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ИНФОРМАЦИИ**

Section 4
**ELECTRONIC MASS
MEDIA**

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POLITICAL NEWS IN KAZAKHSTAN'S TV

This study examines the impact of television during the democratization process in Kazakhstan. Television plays a significant role as a public watchdog in Kazakhstan. The analysis examines whether the political news and information on television in Kazakhstan leads to support for democracy and increases public interest in the democratization process. Television have had much greater success in dispersing a range of perspectives, information, and commentary in Kazakhstan. The author of this study are discussed in detail the utility and its implications of the role of television in the democratization process.

Key words: television, political news, democratization process, Kazakhstan.

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Қазақстан телеарналарындағы саяси жаңалықтар

Бұл мақалада Қазақстандағы демократияландыру үдерісіне телевизияның ықпалы қарастырылады. Қазақстанда теледидар қоғамдық бақылаушы ретінде маңызды рөлге ие. Автор Қазақстандағы телеарналар саяси жаңалықтарды тарату барысында демократияны қолдайды ма, демократияландыру үдерісіне қоғамның қызығушылығын арттыруға ықпалы қандай деген сұрақтарға талдау жасайды. Қазақстанда телеарналар ақпарат таратуда жоғары сұранысқа ие. Бұл ғылыми зерттеуде автор демократия үдерісіндегі теледидардың рөлін жан-жақты талдайды.

Түйін сөздер: телевидение, саяси жаңалықтар, демократизация үдерісі, Қазақстан.

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Политические новости на казахстанском телевидении

В исследовании рассматривается влияние телевидения на процесс демократизации в Казахстане. Изучается роль телевидения как общественного наблюдателя. Автор задается вопросом, приводят ли телевизионные политические новости и информация к поддержке демократии и повышению общественного интереса к процессу демократизации. Телевидение добилось гораздо больших успехов в распространении в Казахстане ряда перспектив, информационных процессов и комментариев.

Ключевые слова: телевидение, политические новости, процесс демократизации, Казахстан.

Introduction

This study examines the relationship between the use of political news on television and support for democracy since the independence of Kazakhstan. It also analysis whether the political news and information on television in Kazakhstan leads to support for democracy and increased public interest in the democratization process. In terms of a 'transition to democracy', the dissolution of the

Soviet Union is considered a major component of a wider global shift towards democracy at the end of the twentieth century, and this includes an independent Kazakhstan. This political transition has had tremendous impact on the country's media. In the circumstances of transition from the Soviet system, individuals' constitutional rights and freedoms are only gradually being established and there is still insufficient check on abuse of authority,

therefor the media can play a critical role [1]. In Kazakhstan the methods used are less tyrannical than those of the Soviets, but control over the flow of information is strict and ownership is restricted. Most media including TV, radio stations and newspapers are owned or controlled by members of the president's family [2]. However, private independent media has emerged and is a source of tension. According to the Europe and Eurasia Media Sustainability Index, Mass media is the epicenter of social and political turbulence in Kazakhstan [3]. Several scholars argue that television is the most prevalent form of media in Kazakhstan, as well as the most trusted [4] (B. Junisbai, A. Junisbai, N. Ying Fry, 2015; O. Nikolayenko, 2011; M. Laruelle, 2015).

Frederick Starr (1999) points out: 'By the late 1990s tens of millions of dollars, pounds, marks, and francs had been spent on the development of "civil society" in Central Asia' [5]. That investment is part of what scholars argue is the hope of Western democracies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and human rights groups for democratic mass media systems to be stabilizing, modernizing and nation-building tools. However, there remain significant obstacles to the development of functional and effective press systems able to maintain economic and political autonomy [6].

In view of those challenges, television in Kazakhstan as a tool of soft power to communicate with citizens controlled by state-run structures should not obscure the authorities' relative lack of investment in prestige developments of media has resulted in the public resources away from their "basic" services [7]. Television journalists' primary goals have been the promotion of democratic journalism as a foundation of civil society, advocacy of press freedom and journalists' rights, and advancement of independent, sustainable media outlets in an environment hostile to those principles [8]. The assumption here is that being the most powerful medium in most of Central Asia, television should sensitize and accelerate the democratic process among the voting public.

The analysis is based on the Baltic Surveys/ The Gallup Organization research conducted on behalf of the International Republican Institute. Field work was carried out by the Institute for Comparative Social Research- Kazakhstan. The national representative survey was conducted from February 17-28, 2011. The eligibility criteria was based on age (18 years and older). A sample of 1,527 Kazakh participants were interviewed face-to-face in their homes. Kazakhstanis were asked about their political views, media choice for political news,

their opinion about impact of mass media, plus other variables related to support for democracy and political news use.

Political News Use

The main theoretical assumption of this research is that some individuals use television for exposure to political news and to engage their political interests as citizens; and this sensitivity to, and engagement with, the political process leads to supporting democracy. This argument is supported by Nicholas Garnham (1992), Lawrence Grossberg et al. (2006), Kevin Howley (2007) Mark Poster (1997) and other scholars who discuss the role of media as an important discursive site for political information within the public sphere.

McQuail (1992) says this line of argument calls for measures to strengthen the media's independence from government, to ensure sufficient resources, and to provide access rights to information as a form of media accountability. The relationship between television news and support for democracy in Kazakhstan has not been empirically examined. While there is scholarly work detailing the relative strengths and weaknesses of Post-Soviet and post-communist media, the work does not specifically address Kazakhstan [9].

Historical Perspective

In June 1989 the current president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbaev, served as chairman of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic's Council of Ministers when the Communist Party of the Kazakh S.S.R. appointed him first secretary; subsequently, the republic's Supreme Soviet conferred upon him the title of republican president in April 1990. In 1991 he was elected for a five year term by popular vote. 'Kazakhstan's first multi-party elections, held in 1991, returned a parliament considered favourable to Nazarbayev, but were judged unfair by foreign observers. Complaints included arbitrary barring of some candidates, ballot stuffing and media distortion. After independence President Nazarbayev's market-oriented economic policies won popularity, and aid from western governments' [10]. In 1999 Nazarbaev was reelected for a seven year term. It was extended to 2000 via a nationwide referendum. Thus, the 1999 presidential election was held preterm. He was again reelected in 2005. According to the article 'Primer on presidential election in Kazakhstan' (2011) Nazarbayev's performance at the polls evoked debate as election monitors decried elections in Kazakhstan as far from free and fair and certainly not a competitive contest. That being said,

President Nazarbayev's strong performance in 2011 was clearly attributable in part to the fact that the ruling Nur Otan party carried out an effective and disciplined campaign. The president's rivals and the opposition factions were not helped by the fact that the opposition ranks in Kazakhstan were divided and failed to rally round a single candidate. 'Moreover, experts have noted that no one-opposition candidate had the standing to wage a competitive race against President Nazarbayev, who has been in power for more than 20 years. Television news programs and current affairs talk shows debated pros and cons of a one-party movement system and backed the opposition politicians', who supported for a return to multiparty systems' (<https://www.irex.org/region/europe-eurasia/kazakhstan>). Instead of supporting a return to electoral democracy, Kazakhstani's sided with the authoritarian government in support of the president, who won the referendum by 97.7 % of the vote. «... Our understanding of democratic processes is based on two main points. First, it is a presence of some universal principles of democracy. Secondly, existence of national-cultural features in mechanisms of implementation of these principles», – the President of Kazakhstan Nazarbaev has defined «the Kazakhstan way» of advancements to a democratic society.

The OSCE/ODIHR has observed the elections in Kazakhstan since 1991. The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission for the 2011 early presidential election found that 'needed reforms for holding genuine democratic elections still have to materialize as this election revealed shortcomings similar to those in previous elections. While the election was technically well-administered, the absence of opposition candidates and of a vibrant political discourse resulted in a non-competitive environment' (<http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kazakhstan>). Kazakhstan's independent TV channels, led by political commentators, journalists and talk-show hosts, debated the issue and publicly supported the opposition by calling on voters to support independent candidacy or multiparty politics.

Television in Kazakhstan

As of 2015, there were 1,367 newspapers, 531 magazines, 260 online media outlets, 95 television stations, and 58 radio stations registered in Kazakhstan. The main source of political information in Kazakhstan is television, ahead of newspapers and radio. State owned electronic media is operated by the Kazakhstan Radio and Television Corporation. Most media outlets are privately

owned, but only a few are seen as independent and as providing well-balanced and fair coverage of political developments. Several critics from the media and NGO sector indicate that media freedom is limited by a strong concentration of media ownership with owners controlling the editorial policy of their media outlets. Furthermore, legal provisions concerning the honor and dignity of the President, the violation of which may lead to up to three years imprisonment, reportedly contribute to an environment with generally limited freedom of expression in which journalists exercise self-censorship (<http://homepage.divms.uiowa.edu/~jones/voting/KazakhOSCE.pdf>).

All media in Kazakhstan were state owned until the late 1990s and were subject to censorship and direct political control immediately after independence. In this sense Kazakhstan's initial independence produced a relationship between media and government that retained some authoritarian principles; 'A trusted, respected, and independent mass media system is a major indicator of a country's development of democracy and civil society' [11]. The emergence of press freedom in Kazakhstan started by Gorbachev's "perestroika" and then accelerated in the years after independence. Newspapers were the first to develop an independent media. 'In the beginning of the 1990s, new private newspapers appeared almost every day, inspired by the spirit of freedom and criticism displayed by the rapidly changing Russian press' [12]. The first independent television stations were launched in 1990 and by the end of 1996 there were over fifty private TV stations in Kazakhstan. These private TV stations were 'airing programs about issues of real concern to their audiences is a significant step away from standardized state programming' [13]. These independent TV stations created public affairs programs, talk shows, political news coverage and according to Katsiev (1999) these stations: – KTK in Almaty, Efir in Astana, RIKa-TV in Aktuybinsk were quite independent as they exposed human rights violations and launched investigative journalism (Katsiev, 1999). Zhunisbai points out: 'Although the country's image (Kazakhstan's image) as a liberal polity during these early years was marred by retaliation against individual media outlets for including stories considered too critical of the government, a number of those working in television and radio recall the idealism of this period' [14]. Barbara Zhunisbai's case studies demonstrate that the independent TV channel Tan in Almaty and regional television stations like Rika TV in Aktobe, Irbis in Pavlodar 'which before late 2001 had not

aired opposition political views, suddenly became sharply critical. The stations began broadcasting program calling for the acceleration of unrealized democratic reforms that the president had promised for a number of years' [15]. The public affairs programs and special interviews generated popular debates between politicians and audience. From a theoretical perspective, this is an indicator of growing interest in political news which could lead to public support for the democratization process.

Journalists investigated the dominance of financial-industrial groups in media, corruption, and abuse of power by government. However, the successes achieved by independent broadcasters by late 1996 led the authorities to undertake steps which are now radically changing the television market in Kazakhstan. The chief device, which someone in the government invented, is what came to be called the 'tender on radio and television frequencies' [16]. In the beginning of 1997 President Nazarbaev announced the tender competition. The tender competition requires that private stations wishing to broadcast pay the state for a license since air frequencies were now to be considered a national resource from which the state should legitimately gain a profit (Katsiev, 1999). The tender competition was one of the tools to regulate broadcast frequencies, control broadcasting by a committee of the Council of Ministers of Kazakhstan, and control the excess of demand for frequencies. According to Katsiev this competition was "merely to close down private broadcasting" [17].

One would expect the use of political information on television station to lead to support for democracy in Kazakhstan if there is any interest in politics, particularly since earlier case studies in several Central Asian countries have shown television's potential to mobilize the masses. However, the recent political developments in Kazakhstan tell a different story, particularly in instances where the president mobilized the tender competition. Private stations wishing to broadcast paid the state for a license since air frequencies were now to be considered a national resource from which the state should legitimately gain a profit. The legal and political environment in Kazakhstan raises questions about how the media and democratic principles operate, particularly for a newly established country with an authoritarian past. Does the use of political news lead to support for democracy within a restricted legal and political environment? To what extent does political interest account the relationship that exists between television news use and democratic support? Three specific research questions are asked

to help us understand the relationship between media and politics.

RQ1: Is there a relationship between Kazakhstani voters' use of televised political news and their interest in politics?

RQ2: Do Kazakhstani voters who access political news on television have strong support for democracy?

RQ3: Do Kazakhstani's with higher levels of political interest have greater levels of support for democracy?

Media and Politics

Answers to these questions are found in reports and monitoring data produced during presidential elections. Report data shows how media was used in the election process. Cross tabulation and regression analysis using... From this analysis the relationship between Kazakhstan's media and democratic processes begins to emerge. A survey commissioned by the Eurasian Council on Foreign Affairs (ECFA) and conducted by UK market research agency Ipsos MORI found that nearly eight out of ten (79%) respondents agree with the statement that 'Kazakhstan is ready to hold the Presidential Election on 26th April 2015' and only 3% 'disagreed', with the remainder (9%) stating 'don't know'. A further 82% of respondents stated that they were 'certain' or 'very likely' to vote at 26 April 2015 Presidential Election [18]. Considering the ongoing intimidation of journalists and suppression of information, the question arises as to whether important political campaigns and interactive discourse about current affairs aired on TV leads to significant support for democracy.

Since 1999 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) an Election Observation Mission (EOM) conducted qualitative and quantitative monitoring of national TV stations – state-owned and the private television and newspapers, including two which are state-owned. The EOM analyzed the quantity of the time/space allocated to candidates and election officials, as well as the tone of their coverage in prime-time programs and print publications. (www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2005/12/17259_en.pdf). According to the OSCE monitoring in four presidential elections 'Time or Space (%) for Each Candidate During the Total Time Dedicated to Politics' all monitored broadcast media the biggest part of their candidate-related news coverage dedicated to Mr. Nazarbayev. On 28 March, 2015, the OSCE/ODIHR EOM commenced quantitative and qualitative monitoring

of seven television channels: Kazakhstan TV and Khabar TV (state-funded), First Eurasian Channel (mostly state-funded), Astana TV, Channel 7, Channel 31 and KTK (private); radio station, Kazakh Radio (state-funded); three online media, www.nur.kz, www.tengrinews.kz, and www.zakon.kz; and five newspapers, Egemen Kazakhstan, and Kazakhstanskaya Pravda (state-funded), Karavan, Vremya and Zhas Alash (private). According to the OSCE/ODIHR EOM media monitoring results, the broadcast media's coverage Candidates were given nominally equal coverage, but the incumbent was also extensively covered in his official capacity, thus contributing to an uneven playing field. Altogether, the coverage of the incumbent was approximately twice as much as that of other candidates. The state-funded Kazakhstan TV and Khabar TV dedicated a comparable portion of political prime time news coverage to all three candidates, with 20% and 18% to Mr. Syzdykov, 19% and 18% to Mr. Kusainov and 15% and 14% to Mr. Nazarbaev. However, the coverage differed in its tone; for Mr. Nazarbaev it was overwhelmingly positive, regularly featuring expressions of support from citizens while the tone was mostly neutral for the other two candidates. In addition, both channels almost always started their prime time news programs with reports about the President in his official capacity, devoting to him an additional 26% and 31% of political news coverage in a positive and neutral tone. Most monitored television channels, as well as two official state-funded newspapers, had a similar pattern in their election coverage with information on the incumbent's official activities visibly prevailing (most notably on First Eurasian Channel with 37%). In addition, the CEC interpreted the Election Law in a manner that any airtime given to a candidate outside the news was considered campaigning and should be paid for by the candidates. This, in combination with the media's perception of their role to strictly comply with the principle of equal opportunity, restricted editorial freedom and did not encourage analytical coverage or critical public debate. The lack of comprehensive campaign information considerably limited the opportunity for voters to make a well-informed choice. The Election Law could be amended to encourage media to provide more diverse and analytical campaign information to voters. The observer's final report suggested, 'Formats of election coverage and decisions on paid election-related material should depend solely on the media's own editorial policy' (Early Presidential Election, 26 April 2015, OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation

Mission Final Report). According to the OSCE, the strongest result of their monitoring of candidate-related news coverage shows that Nazarbayev was more frequently portrayed in his capacity of President than as a candidate, and predominantly in a positive light [19].

Monitoring conducted by the OSCE/ODIHR EOM in 2015 systematically measured public opinion on democracy, governance, quality of life, as well as media news use. Data collection was timely because Kazakhstan was conducting referenda to presidential election. Complete data and the results were released to the public for independent verification and replication periodically before the election. In Kazakhstan the OSCE/ODIHR EOM commenced quantitative and qualitative monitoring of television channels: state-funded and private, radio station (state-funded), online media, and newspapers (state-funded & private). Data represented media monitoring results. The results indicated that broadcast media's coverage candidates was nominally equal while the incumbent was also extensively covered in his official capacity, thus contributing to an uneven playing field. Altogether, the coverage of the incumbent was approximately twice as much as that of other candidates. As Table 2 shows, a number of monitored media dedicated their attention almost exclusively to official information on the work of the authorities (president, government, local governments, and the CEC). Although the campaign was visible in nationwide and local media, there were no debates or interviews and virtually no in-depth analysis. The monitoring analysis sought to determine the relationship between television news and political interest and ran tests on whether television news use has a direct influence on the TV viewers' support for democracy. Also assessed was whether political interest is a moderating variable for the relationship between television news use and democratic support.

Results

This study questioned whether public consumption of television news on political affairs leads to support for democracy in the complicated context of Kazakhstan. Also examined was political interest; whether it is a moderating indicator of television news use and support for democracy. On the question political news use, 75% of respondents indicated that they use the media, especially television, to get news about politics and government. Overall, 50.5% said they use the media for political information every day, while 24.9% use a medium of choice a few times a week.

Cross-tabs results showed that respondents are interested in politics, discuss politics, and hold strong beliefs about the impact of their votes on their leaders. With all key indicators of political interest entered in the model, 86% of respondents said they were interested in what was going on during the democratization process.

Regarding democracy, Kazakhstani's were asked how strongly they are committed in their expressed support of democracy. Overall, 83% strongly supported democracy. Likewise, 70.3% of Kazakhstani's expressed active involvement in politics while a slim majority favored a change from the autocratic system created by President Nazarbayev, «the Kazakhstan way» of advancements to a democratic society. New research commissioned by ECFA and conducted by UK market research agency Ipsos MORI, shows that an overwhelming majority of Kazakhstani adults (89%) believe that, when thinking generally about quality of life in Kazakhstan, on balance the country is moving in the right direction. This is in striking contrast to what television news and current affairs had consistently opposed to be detrimental for democracy.

In order to further examine the relationship between media and politics regression analyses were performed using data from the OSCE/ODIHR EOM in 2015 stepwise regression analysis was run to test the relationship between Kazakhstani voters' use of television for political news and their interest in politics (RQ1). The regression showed that the more Kazakhstani's get political news from television, the more they are interested in politics. This is consistent with other research. The "television news use" values in that model produced a strong relationship. The stepwise model was also used to examine the relationship between Kazakhstani voters access coverage of political news on television and their support for democracy. The survey results indicated that television news use was not a strong predictor of the voters' support for democracy.

Analysis of the relationship between level of political interest and the level of democratic support found a positive relationship. This indicates that overall political interest is perhaps more powerful than media attention. This important correlation indicates the impact of

political interest as a moderating variable between television news and politics.

Conclusion

The more Kazakhstan voters access news coverage of political information on private television accounting for their interest in politics, the higher their support for democracy. Kazakhstanis also see democracy as a political activity through which they fulfill an obligation of answering the president's call to support his ideology and regime legitimacy. As a result, the president periodically gets away with changing his political ideologies in referenda despite television news coverage, which oppose such unconstitutional political maneuvers. Without addressing presidential hegemony through which the government imposes despotic policies that undermine multiparty democracy, stifle political contestation, suppress a free press, and curtail political mass mobilization on private television, a reversal to full autocracy is inevitable. The limitations of this study are primarily grounded in some of the unanswered questions that emerge from these findings. It remains unclear whether Kazakhstani voters truly recognize presidential hegemony in undermining the democratization process; this matter needs further exploration. Could there be other reasons that explain why the direct influence of television to support democracy is not more strongly supported by the general public? As an ideological tool, could the national television also build support for anti-democratic sentiments of those in power? Are there some underlying cultural institutions that are more important than democracy?

What we learn from this endeavor is just a first step toward understanding television use of political information disseminated through news and public affairs programs for the process of democratization in this part of the transitioning world. The implications from this study add considerably to what we know about media and politics in a developing third world country like Kazakhstan: that if civil society gets citizens interested about politics, television can play a major role at fostering public debate and sensitizing society through their news and public affairs programs to mobilize citizens to support democracy.

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