt to regain legitimacy. According to Anceschi's (2014) analysis, the legitimacy issue for Nazarbayev's regime in the 1990s was presented as the tension between self-determination and re-integration to the post-Soviet political alliance. In the first part of the argument, I have already substantiated on the regime's attempt to regain legitimacy by shifting the discursive framing of linkages to Russia from ideological to rational choice. Moreover, the regime can adopt a more traditional, Gramscian ideological approach to self-legitimation by appealing to the importance of one's national (even ethnic) affiliation. As I have already discussed, ethnicity-centered approach to manifestation of the national identity in Kazakhstan is hardly possible. However, I argue that appeal to ethnic and religious background of the citizens can be made more subtly, without explicitly addressing the members of the titular nation. Kudaibergenova's (2019) portrayal of the national identity discourse advanced by Nazarbayev's regime, appealing to unity of the multiethnic society and aspiration for a bright future, plays an important but not an exhaustive role. The patriotic, as I call it, discursive framing contains bits of civic and ethnic nationalism, appealing to various elements of both of these identity construction approaches.

Thus, in my empirical analysis, I predict that after January events, when the regime of Tokayev demonstrated its weakness because of its inability to contain violence and had no way but to ask for help from Russia-led CSTO, the authoritarian leader of the country made effort to distance himself from the Kremlin by framing ties with Russia in rational-choice fashion. Decision to deploy Russian military troops, even for a short period of time, fueled fierce criticism addressed to the regime and demonstrated the alleged dependence on the Kremlin. To test this, I conducted a dictionary analysis based on two list of words with one referring to the rational-choice framing of ties with Russia and second referring to ideological ties.

3.1.2. Dictionary analysis results

I, firstly, conducted the analysis of Russia-related tweets made by Tokayev. The first thing to note is that the number of the social media posts that anyhow mention Russia is only three, and all of them are just versions of the same tweet posted in Kazakh, English and Russian languages. The content of the tweet mentions two topics: trade and economic development (supposedly with Russia) and armed conflict in Ukraine. The first topic is framed in rational-choice manner, focusing on trade between two countries.

```
> russia_after_jan1[5]$text
[1] "Spoke with President Vladimir Putin about trade and economic development. On the situation in Ukraine, I stressed the urgent need to reach an agreement at the negotiations table."
[2] "поговорил с Президентом Владимиром Путиным по вопросам торгово-экономического развития. По ситуации в Украине подчеркнул настоятельную необходимость достижения соглашения за столом переговоров."
[3] "Президент Владимир Путинмен сауда-экономикалық қатынастарды дамыту мәселелері жөнінде сөйлестім. Украина дағы жағдай бойынша келіссөздер арқылы келісімге келу аса маңызды екенін айттым."
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Figure 3.1.2. President Tokayev's tweets published on March 3, 2022.

The number of Russia-related tweets made by Tokayev before January events is fifty which is also not significant. However, the difference can be noticed in the way how tweets are framed. Dictionary analysis of Russia-related tweets before January events demonstrated that words describing rational-choice rationale for linkages with Russia (rational-choice framing) were more frequently used than the words associated with ideological linkages. To be precise, 19 out of 50 tweets contained words associated with rational-choice framing of linkages and 8 out of 50 tweets were ideologically framed. Yet these results are not conclusive enough because the sample of tweets is small. Therefore, the identical dictionary analysis was conducted in regard to the speeches and presidential addresses of Tokayev since his accession as a president of the country. It can be noticed that the frequency of words from the rational choice dictionary was significantly higher than the words associated with the ideological linkages.

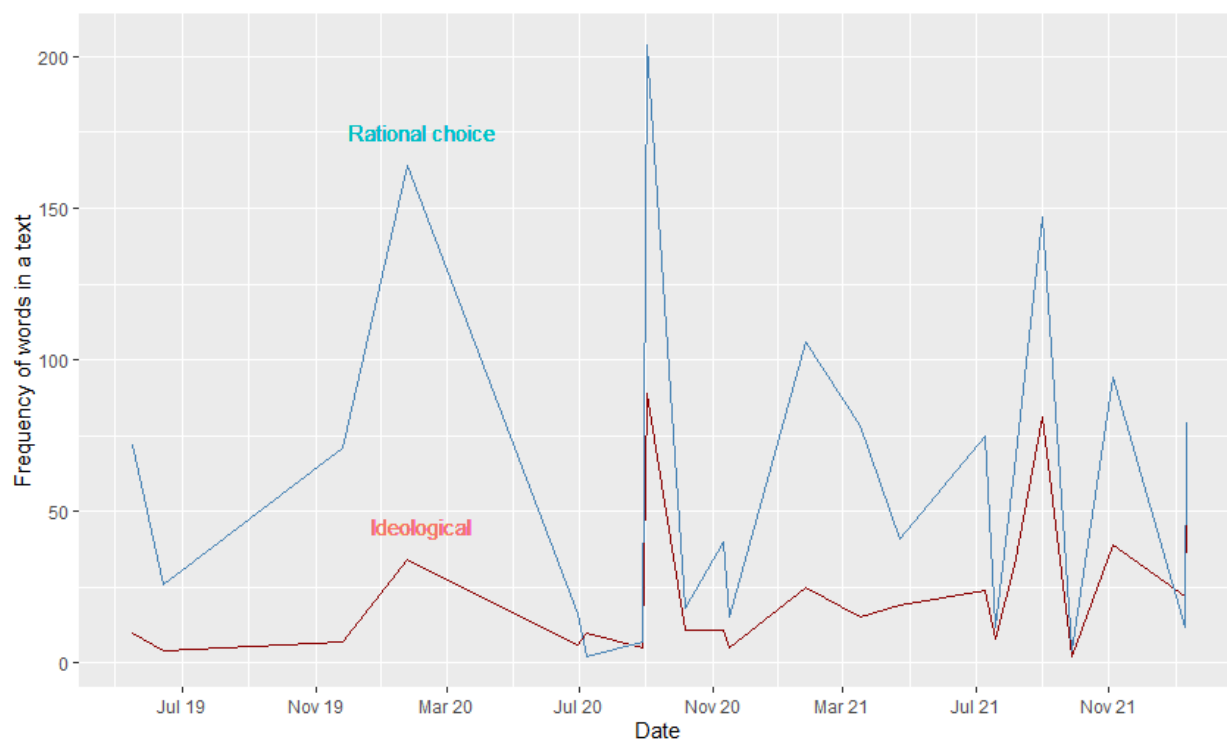


Figure 3.1.3. Frequency of words from ideological and rational choice dictionaries in Tokayev's statements mentioning Russia

There is no point in conducting ITS analysis to measure changes in how linkages to Russia are presented in Tokayev's speeches because Russia is mentioned only in two Tokayev's speeches after January events. However, the results of a dictionary analysis demonstrate that the rational choice framing of linkages to Russia has been predominant over the whole period of Tokayev's presidency. This is less of a hallmark of Tokayev's presidency, but a demonstration of continuity in foreign policy strategy in regard to Russia. As Stevens mentions, Nazarbayev was also maneuvering between more and less nationalist agenda during his presidency, for example, periodically raising the issue with little popularity of a Kazakh language (2020, 1170). Thus, shift from the ideological framing of linkages to Russia to rational choice one was not a one-time event, but rather one of the mechanisms in Kazakhstani regime's toolkit that they use depending on their needs and necessities. Even though the lack of data does not allow to measure the shift quantitatively, a closer look to the statements made by other political figures except Tokayev

demonstrates that Kazakhstani authorities made an attempt to distance themselves from the Kremlin after January events. The most widely discussed statement was made by Timur Suleimenov, the first deputy chief of staff to the president of Kazakhstan, in his interview to Brussels-based *Euractiv* media outlet. Suleimenov stated that “Kazakhstan will not be a tool to circumvent the sanctions on Russia by the US and the EU” and that Kazakhstan “is the most westernised country in Central Asia” (Gotev 2022). Given how centralized governance in Kazakhstan is, this statement is a message that alliance with Russia is pragmatic rather than ideological.

3.2.National identity

The second important dimension in which self-legitimation of the regime in Kazakhstan can take place is the issue of national identity. As Kudaibergenova (2019) notes, the majority of the citizens identify themselves as the citizens of Kazakhstan (*Kazakhstanis*). This, of course, still allows for ethnic identities to play an important role and complement the national identity, but it is evident that people embrace the overarching and inclusive national identity as opposed to more exclusionary ethnic identity. As was discussed in the first chapter, the classic dichotomy of ethnic versus civic nationalism is not fully applicable to the case of Kazakhstan because although the practice of celebration of one’s ethnic identity is yet used by authorities from times to times, it is adopted with caution. Kudaibergenova (2016) names this inconsistent approach to nationalist discourse as “strategic ambiguity”.

Even though the authorities have been quite careful in using the ethnonationalist agenda, the use of it is also important for a regime in its self-legitimation attempts in the light of a “political postcoloniality” critique addressed by the ethnonationalist groups and politicians (Kudaibergenova 2016, 923). This critique usually concerns the issues of the Soviet, and Stalinist

in particular, rule and the ways to present this in the official discourse (Kudaibergenova 2016). As Kudaibergenova further argues, the ‘efficiency’ and ‘development’ discourses advanced by Nazarbayev’s regime is a demonstration of an inferiority complex that is closely related to the need for “reflexivity towards Russia’s domestic and foreign policy” (2016, 923). Yet I agree that close ties with Russia and membership in common trade and security agreements, such as the EAEU and CSTO respectively, do not allow the regime to fully capitalize on the postcolonial discourse and nationalism to gain more legitimacy in the eyes of citizens (Kudaibergenova 2016), I argue that the regime is still capable of maneuvering between more exclusive ethnonationalist discourse and inclusive (civic) discourse which usually touches upon the issues of development and modernization.

3.2.1. Dictionary analysis results

To measure the changes in framing of the current situation in the country, which Tokayev discusses in his tweets, public statements and presidential addresses, I conducted the dictionary analysis and then ITS to check if the discontinuity in the framing of a nationalist agenda was a case after a critical point.

Firstly, discussing the results of the analysis of the tweets, it can be noted in Graph 3 that due to the limitation in the number of characters on Twitter, the maximum number of used associated with civic nationalism is equal to four, while the biggest number of words from patriotic dictionary used in one tweet is equal to three. Notably, the biggest number of words from both dictionaries was used in January 2022. This can be explained by the frequency of tweets made by Tokayev appealing to the citizens of the country and encouraging to leave the streets. On the other hand, the character limitation does not allow to validate the causal

explanation because the tweets are usually context-specific and barely enable the author of the post to appeal to the feelings of the readers.

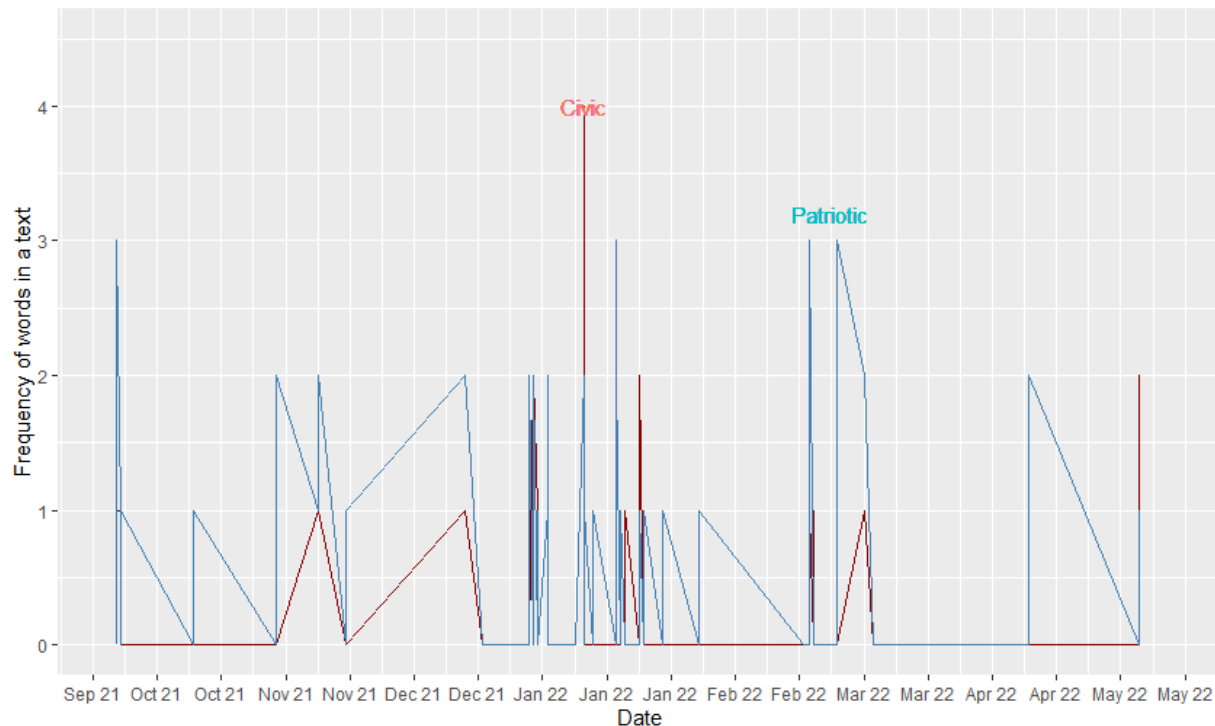


Figure 3.2.1. Frequency of use of civic and patriotic framing in the tweets made by Tokayev in the period between October 1, 2021 and May 20, 2022.

The analysis of the statements and addresses to the nation by President Tokayev, in contrast, are more extensive and contain more information. As one can notice in Graph 3, civic framing has been consistently more frequently used by Tokayev in his statements over the whole period of his presidency. However, this can also be explained by the fact that the words in the dictionary associated with civic nationalism are more general and inclusive for a greater number of people. Given that most of the statements in the dataset were addressed to a wider audience by being broadcast on state television, the more inclusive framing used by Tokayev is understandable. The highest number of patriotic words was used in the statement dedicated to the celebration of the Independence Day of Kazakhstan on December 15, 2021. Therefore, it is not

surprising that unusually many words associated with the patriotic feelings were mentioned in that speech.

Table 4 demonstrates the results of the second part of the analysis, which is ITS. The intervention, which is January events, appears as a statistically insignificant predictor of the changes in the number of patriotic words used by Tokayev in his statements. The coefficient is equal to -1.820 (controlling for the number of words in each statement), which means that the critical events, which are January events, unlike the expectations, negatively affected the number of patriotic words used by the President in his statements.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	Patriotic
interven	-1.820 (7.275)
words	0.006*** (0.001)
Constant	14.825*** (3.720)
Observations	76
R ²	0.217
Adjusted R ²	0.195
Residual Std. Error	19.371 (df = 73)
F Statistic	10.100*** (df = 2; 73)
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Figure 3.2.2. Interrupted time series (ITS) analysis results.

3.2.2. Limitations

The main complication with the quantitative analysis of the speeches is the fact that the statements are made in the context of different events, some of which are related to the topic of national identity, and some are not. Therefore, the quantitative approach to the analysis of the statements is highly susceptible to the topic which is addressed in a speech. One possible way to overcome this challenge was to sort all 76 speeches out and select only those in which Tokayev

would presumably use civic or patriotic framing. However, this would demand careful and selective analysis of the content of each statement, which could not be possible in this study due to time limitations.

The second limitation of the quantitative analysis is related to the selection of words for dictionaries. As Maerz and Schneider note, “dictionary analysis by itself, for example, is built on shaky foundations since the choice of dictionary terms can be either highly context-specific or, if not exhaustively justified, appear ambiguous” (2019, 521). Moreover, they hold that the dictionary words should be of a high level of a generality for a dictionary to be relevant across different political regimes (Maerz and Schneider 2019, 521). However, even in the study limited to one regime, the dictionary words are used in different contexts and for various purposes, which undermines the internal validity of the findings. On the other hand, if the words were too specific, this would significantly decrease the frequency these words are used in the statements, which would make a quantitative analysis irrelevant and pointless.

Concluding remarks

This study aimed at exploring the effects of the internal shock that happened in Kazakhstan in January 2022 on the self-legitimation process of the authoritarian regime through social media and public statements translated via traditional means of communication. Although the research has been weakened by several methodological issues and peculiarities of the empirical case studied, an attempt was made to open up a new theoretical framework to discuss the legitimation of authoritarian regimes in the age of digital technologies. As was discussed in the literature review section, a number of previous studies focused on the issues of digital authoritarianism whereby technologies are used as a tool for repression. This study aimed at capturing the dynamic changes in the framing of issues by Tokayev's regime as a response to the internal shock (January events) which adversely affected the legitimacy of the president.

The analysis of the framing of linkages to Russia showed that even though there were no signs of dynamic changes in how ties to Russia were framed by President Tokayev in his tweets and statements, rational choice framing has been consistently used more frequently than the ideological one. This demonstrates that the regime has continuously distanced itself from the Kremlin for internal and external reasons. Internal reason is the nationalist groups and public figures who capitalize on regime's alleged loyalty to Russia, as was discussed in the analysis part. The external reason is the need for partnership with the Western countries, as the analysis of the statement made by Timur Suleimenov demonstrated.

As for the use of framing in the context of national identity topics, the results of the study showed that the civic framing of a nationalist discourse has been consistently used more frequently than the more exclusive patriotic one. Unusually high number of words from the

patriotic dictionary was used by Tokayev in his statement devoted to the Independence Day.

Although the quantitative analysis did not confirm the hypotheses, the study provides a basis for further research on the analysis of television statements and social media messages made by politicians in authoritarian countries.

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