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The Party of Power of Kazakhstan

The origins, resources and regime-supporting functions of Nur Otan

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEC   Central Electoral Commission
CIS   Community of Independent States
CPSU   Communist Party of the Soviet Union
DVK   Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan
EPI   Effective Number of Parliamentary Parties
KTK   Commercial Television Channel
NDR   Our Home is Russia
NGO   Non Governmental Organization
NKK   People's Congress of Kazakhstan
NTK   Independent Television Channel
OSDP   National Social Democratic Party
OVR   Fatherland – All Russia
PACE   Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly
PNEK   People's Unity Party
PPO   Party Basic Organizations
PR   Proportional Representation
SNEK   Union of People's Party
SPK   Socialist Party of Kazakhstan

A note on the transliteration of names

Kazakhstan's official language is Kazakh, a language of the Turkic family which adopts a Cyrillic alphabet. Russian is the second most spoken language in Kazakhstan, and has official status as "language of inter-ethnic communication". Official documents are published in Russian and Kazakh, and the use of Russian is still very widespread, especially among people who have been educated under the Soviet Union, as well as in the main cities.

Russian names are spelled in this dissertation according to the Library of Congress system of transliteration, while the spelling of Kazakh follows the transliteration system established by the United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN) and the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use (PCGN).

Some spellings are slightly altered, in order to accommodate common English spellings of well-known Russian names or to facilitate the reading. The Russian 'ii' ending was changed to a 'y' in surnames (for example, Trotskii becomes Trotsky) but not in all first names or place names. The letter 'ë' is spelled 'yo' (as in Pyotr) to facilitate pronunciation. For the sake of clarity I have also dropped the Russian soft sign from all personal and place names (Gelman instead of Gel'man and oblast instead of oblast').

Acknowledgements

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A. Del Sordi (2012). The "party of power" Nur Otan and the stability of the Kazakhstani political system. Paper presented at the Annual BASEES Conference, Cambridge, UK, March 31 – April 2, 2012.

Abstract

Firmly guided by the strong leadership of the President Nursultan Nazarbayev, the contemporary political system of Kazakhstan is characterized by the presence of a prominent political party. Commonly labelled as a "party of power", Nur Otan dominates the national parliament, boasts an ever-increasing membership and a capillary organizational structure.

Nur Otan maintains a close relationship with the ruling elites who played a crucial role in its creation. These members continue to sustain it with a constant flow of resources, including the design of ad hoc institutional constraints, privileged access to the media, the adoption of a flexible ideology, and the association with the popular figure of the leader, the President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

Secondly, the consolidation of Nur Otan's dominant position coincided with the establishment of a "soft authoritarian" regime. I look at Nur Otan's contribution to this process. It is argued that the ruling elites used the party, and enacted their party-supporting strategies, in order to face a series of regime-threatening challenges, such as legislative rebellions and elite splits. Finally, drawing hypotheses from the literature on "new authoritarianism", I look at the specific ways Nur Otan contributes to regime stability: these authoritarian functions include managing elite competition, organizing youth activism and giving the regime an "invincible" image.

A collateral question stems from the close relation of Kazakhstan with neighbouring Russia and from striking commonalities between their ruling parties. I investigate the possibility that the model of the "party of power" has been exported from Russia to the Central Asian state, together with "authoritarian values.

Chapter 1.

Introduction

1.1 Introducing Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan became an independent country only two decades ago, with the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was a sudden and unexpected process: in a way "Kazakhstan was born by default" (Cummings, 2005: 1).

The country extends over a surface of 2.7 million square kilometres (approximately nine times the size of Italy, and larger than the whole Western Europe). It hosts a relatively small population, slightly above 16 millions, which, however, is increasing rapidly.

 Its vast territory holds abundant and extremely valuable natural resources, including gold, uranium, copper, aluminium and, especially, oil and natural gas[1]. Revenues from the deployment of these resources are key to the country's impressive economic growth[2]. The economic bonanza has brought increasing

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[1] Kazakhstan, an oil producer since 1911, has the second largest oil reserves as well as the second largest oil production among the former Soviet republics after Russia. (Energy Information Administration 2010). To give an indication of the richness and variety of Kazakhstan's mineral resources, Brill Olcott (2010) reports a phrase by a Soviet geologist, who once boasted that "Kazakhstan was able to export the entire periodic table of elements" (Brill Olcott, 2010: 10). Kazakhstan's proved oil reserves are of 30 billions of barrels, while proven reserves of natural gas are of 85 trillions of cubic feet. See: http://www.eia.gov/countries/country-data.cfm?fips=KZ

[2] Kazakhstan has maintained a sustained GDP growth since its exit from the severe crisis it went through in the early 1990s. Detailed data on GDP since 1992 are found in Brill Olcott (2010: 298). After the global economic crisis of 2008, where also Kazakhstan's growth slowed down, the country has rebounded well and registered an estimated 7.1% growth for 2011. See http://www.worldbank.org.kz/en/country/kazakhstan/overview

inequality between the middle class that has started emerging in the cities, and the marginalised communities which are not benefiting from this growth. It is possible to note a geographical and a urban/rural divide, the most deprived regions being the rural and extractive regions in the West and in the South of the country[3].

Particularly relevant is Kazakhstan's geopolitical position. Kazakhstan is a landlocked country, largely endowed with resources: these circumstances put the country at the centre of an international competition for influence, where the main actors are the neighbouring powers, Russia and China, but also actors like the European Union are trying to find their space. In particular, European actors are interested in the development of newly discovered gas reserved on the Northern shore of the Caspian sea[4].

Although the situation is changing quickly, especially given the increasing role of China in the Central Asian energy market[5], Kazakhstan is particularly close to Russia, which still maintains a

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[3] The unequal wealth distribution has created tensions, particularly in the West, when in December 2011 there were workers' strikes and attacks then related to Islamic terrorism.
[4] For instance, the giant oil field of Kashagan, which will start delivering in 2013, is jointly controlled by state-run Kazmunaigas and six international oil companies. Kazmunaigas, Eni, ExxonMobil, Royal Dutch Shell and France's Total own stakes of around 16.8 percent each, while ConocoPhillips owns 8.40 percent, and Japan's Inpex 7.56 percent. See: http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/08/10/kazakhstan-oil-kashagan-idUSL6E8J7CML20120810
[5] In the attempt of diversifying its resources provisions, China is increasingly importing crude oil from Central Asia and is acquiring equity shares from a number of countries, including Kazakhstan, Russia and Iran. Also, it is working on alternative energy corridors, investing in projects like the Kazakhstan-China oil pipeline, built in record time between 2006 and 2009, and the Central Asia Gas Pipeline (Energy Information Administration 2010). For details, see S. Shen (2011). Qualitative Energy Diplomacy" in Central Asia: A comparative analysis of the policies of the United States, Russia, and China. *Brookings Institution Research Paper*. See also N. Swanstrom (2007). China's Role in Central Asia: Soft and Hard Power. *Global Dialogue* 9, (1-2).

fundamental position of intermediary with Western European buyers, as pipelines mostly pass on its territory[6].

Russia also maintains a privileged relation with Kazakhstan thanks the common past in the Soviet Union. This left a legacy of privileged relations between the political elites, the use of Russian language as regional *lingua franca*, and, especially, a large number of ethnic Russians, who still live on Kazakhstani territory[7].

Kazakhstan is, in fact, a multi-ethnic country: Kazakhs constitute about 60 percent of the population, while Russians, the first minority group, are 25 percent. Other minorities include Ukrainians, Uzbeks, Germans, Tatars and Uighurs (Brill Olcott, 2010: 293). Kazakhs have actually only recently become a majority in their own country, as in Soviet times they were only 40.1 percent of the total population (Cummings, 2005)[8].

Prevalently Muslim, Kazakhstan is also a multi-confessional country. Muslims, mostly belonging to the Sunni Hanafi school, constitute almost 70 percent of the population, although they are in large part "traditional Muslims", practising a sort of folk, "ritualistic" Islam, largely influenced by pre-Islamic traditions

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[6] Russia is trying to maintain its strategic position in the Central Asian energy sector, making sure of not being bypassed in the development of energy relations between the European Union and Central Asia (Brill Olcott 2010). It is trying to maintain control on the region's resources also through an aggressive campaign of investments conducted by Gazprom (Kramer 2008).

[7] As it will be explained in the last chapter of this thesis, this relation extends to a close political cooperation and even to the possible exportation of political values.

[8] In order to give the right consideration to this multi-national nature, I will use the adjective "Kazakhstani" instead of "Kazakh", when referring to the whole country. "Kazakh" will be used when referring to the Kazakh population only.

present in the territory[9]. Orthodox Christians are the second religious group in the country.

The presence of different ethnicities and religions is an important element of the contemporary public life of Kazakhstan: one of the country's representative bodies is the Assembly of Nations, a consultative chamber which gathers the representatives of all the most important ethnic groups. Also, Kazakhstan is very active in promoting inter-religious dialogue[10]. Finally, although the official language is Kazakh, Russian is still used as the language "of interethnic communication", and official documents are published in both languages.

Another important element of Kazakhstan's society is the traditional clan structure, which assumed a more relevant position in recent times also because of the recent attempt of the government to reinvigorate this identity as a component of statehood (Brill Olcott, 2010). The Kazakhs are traditionally divided in three hordes (*zhuz*), a Great, a Middle and a Small one, further divided in *taip* (tribes) and *ru* (clans). The knowledge of ancestors does not seem to be very widespread among Kazakhs (Brill Olcott, 2010). Nevertheless, a number of authors, including Schatz (2004) and Collins (2006) underscored the important role played by these kinship divisions in both national and regional politics.

The political life of the country has been dominated for two decades by the figure of the President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who earlier had the chair of Secretary of the Kazakhstani

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[9] For these considerations I am indebted to Dr. Galina Yemelianova (CREES, Birmingham) and her excellent presentation on "The role of Islam in National Identification of Kazakhs" at the BASEES Conference, Cambridge, UK, March 31, 2012.

[10] For instance, it hosted the Third Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in the capital city Astana in July 2009. For reference, see: http://www.kazembassy.org.uk/the_third_congress_of_the_leaders_of_world_and_traditional_religions_1.html

Communist party. It was under his strong leadership that Kazakhstan acquired its independence, became a full-functioning market economy, although with much initial sacrifice, and became more and more authoritarian, after a phase of relative pluralism in the early 1990s.

1.2 The research question

Along with a strong leader, the contemporary political system of Kazakhstan is characterized by the presence of a prominent political party.

Commonly labelled as a "party of power" – *partiya vlasti* in Russian – Nur Otan (which loosely translates as Fatherland's Light) dominates the national parliament, has a big and ever-increasing membership, a capillary organizational structure, and enjoys a privileged position in the political system, as well as the support of the country leader. Party members occupy key positions in the government and its youth organization acts as an effective recruiting and mobilizing machine.

At the same time, Nur Otan exists in a presidential, rather than a party-based political system. The President has wide Constitutional powers, and exercises them extensively, controlling directly the policy making process. In this highly personalized context, moreover, the role of informal politics is extremely relevant, and the party seems to have little power, resources and charisma of its own.

The puzzle at the basis of this work regards the presence, at the same time, of these two elements: a strong, dominant-like party and a super-presidentialist regime. The questions arising from it regard the internal mechanisms that regulate this system.

The first question regards the relation between Nur Otan and the political elites from which it originates. In particular, I focus on two aspects: (a) the role of ruling elites in establishing and supporting the party, and the asymmetric relation between party and power which follows from it; (b) and the strategies chosen by elites in order to keep the party of power in its prevailing position. In this respect, the party is considered as an organization (Panebianco, 1988), and analyzed on an meso-level, an intermediate level between micro approaches, focusing on the positions and choices of single party-men and the macro approach proposed by party system studies.

Considering the party as an organization, it is possible to look at its internal features and functions, as well as at the relation with the entities which condition its existence, the restricted group of people which created the party and continue to support it.

Nur Otan's dominant position is in fact broken down and discussed in its different aspects, within and outside of the party system, finding that this party is only halfway dominant. Following the "genetic approach" (Panebianco, 1988), the key for understanding this partial dominance is found in Nur Otan's origins, which established a long-lasting relation of dependence and weakness of the party respect to the elites which originated it.

My other question regards the role of Nur Otan in contributing to the stability of Kazakhstan's authoritarian regime.

A growing literature on "new authoritarianism" has proposed several hypotheses for the presence of political parties in non-democratic regimes, finding a series of regime-supporting functions. In this work, I test some of these hypotheses, regarding the capacity of Nur Otan of coordinating elites and mobilizing the citizenship in favour of the regime (c).

I also try to connect these two elements, by focusing on the reasons guiding the leadership in making their party-building choice (d). These choices are intimately connected with the party's regime-supporting functions, although the two aspects should not be confused. In particular, it will be seen how the choice of establishing an executive-based party, as well as to support it using various strategies and resources, were connected to specific regime-threatening challenges. I argue that this process is a dynamic one: the elites' behaviour and the party functions change according to varying conditions within the political system.
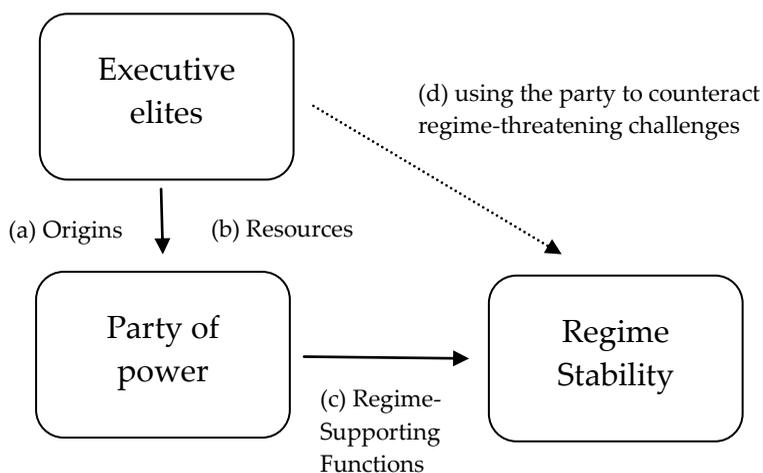
Figure 1.1 Thesis structure

The relevance of this work resides in providing empirical evidence in support of theories about the role of parties for regime stability, although the case-study nature of this work

allows only limited generalizations outside of the Kazakhstani case.

At the same time, the dissertation aims to contribute to the study of the internal dynamics of autocracy by looking also at the other side of the issue, which is why and how elites engage in party-building and what they actually do in order to support their creatures. This perspective also allows creating distinctions between different types of dominant parties along the dimension of independence from the executive.

A collateral research question stems from the similarities and the close relation of Kazakhstan with neighbouring Russia. The question regards the possibility that the model of the "party of power" has been exported to the Central Asian state, together with a series of "authoritarian values". In this respect, the thesis contributes also to the on-going debates on authoritarian diffusion.

Obviously, given the empirical scope of this work, the conclusions that can be drawn from it are necessarily limited to the case. Nevertheless, the hypotheses presented for Kazakhstan can offer a starting point for further comparative research.

1.3 Research design and methodology

1.3.1 Methodological choices and justifications

For this dissertation, a mixed-methods qualitative research design has been utilized on a single case-study: the methods used included elite and expert interviews, documentary data, content analysis, secondary sources and observation.

The choice of research design and methodology is necessarily connected with the nature of the research enterprise.

It was stated earlier that the goal of this dissertation is clarifying some of the internal dynamics in non-democratic regimes, namely those related with the formation, support and utilization of a political party in order to enhance regime stability.

The study of the relations between party and elites is the first of these aspects: often, these relations involve a small number of actors, often taking decisions in informal contexts, which tend to be scarcely measurable with quantitative methods.

Similar considerations can be done relatively to the forms of support offered to the party by the elites: it is actually very difficult to penetrate, not to mention measure, the external layer of party activity and actually understand how the party competition is actually biased towards the party of power. A qualitative mixed-method approach allowed me to analyze the issue from different perspectives, looking both at legislation and official documentation, relying on interviews and looking, when possible, at public manifestations of these forms of support, like in the case of privileged access to mass media.

The functions performed by the party constitute the third main aspect of this research. Also in this case, the choice of a qualitative research design results as the most suitable. By emphasizing understanding and in-depth analytical exploration, the qualitative approach allows a better understanding of these complex dynamics and of their consequences for regime stability.

The decision of focusing on a single case-study attains to the necessity of adopting an intensive research design, which is better suited to understand longitudinal dynamics as well as establishing causal mechanisms (Gerring, 2004: 349). In my case,

the understanding of the party of power and of its origins and functions is developed according both the line of historical reconstruction, as well as through the elaboration of causal mechanisms.

Moreover, I conduct my research on a largely under-studied case, Kazakhstan, which is only recently attracting the attention of political scientists, and single-case studies constitute a better choice when there is scarcity of studies on a subject (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Obviously, there are drawbacks to this choice: single-case studies have not the same theory-development potential as comparative research designs (George & Bennett, 2005). This problem is partly relevant for this work, which is devoted for a large part to the testing of existing, although not yet established, theories on party functions.

Relatively to the supporting role of elites, this shortcoming is addressed by establishing, when possible, internal comparisons between Nur Otan and previous attempts to build a party of power.

As said, in this work both the historical/longitudinal and the theoretical dimension are addressed.

Theoretically, I address two questions. One is the effect of party origins on the development of party structure, especially in regard of its independence; the second question is whether and how the party of power Nur Otan is contributing to the stability of the Kazakhstani regime. Causal mechanisms are looked for in both cases, although a search for a predictive model is not the aim of this work. Rather, the focus is on the identification of causal mechanisms, the ways they work and the conditions they are associated with (Sayer, 2000).

At the same time, this work gives great importance to the historical element. The importance of the historical perspective in party studies has been long recognized (Duverger, 1964; Panebianco, 1988), and this approach was adopted when reconstructing Nur Otan's origins in order to show the role of elites in establishing and supporting the party. The other important application of this historical approach is done in order to show how the party has been addressing a series of challenges over time, and how elites have gone through a learning process which has allowed the improvement of their strategies. In the last case, the method used process-tracing – with the appearance of potential regime challenges and the establishment of certain party-supporting measures serving as my primary data.

Process-tracing is defined as the "method [that] attempts to identify the intervening causal process - the causal chain and causal mechanism - between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable." (George & Bennet, 2005: 206). The advantage of this method is that it allows to identify the *causal mechanisms* that connect causes and effects. They define causal mechanisms as "ultimately unobservable physical, social, or psychological processes through which agents with causal capacities operate, but only in specific contexts or conditions, to transfer energy, information, or matter to other entities" (George & Bennet, 2005: 137).

This is a suitable method for my study, as it allows testing hypotheses and theory-based mechanisms by specifying the linking causes and effects of the processes involved. For every hypothesis about party functions, I reconstruct the chain of events which may have brought the ruling elites to use the party *tool* in such a way, and to adopt specific party-supporting measures.

1.3.2 Details on the empirical research

The main empirical source for this work is a series of more than 30 semi-structured interviews with party elites and activists, local experts, local and international journalists, local NGO activists and members of international organizations. Political activists mostly belonged to Nur Otan, but members of other political parties were also interviewed, when possible.

The main sites chosen for the interviews were the former capital city, Almaty, and the capital city Astana. This choice was made on considerations of opportunity. Although Astana has been the capital city for more than ten years, Almaty is still the most important economic centre of the country, and it has a very lively civil society. Most opposition parties have their main office in Almaty, and even politicians who have to be in Astana for official reasons travel to Almaty on a regular basis. More than Astana, Almaty also offers a large and varied expert community. Therefore, I tried to divide equally the available time between the two cities. A few expert interviews were conducted also in other contexts: these were usually experts met in occasion of international conferences.

After initial interviews, the method of snowball sampling was used. It should be noted that, especially in Almaty, representatives of the various political parties and NGOs are connected with each other in a close network, keeping updated on each other's activities and, in many cases, maintaining personal relations regardless of the political affiliation. In more than one instance, I was introduced to a representative of Nur Otan by an opposition politician, and vice versa.

The method of contact also deserves a little note. I had initially prepared formal letters of introduction, which were sent by mail

or e-mail, according to the age and level of the interviewee. After the initial interviews, contact was made mostly by phone, personal introduction and social networks: politicians of all ages seem to be very keen at using this tool in order to communicate with each other, promote their latest activities and give their opinion on various topics. The most used social networks are the Russian-based ones *V Kontakte*, *Odnoklassniki* and *Moi Mir*, but also Facebook and Twitter are very widespread.

Interviews were semi-structured (Kvale, 1996; Leech, 2002). Questions were designed in order to take into account the position of the interviewee, as well as their personal history. Semi-structured interviews were preferred to structured ones because, like this, it was possible to maintain a certain flexibility and to adapt questions to the interviewee's expertise.

A number of questions, however, were asked to each interviewee: these regarded the role of political parties in the political system of Kazakhstan, their perception about the most crucial moments for the party system and for the ruling party since independence, and which functions they thought the party of power is performing.

This research relies on a variety of sources: empirical evidence for its claims does not come only from interviews, but also from the analysis of documentary sources and legislation and, in some cases, of the printed press, which underpin the triangulation of data.

Data from documentary sources constitute the second most important source of empirical evidence for this dissertation. This included a variety of Nur Otan documents, including the party program and statute, retrieved personally or from the party website. Other first-hand data included legislation and party documents by other political parties. Books by local authors, as

well as newspapers and reports by international organizations, also constitute a very important part of these sources. In particular, access to databases of local media like EastView and INTEGRUM were crucial for conducting the content analyses presented in Chapter 4 and in Chapter 6. The methodology employed in these cases is described in detail in the Appendixes Four and Five.

Finally, secondary sources like books, journal articles, analytic reports and websites also contributed to increase the validity of findings. A limited addition was given by the observations carried on during the period of fieldwork. In particular, I was admitted in the Nur Otan branches of both Almaty and Astana and had the chance to observe several meetings, including a session of the High Party School. While this does not have specific relevance, it contributes to the overall triangulation of data by confirming impressions gained elsewhere, or triggering new questions to be later confirmed by interviews or to be looked for in documental analysis.

The period considered for this research starts well before the creation of Nur Otan, and actually coincides with the establishment of Kazakhstan as an independent country in 1992. Some periods are considered more carefully, especially those which were particularly relevant for elites when adopting party-building strategies.

1.4 Thesis Structure and chapters outline

We have seen how this introductory chapter presented the main research question and the relevance of the research and discussed the most important methodological issues.

The following chapter (*Chapter 2*) introduces the main concepts which constitute the tools for the following discussions, and answers a few preliminary questions. The first of these questions regards the authoritarian nature of the Kazakhstani regime. Subsequently, the relation between the formal and the informal levels of Kazakhstani politics is presented, as well as the role of bridge that the party seems to have in it. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of the "party of power", a concept elaborated in order to explain executive-based parties in the post-Soviet region. While the concept is imprecise and somehow redundant, studies on the "party of power" offer significant insights on the origins of executive-based parties and the consequences of this 'special relation' with the ruling elites, and the term can be successfully used to indicate an executive-based dominant party.

Chapter 3 investigates the relation between the party and the elites. First of all, the dominant nature of Nur Otan is questioned. In fact, despite dominating the electoral competition, and the party system, Nur Otan is not a ruling party in the classic sense. In fact, if taken within the whole political system, for example considering its agenda setting capacities, or its control on resources and strategic areas, Nur Otan seems much less powerful, not only than a dominant party, but probably even than any party which managed to get the governing majority. A second section is devoted to the issue of party genesis. The literature on party origins has long determined that the way a political party came into existence and 'solidified' into an institution has important consequences on its future features. More specifically, the literature on the post-Soviet phenomenon of "parties of power" has looked at the consequences of the party's origins in the executive branch of power, and in particular at the relation of dependence that connects the party

and the elites in power. The origins of Nur Otan are finally reviewed in light of these considerations.

The ways elites support the party of power are reviewed in *Chapter 4*. Two forms of support are found: the first one involves substantive resources, consisting of institutional and economic forms of support which were put forward with the explicit purpose of favouring the party. These include the creation of *ad hoc* institutional constraints, and their selective application; and the use of "administrative resource", which I examine in its form of privileged access to State media. The other category comprises less tangible resources, better understood as advantages that the party gets from its very position of power. I try here to show how the success of Nur Otan is due mostly to the popularity it receives from being the "President's party", and from the general consensus enjoyed by the regime, especially in connection with its positive economic performance. Moreover, by maintaining a flexible ideological profile, Nur Otan is able to present itself as an acceptable entity to most of the population.

Chapter 5 presents a discussion on party functions. A first section investigates the issue diachronically, reconstructing the phases of development of Nur Otan. The choices of the executive elites to establish a strong party of power, as well as the later decisions to enhance and support it, are seen as the result of a prolonged learning process, taking place since independence; also, it is argued that the founding of a party of power was contemporary and contingent to the establishment of a soft authoritarian regime. In the second section, the regime-supporting functions of Nur Otan are analyzed according to different categories, including elite coordination, the offering of career opportunities, mass and youth mobilization.

Finally, the issue of the similarity and possible influence of the Russian party of power on Nur Otan is the object of *Chapter 6*.

After considering the commonalities between the two parties, I present a reconstruction of the evolution of United Russia, which followed a path very similar to Nur Otan. In order to detect possible influences, two strategies are undertaken: on the one hand, the relation between the two parties is examined, in order to look for signs of contacts and occasions for learning; secondly, a content analysis is performed on a sample of Kazakhstani printed media in order to look at whether and how values originating in Russia are received in Kazakhstan.

The appendixes provide additional details to the argumentation developed in the thesis, by offering general data on Nur Otan's organizational structure (*Appendix Two*) and election results (*Appendix Three*) or by clarifying better the methodology utilized for interviews (*Appendix One*) and for the media analyses (*Appendixes Four and Five*).

Chapter 2.

Party and Power: a Complex Relation

It was stated earlier that the purpose of this dissertation is the understanding of the relation between the ruling party, Nur Otan, and power elites in the authoritarian system of Kazakhstan.

This chapter has the goal of introducing the main concepts, which constitute the pillars of the following discussion, and of answering preliminary questions.

First of all, a discussion on the nature of the Kazakhstani regime is presented, together with a review of the literature on "new authoritarianism".

A further section is devoted to introducing the complex relation between the formal and informal elements of Kazakhstani politics, particularly the nature and structure of ruling elites.

The chapter ends with a brief discussion of the "party of power", a concept elaborated in order to explain executive-based parties in the post-Soviet region. While the concept is imprecise and somehow redundant, studies on the "party of power" offer significant insights on the origins of executive-based parties and the consequences of this special relation with the ruling elites, and the term can be successfully used to indicate an executive-based dominant party.

2.1 Party Politics in the Authoritarian System of Kazakhstan

2.1.1 Kazakhstan's authoritarian regime

Despite the formal introduction of democratic institution and of a phase of relative pluralism in the early 1990s, Kazakhstan soon consolidated in an autocracy.

Measurements of political freedom calculated by Freedom House and the Polity IV project classify Kazakhstan as an authoritarian regime[11].
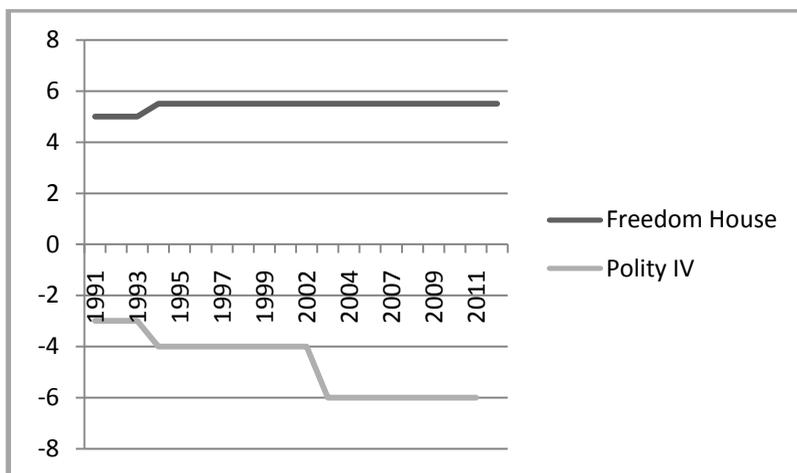
Figure 2.1 Freedom House and Polity IV values for Kazakhstan, 1991-2011

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[11] Freedom House, is a non-profit advocacy group, founded in New York in 1941 to promote democracy and expand political and economic freedom around the world. It compiles annual ratings of the extent of political and civil liberties in different countries. The Polity project also evaluates countries annually on the authority characteristics of their political regimes. D. Treisman (2009). *Twenty years of political transition*. Paper prepared for the UN-WIDER Conference "Reflections on Transition: Twenty Years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall", Helsinki, September 2009, pages 1-2. Although useful, these measurement have to be taken with a pinch of salt, as they measure absolute levels of democracy, and do not give great relevance to the domestic context.

Freedom House organizes its ratings, on a 7-point scale, with 7 representing the least free conditions. Kazakhstan was rated as partly free from 1991 through 1993 (Karatnycky, Motyl & Shor, 1997); after that, the polity has been labelled as "not free", assuming a general score of 5.5[12]. Polity IV rates the regime on a 21-point scale that runs from -10 (a "fully institutionalized autocracy") to +10 (a "fully institutionalized democracy"). Kazakhstan has scored in the negative numbers since independence, and the value has further diminished over the years. Currently, and since 2003, its score is of -6, and the regime is qualified as "authoritarian"[13].

In this work, I use a minimal definition of autocracy, meaning by it the regime that does not fulfil two minimal requirements: free and competitive legislative elections, and an executive that is elected either directly in free and competitive presidential elections. According to this procedural approach, these two criteria are at the basis of the distinction between democracy and authoritarianism (Przeworski *et al*. 2000; Cheibub *et al*. 2010; Boix, 2003).

Kazakhstan has not yet experienced alternation in power, as the country leader, the former Secretary of the Kazakhstani Communist Party Nursultan Nazarbayev, has remained in power as the President for two decades, winning elections with extremely high margins and even becoming the "Leader of the Nation".

Elections take place regularly according to universal suffrage, but their results are often criticized for irregularities, and always fail to be considered totally "free and fair" by international monitoring organizations like the OSCE. Moreover, as it will

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[12] http://www.freedomhouse.org/regions/central-and-eastern-europeeurasia
[13] http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/Kazakhstan2010.pdf

diffusely explained later, the conditions of the political competition are manipulated in order to favour the party of power over its competitors.

Hence, the Kazakhstani regime is, by this definition an authoritarian regime, or autocracy[14]. A survey of the relevant literature will be presented in the next section.

The Kazakhstani regime can also be characterized according to the nature of this authoritarian regime, which is found to be "soft" (Means, 1996; Schatz, 2009). By "soft authoritarianism" is meant one where forms of subtle manipulation and persuasion are generally preferred over repression. Schatz individuates a "soft authoritarian tool kit", including: a committed core of supporters, the possibility to "mobilize those outside of the core believers through material enticements and blackmail", occasional use of "hard" coercion to manage the opposition, an efficient media management and a successful "discursive preemption", meaning the ability of staging political dramas in order to weaken opposition (Schatz 2009: 206-207).

In the following chapters it will be seen how the party of power contributes to the construction of such a regime, which has its first advantage in being a more cost-effective option in comparison with regimes largely relying on coercion (Fish, 2005).

2.1.2 The study of "new authoritarianism"

The study of non democratic types of rule has a long tradition, which goes back to the seminal work of Juan Linz on the topic (1975). While in the 1990s, in the wake of the "third wave" of democratization, the debate on democratic transitions occupied

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[14] In the thesis I will use the terms interchangeably.

most of the discussions among scholars in Comparative Politics, the contemporary diffusion of autocracies and the consequent feeling of uneasiness in continuing to use the "transition paradigm" have brought about a renewed attention on authoritarian regimes and their governance (Carothers 2002; Huntington, 1992).

After a phase of despair among scholars and policy makers about the dangers of a "democratic rollback" (Diamond 2008) and the formation of a front of non-democratic powers (Gat, 2007), a "new sobriety" is now spreading in the social sciences, allowing the proliferation of regime studies which lack both the enthusiastic approach of transitology or the dimness of the return of autocracy (Burnell & Schlumberger 2010).

A number of studies, going under the denomination of "new authoritarianism" are investigating the internal features of non-democratic regimes, in connection with the stability and durability of their rule.

This new literature on authoritarian politics follows three main lines of research. On the one hand, there are economic models of dictatorship, which underscore the connection between political order and property rights: among the most important contributions there are Tullock (1987), Olson (1993), Wintrobe (1998), Bueno de Mesquita *et al.* (2003), Boix (2003) and Acemoglu & Robinson (2006). Political scientists tried also to investigate authoritarian regime by using a broad cross-sectional approach, which allows accounting for institutional variation among autocratic regimes (Geddes, 2003; Gandhi and Przeworski, 2006). A third category are in-depth studies, which attempt to uncover different mechanisms of autocratic survival under various institutional settings, for instance looking at how dictators use electoral rules to divide opponents (Lusk-Okar,

2005) or looking at the logic of autocratic elections (Magaloni, 2006).

Studies belonging to this third category often focus on the role of formal institutions usually associated with democratic political systems, including multiple political parties, partially competitive elections and parliamentary assemblies, in autocratic context (Brownlee, 2007; Lust-Okar, 2005; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006; Geddes, 2006; Schedler, 2006; Magaloni, 2008; Levitsky & Way, 2002; Way, 2005).

In particular, the study of one-party rule, meaning both single-party and dominant party regimes, has received particular consideration. First, this attention is due to the diffusion of this regime type: one-party regimes are the most common type of autocracies: one-party regimes represent the 57% of authoritarian regimes during 1956-2006, and 33% of the total numbers of regimes in the world (Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010: 124). The other reason for such an attention is the relative stability and durability that characterize party-based regimes in comparison with other regime types, in particular military ones (Geddes 2003, Magaloni 2008). Obviously, a cautious approach is necessary when defining this as a causal relation. As Magaloni and Kricheli (2010) suggest, it may well be that there are other reasons for party-regimes to survive for a long time, associated with performing regime-supporting functions but not conditional to them[15].

In general, the investigation of the functions of authoritarian parties is a promising avenue for the better understanding of authoritarian politics, especially when this is done, as in this case, on a single-case basis.

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[15] A wider discussion on the literature on party authoritarian functions is presented in Chapter 5.

One may argue that Kazakhstan is more of a personalist regime, rather than a party-based one. The personal powers of the President are indeed very large, and Nazarbayev exercises them extensively, making a large use of his decree and veto power.

Instead of adopting this distinction as a categorization, as Geddes (2003) does[16], I prefer treating the definitions of "party-based" and "personalist" as ideal-types, as suggested by Magaloni (2007).

This way, it is possible to see how elements of the two "pure" types coexist in the same regime, and how the two elements communicate and influence each other.

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[16] Geddes (2003) divides regimes between personalist, party-based and military.

2.2 The formal and informal in Kazakhstani politics

The purpose of this section is to introduce the relation between formal and informal politics in Kazakhstan, as well as to provide some fundamental definitions.

The Kazakhstani system has a very important component in informal politics, which is partly due to its traditional structure (the clan structure), but more to the presence of large patronage networks. This informal element conditions and interacts with the formal level, the one of institutions, and is, at the same time, conditioned by it (Isaacs, 2011). This relation is at the basis of the origins of the party of power Nur Otan, which was created by a restricted group of people in power in order to achieve a better control of the formal sphere.

Relatively to political parties, three mechanisms of informal influence have been found (Isaacs, 2011). The first one is the central role of Nazarbayev, who is the head of a personalist regime where he enjoys enormous influence with the support of the elites, and takes relevant decisions in managing the party system (Isaacs, 2011).

The second is the existence of patron-client networks between the president and the elites. Nazarbayev seems to favour different members of the elites, sometimes on clan basis, but more often on other relations, with his patronage in exchange for loyalty (Schatz, 2004). Patronage networks operate at many levels, including the local one: the regional *akims* (governors) are appointed by the president and have the power of appointing local administrators at lower levels (Schatz, 2004).

The third informal element of the political game in Kazakhstan is the conflict between the elites. While the aspect of their conflict

will be treated in greater detail in Chapter 5, the nature and structure of these elites deserve a few more words.

Although it can be considered as a quite homogeneous group, compared, for instance, with Russia (interview, Beshimov, 2011), the Kazakhstani elites are divided in different groups, which emerged either from the Soviet *nomenklatura*, or from new economic activities, or within the family and friends' circle of the President. Table 2.1 shows the most important groups, together with their economic and media assets.

In this dissertation, the term "elites" will be used to indicate these different groups. These groups are different from the restricted group at the very centre of the system which gave origins to the party of power Nur Otan. This group, which can be identified in the President and his closer allies, including his adviser Ermukhamed Ertysbayev and the former Prime Minister Tereschenko, is the group which has the closer control on the legislative process as well as on the country's key assets. For its overlap with the highest state institutions, this group can also be referred to as "the authorities". In this work, I will refer to this group with expressions like the "ruling elites", the "power elites" or the "executive elites". While the choice of refer to this group also as "power" or "ruling" elites underscores their position of power. The last expression indicates their belonging to the executive branch of power, rather than to the legislative, in order to highlight the origins of Nur Otan in that context. This perspective is taken from the literature on the post-Soviet parties of power, which will be discussed in the next section. Indeed, as it will be seen, the expression "party of power" is successful in conveying the idea that the party actually belongs to the groups in power.

Nursultan Nazarbayev: President of the Republic of Kazakhstan				
Rakhat Aliyev and Dariga Nazarbayeva Group (Son-in-law and daughter of the President)	Timur Kulibayev Group (Son-in-law of the President)	Eurasian Natural Resources Corporation (ENRC) Led by close associates of the President, Aleksandr Mashkevich, Patokh Chodiev and Alijan Ibragimov	The Group of Nurzhan Subkhanberdin (long time friend and clansman of the President)	The Group of Mukhtar Ablyazov (Former Energy Minister and close associate of the President)
Assets: Sakharny Tsentr Neftianoy Tsentr, Mangistaumunaigaz: TV Stations: Khabar, NTK, KTK Newspapers: Novoe Pokolenie, Panorama, Karavan	Assets: KazEnergy, Almex Holding Group, Halyk Bank. (many of these assets have been sold now, but Kulibayev's fortune is said to be worth 2.1 billion USD)	Assets: Kazkhrom, Aluminii Kazakhstana. Newspaper: Express-K	Assets: Kazkommertsbank (largest bank in Kazakhstan) Newspaper: Vremya	Assets: Bank Turan-Alem, Astana Holding, Kazakhstan International Bank, Neftiania Strakhovaya Kompanya. Newspaper: Respublica
Political Connections: Access and allies in the tax police and security services	Political Connections: Limited but close to former Prime Minister Karim Masimov.		Political Connections: Uraz Zhandosov (former Finance Minister), Alikhan Baimenov (ex Labour Minister)	
Political Party: Asar		Political Party: The Civil Party	Political Party: Alleged links to Ak Zhol and Nagyz Ak Zhol	Political Party: Alga

Table 2.1 Elite map. Source: Isaacs, 2011.

Political parties in general, and Nur Otan in particular, constitute a sort of bridge between this informal realm and the formal element of Kazakhstani politics, the one constituted by the state institutions and by the administrative and bureaucratic system[17].

As it will be shown in greater detail in chapter 5, elite groups participate in institutional life through political parties, both pro-government and opposition. While striving to control these elite parties, elite groupings aim to conquer a higher place in the informal hierarchy and to get closer to the top layer of political power[18]. The president acts as an arbiter between them, deciding how much power each elite will have and managing conflicts to its own advantage (see also Isaacs, 2011).

Nur Otan occupies a specific place in this system, because it does not represent just one segment of the elites, but its centre, the restricted group who is in the very top position.

Created by the top elites, Nur Otan seems to occupy an intermediate place between the formal and the informal level, acting in a way as a bridge between them.

As noted by Isaacs, Nur Otan is "focused on the president, his personality and his centrality to the country's prosperity […]. It is the informal politics of personality as opposed to formal

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[17] Obviously there are also other points of contacts between the two realms: for instance, the use of formal rules in order to harass opponents or to favour the party of power is an example.

[18] Isaacs finds different mechanisms of connection between parties and elites: parties created by "charismatic personalities" in order to remain or to claim public office; parties created by the new-liberal professional elite in order to protect its political and economic interests; parties as organizations for the representation of oligarchic interests in the parliament; "spoiler" parties; and parties created on the basis of political personality for representation of presidential interests in the legislature (Isaacs, 2011: 112-116).

ideological ideas that drive party representation" (Isaacs, 2011: 123).

This circumstance could actually have important consequences for the future of the party and the political system in general: although there are still little signs of this, the gradual transfer of power from the President and the top elites to the party could be a sign of an on-going process of institutionalization, which would lead to the evolution of the system towards a party-based form.

2.3 "Party of power" as a working term

The term "party of power" – "*partiya vlasti*" in Russian – has gained great popularity among both actors and analysts of post-Soviet politics in the 1990s and especially in the 2000s. Today, the term is widely used in the general press, mostly in reference to Russia but also to other post-Soviet countries, including Kazakhstan[19].

The term has been used widely also in the scholarly literature. Initially coined for the Ukrainian case (Wilson and Yakushyk, 1992)[20], it came to indicate a Russian phenomenon, the one of political parties founded by or connected with the Kremlin in the 1990s and 2000s (Myagkov *et al.*, 2005). There are also few attempts to analyze "parties of power" in comparative perspective (Resende & Kraetzschmar, 2005; and, in part, Meleshevich, 2007).

Despite its popularity, there is a large degree of confusion on the concept: definitions are sometimes lacking, not always clear and very different from each other. Andrey Ryabov (2005), for instance, defines the party of power as "a political organisation

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[19] In order to have an overview of the usage of the term in the press, I made a search for it in the electronic databases collection "East View", covering more than 400 publications in the post-Communist area. The search for the terms "party of power" and "*partia vlasti*" for the period 1989 – 2010 resulted in 1710 and 41090 findings respectively. The diffusion of the term has increased greatly in the 2000s: restricting the search to the period 2001 – 2010 it is possible to see that the majority of the results are found in this decade: 992 results for "party of power" and 35463 for "*partia vlasti*". The term refers mainly to Russian parties of power, but it is used to indicate parties in other post-Soviet countries, in particular Ukraine and Kazakhstan. The database was accessed in March 2011.

[20] This is true also for the news media: already in occasion of the Ukrainian parliamentary elections of 1993, the term was used to indicate the spectrum of parties supporting central power. Vladimir Bogdanovsky, "Ukrainskaya Prevybornaya Mozaika: Risunok ne Poluchaetsa" in *Krasnaya Zvesda*, n. 278, 2 December 1993.

that participates in elections and has its representatives in the bodies of power at different levels", making it indeed quite difficult to distinguish the party of power from any other political party (Ryabov, 2005: 4, in Meleshevich, 2007).

By "party of power" scholars have meant very different things, such as the group of people in power, an electoral bloc, or an elite strategy.

The first interpretations of parties of power focused on the structure of such parties, pointing at their *elite-based composition* and *pragmatic orientation*.

Starting from the observation of the Ukrainian case, Wilson and Yakushyk (1992) defined the party of power as "a political bloc that includes pragmatically oriented and deideologized upper level circles of the old [Communist] *nomenklatura*, representatives of the state apparatus, mass media, managers of traditional sectors of industry and agriculture" (Wilson and Yakushyk, 1992: 164). Sergey Khenkin (1996) also defined the party of power as a sort of bloc which coagulated around the highest spheres of power. In his definition, the party of power is a "set of institutions, structures and organizations, grouped around the head of state, which follow the official policy, and participate in the definition of goals and strategies for the development of Russia (including single regions)" (Khenkin, 1996: 1). Khenkhin explicitly states the low level of organization of the party of power, and assigns to it a quasi-party quality: "differently from dominant parties in the majority of the countries in the world, the Russian party of power is not politically or organizationally outlined. It remains as a peculiar quasi-party" (ibidem). Colton & McFaul (2000, 2003) present the term as a synonymous, for Russians, of what Westerners call "the establishment", the rather amorphous group of people in power (Colton & McFaul, 2000:

202; Colton & McFaul, 2003: 48). Turovsky (2006) relates the phenomenon to the specific structuring process of a new Russian political elite, made of three components: part of the Soviet *nomenklatura*, which managed to adapt to the new political conditions; the new business elite; and new bureaucrats, who started their career in post-Soviet times. He describes parties of power as "institutionalised" elite groupings (Turovsky, 2006:153).

While these definitions reflect quite accurately the situation as it was in the first phases of the evolution of Russian parties of power, they are inadequate to explain the later developments of these parties, which evolved in complex and somehow influent organizations. Moreover, the scope of these approaches is limited to the Russian case at a specific point in time. This leaves little space for generalizations, even within the post Soviet space, where the idea and terminology of the party of power seem to be successful.

Things are not different also for the other approach to the study of the party of power, which focuses on the *electoral function* of these parties: this approach identifies the party's main function and raison d'être in competing in the elections and eventually controlling the legislature in the interest of elites who are outside of the party.

In what they call their "narrow" interpretation of the party of power, Colton & McFaul define it as "the contender in a multi-party election most closely tied to the incumbent" (Colton & McFaul, 2000: 203). Oversloot and Verheul (2006), perhaps a little too retrospectively, define the party of power as the designed winner in elections. More precisely, Regina A. Smyth defines "Russia's parties of power" as "electoral blocs organized by state actors to participate in parliamentary elections and forge

national organizations for presidential elections. They rely on state resources over building a party bureaucracy and depend heavily on charismatic appeals to vote to win supports" (Smyth, 2002: 557) [21].

This approach provides an accurate description of the emergence of Russian parties of power as creatures of state elites, giving account of the appearance of several party experiments which were discarded as a consequence of their poor electoral performance (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Reuter & Remington, 2009). Russian parties of power, though, have later evolved to become a stable organization, United Russia, which survived three electoral cycles, increased its complexity and institutionalization, and started serving in other ways the interests of the elites (Roberts, 2010).

Andrey Meleshevich (2007) tries to find a synthesis among the two approaches described before, and to extend the scope of the party of power beyond its electoral function. He defines the party of power as "a political bloc that: (1) has a de-ideological, pragmatic and centrist nature; (2) is created (i.e. founded or utilized) by and acts in the interest of the executive branch of government; (3) relies on state and other administrative resources available to representatives of the executive managers to achieve its goals including participation in elections; and (4) bases its electoral participation on a strong personality-centered factor (Meleshevich, 2007: 195).

Even Meleshevich, however, treats parties of power just as a phenomenon, without trying to establish a party typology. The

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[21] This definition resembles in many points the one provided by Vladimir Gelman (2006): parties of power are (1) established by the executive branch in order to get a majority in legislative arenas; (2) lack a definite ideology; (3) use state resources for campaigning and are merely captured by the top state officials (Gelman, 2006: 8).

absence, in the literature, of definitions for the parties that are *not* "of power" makes it difficult to reason in terms of "typology", which should be exhaustive by definition. The category of "party of power" cannot be inscribed within existing typologies neither, as those categorizations capture its most characterizing elements according to different dimensions, creating overlaps that cannot be considered as mutually exclusive[22]. Dominant parties, for example, are known to control legislative bodies and use extensively state resources in order to perpetuate their rule, in democracies as well as in autocracies (Pempel, 1990). Also, parties with a low ideological profile are already successfully classified under the category of "catch-all" parties (Kirchheimer, 1966).

Despite this, the literature on the party of power still offers useful insights to understand the specific relation existing between these parties and the elites which created them, including the ways the party is supported, which are two of the goals of this dissertation.

In a way, I propose to focus on the "*of power*" half of the expression. In fact, while classic theoretical approaches can provide an adequate framework for the understanding of these parties' electoral and survival strategies, they mostly suppose the party as an autonomous source of power – with the relevant exception of the literature on party origins. The party of power literature, instead, brings on focus the party's peculiar relation with the executive elites and help understanding differences between different types of dominant parties, as it will be seen in Chapter 3.

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[22] Exhaustiveness and mutual exclusiveness are the two conditions around which typologies can be built. See Sartori, 1984; Marradi, 1990.

Therefore, although it cannot be considered as a specific category for the abovementioned reasons, "party of power" is still a useful term, as it successfully and succinctly conveys the idea of a party which is deeply connected with the executive branch of power.

Chapter 3.

The party and the elites

Nur Otan occupies a unique position in Kazakhstani politics: it has been the main parliamentary party for more than a decade and even the only party between 2007 and 2011; since its foundation, it dominates the electoral competition, reaching extremely high vote shares; it monopolizes public attention, thanks to its capillary presence in the provinces and privileged access to mass media; a large organization, it boasts a wide membership and capillary territorial structure. Also, it is commonly referred to as Kazakhstan's "ruling party", especially by members of the party elite (interviews, Kharitonova, Bokaev, Rakimzhanov, Karin, 2011).

At first glance, Nur Otan seems indeed to have all the requisites of a dominant party, on the model of the Mexican Institutional Revolutionary Party.

At the same time, Nur Otan exists in a presidential, rather than a party-based political system. In this highly personalized context, moreover, the role of informal politics is extremely relevant, and the party seems to have little power, resources and charisma of its own.

At a closer look, in fact, Nur Otan seems to be a dominant party only when taken within the party system and the electoral arena. If, instead, it is taken within the whole political system, for example considering its agenda setting capacities, or its control on resources and strategic areas, Nur Otan seems much less powerful, not only than a dominant party, but probably even than any party which managed to get the governing majority.

The classic literature on dominant parties offers a starting point for the understanding of this puzzle. This exercise is fruitful for two reasons: first, it allows to state clearly Nur Otan's prominent position within the party system; second, it allows seeing also the main difference between "classic" examples of dominant parties and parties which, like Nur Otan, are executive-based: an unbalanced relation with the executive elites which created the party.

The key for understanding this difference is party's origins: the circumstances of party genesis are known to have extremely important consequences on a party's organizational features and strength. In the case of Nur Otan, its relative weakness is due to the first-rate role of the executive branch of power in creating, organizing and supporting it.

3.1. Understanding Nur Otan: The dominant party framework and beyond

3.1.1 Party dominance *within* the party system

Maurice Duverger defined as dominant parties those which are believed to be dominant by the public opinion (Duverger, 1964). Other authors focused on the more measurable criterion of electoral success (Sartori, 2005: 174; Magaloni, 2006: 36-37; Pempel, 1990: 3-4).

In his seminal study on parties and party systems, Sartori defined the dominant party as one which is "significantly stronger than the others" (Sartori, 2005: 193), and distinguished between dominant parties in competitive and non-competitive political systems. In a system characterized by genuine competition, a party establishes a "pre-dominant party system" by winning at least three consecutive absolute majorities (Sartori, 2005: 175). In semi-competitive systems, instead, the number of consecutive majorities is not relevant. Other parties exist and are allowed to participate into elections, but only the "hegemonic party" can win (Sartori, 2005: 204-205).

At a first glance, Nur Otan qualifies as "hegemonic party". Founded as Otan in 1999, the party has so far taken part in four electoral cycles, obtaining progressively larger results, and obtaining the absolute majority of votes and seats in the last two elections. The measure of the Effective Number of Parties (ENP) in the political system, based on the allocation of seats in

parliament, gives an immediate visualization of this (see Table 1)[23].

	1994	*1995*	*1999*	*2004*	*2007*	*2012*
ENP	4.67	3.96	4.37	2.66	1	1.37

Table 3.1 Effective Number of Parliamentary Parties (ENP) in Kazakhstan

The index has assumed low values for the past decade, reaching the lowest point (1) in 2007, when Nur Otan occupied all the seats in the Parliament's lower Chamber, the Mazhilis[24]. In January 2012 the situation changed slightly, as two other parties entered the Mazhilis. However, the change is minimal and scarcely relevant, as the two small pro-regime parties which got seats barely overcame the 7% entry threshold.

The level of competition in the Kazakhstani political system is indeed quite low, especially in the last two elections. Some of the opposition parties were not allowed to compete because of alleged violations of formal rules, while others, despite having concurred and received some votes, did not win seats on the basis of a restrictive party legislation[25]. Also, the main party has

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[23] The index is calculated according to the formula N = $1/\sum_{i=1}^{n} p_i^2$ where p is the proportion of seats assigned to each party as a result of an election. See Laakso, M. and R. Taagepera (1979).

[24] Data for the calculation were retrieved from the Central Electoral Commission website: http://election.kz/portal/page?_pageid=153,511661&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL

[25] For example, in September 2011 the Communist Party was suspended for six months and was therefore not allowed to contest the January 2012 elections. The activities of the Communist Party were suspended for six months by a court decision on 4 October

larger media visibility, and irregularities in the electoral process have been reported by international observers.

3.1.2 Is Nur Otan a dominant party *outside* of the party system?

Considered the above, Nur Otan seems indeed a "hegemonic party". However, electoral success and the scarcely competitive nature of the political system are not the only elements which define party dominance. In particular, definitions focusing on the party system, like Sartori's, say little about the position of the dominant party in relation to the other state institutions.

A more complete view is the one presented by Pempel (1990), who found four common features of dominant parties. Parties should be dominant in number; enjoy a dominant bargaining position; shape the public policy agenda; and be in power for a substantial period of time (Pempel, 1990: 3-4).

Nur Otan seems to have at least some of these features. The party is definitely dominant in number, controlling almost exclusively the national legislature and boasting a capillary territorial diffusion and a membership of almost one million[26].

2011.The suspension of the party was due to the participation of the party leader in the activities of an unregistered political association, the *Khalykh Maidany* (National Front). The 4 October 2011 decision of the district court on suspension of the activities of the party was upheld by the appellate court in Almaty on 24 October. See http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/86985. The opposition party OSDP-AZAT is still waiting for registration as a united party (in the latest elections it participated as a coalition bloc of two parties), after two years from the initial request (Interview with Kosanov, 2011). The opposition party Alga's application has never been accepted. The rules on party registration are particularly demanding, and the presence of a 7% entry threshold makes it very difficult for small parties to obtain seats in the Mazhilis. A detailed discussion on the use of legislation and technicalities to shape party competition can be found in chapter 4.

[26] Nur Otan counts 916 363 members as of June 2012. See the official party website: http://www.ndp-nurotan.kz/site/content/79

It can be also said to have a bargaining position within the party system. Nur Otan's officials organize regular meetings with representatives of other political formations, and offer assistance to other parties, including the opposition. In doing so, the "party of power" shows in every occasion its superior position, somehow patronizing the other parties and acting as a mediator between these parties and the central "power"[27].

At the same time, Nur Otan seems to have little bargaining power towards the executive elites, especially the President. Important political decisions tend to be taken outside of the party, in a context where informal practices are extremely relevant, even more than formal institutions. According to the political analyst Dossym Satpayev, the "real players in Kazakhstani politics are not official political parties but underground and shadow players around the President and his circles" (interview, Satpayev, 2011).

Also, the role of Nur Otan as a broker between candidates interested in public office and the centre of power seems controversial. Applying Pempel's model to United Russia, David White (2011) concludes that the party has a bargaining position because "candidates seeking public office either at the federal or regional level have sought to ally themselves with the party in order to maximize their electoral potential" (White, 2011: 659).

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[27] I observed one of such meetings in Astana in November 2011, and interviewed the participants, asking about the frequency and scope of these meetings, as well as their attitude about them. The participants seemed to be well aware of the patronizing tendencies of Nur Otan, but related the necessity to be attending these meetings, in order not to be excluded by "the game" (interview, All-parties-meeting participants, 2011). In another interview, a Nur Otan representative pointed out that other parties "need assistance", and that Nur Otan would help them out until they will be able to stand on their own (interview, Rakhymzhanov, 2011).

In Kazakhstan, independent candidates in elections, common until the mid-2000s, were indeed progressively substituted by party-affiliated candidates, especially after the change in the electoral legislation which instituted Proportional Representation with party list for all seats. Since then, anyone who would like to get an elected post has been forced to be affiliated to the "party of power". However, this process seems to be limited to the electoral arena, where, as we have seen, Nur Otan has a dominant position. On the other hand, the electoral path is not the only, and not even the most important way to public office. Official positions are mostly obtained through informal channels, especially through personal connections with the leader[28].

The third feature assigned by Pempel to dominant parties is the capacity of shaping the public policy agenda. Nur Otan seems to be having mostly an "implementing" role, while the President has most of the policy-making powers. This arrangement is formally stated: according to the party program, the first objective of the party is the "successful realization of the First President's policy agenda" (Nur Otan, 2007). In the "National strategy 2009-2012" it can be read that the "fundamental national values, as they were formulated by the Leader of the Nation, constitute the substance of Nur Otan's ideological platform" (Nur Otan, 2009).

Finally, according to Pempel, dominant parties should be in power for a substantial period of time. Nur Otan was founded as Otan in 1999, and has been the first parliamentary party only since 2004. This is a very short time, compared to other dominant parties such as the Mexican or the Japanese ones, although this

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[28] The topic of the party as a promoter of career advancements will be treated in Chapter 5.

does not exclude that the party could be in power for a long time afterwards.

According to these parameters, Nur Otan is therefore only "partially" a dominant party: it is dominant in the electoral arena, as well as in the landscape of party politics. In relation with the executive elites, instead, it seems to have a subordinate role: it implements, rather than deciding, the policy agenda; and seems to have scarce control on the distribution of key official positions.

3.1.3 Party dominance: a functional analysis

The impression that Nur Otan is only halfway dominant is confirmed if we look at the functions traditionally assigned to dominant parties, and see whether and to what extent Nur Otan performs these functions.

In a study on United Russia, Sean Roberts (2010) surveys the classic literature as well as empirical studies on dominant parties, finding a set of basic functions: legislating, distributing state resources, stabilizing regime succession and guaranteeing control over strategic areas (Roberts, 2010). In his work, Roberts concludes that United Russia is "dominant, but not ruling", and , rather than having the position in power typical of a *principal*, it is only an agent of executive elites.

It is possible to reach a similar conclusion for Nur Otan. Relatively to the power to legislate, it could be argued that, dominating the national parliament, Nur Otan actually has the control on the law-making process. Moreover, the adoption of party and electoral legislation which favours Nur Otan over

other parties, would support the idea that the party is legislating in order to perpetuate its dominance.

In reality, the Parliament is a little more than a rubber stamp for the President's initiatives. As mentioned before, the party has little influence on the definition of the policy agenda, having the role of implementing the President's plans, who appears to be also the party chairman.

The President's prominent position relatively to the Parliament is also stated at the institutional level. While the legislative initiative belongs to the President, the Parliament and the Government alike (Constitution, Art. 61.1), the President has the right of setting the agenda of the Parliament, establishing priorities among drafts and deciding on urgent law projects (Constitution, Art. 61.2). Moreover the President is able to send drafts back to the Parliament and can even overcome the Parliament by exercising his own legislative power[29].

This means that the leader has the possibility to overcome the decisions of the "party of power" at any moment, but especially in the event of a crisis. This situation, created by the super-presidentialist Constitution of 1995, has not changed even after the Constitutional reform of 2007, which was supposed to start the transformation of the system into a presidential-parliamentary republic (Shaymergenov, 2007).

The functions of distributing resources and controlling key areas are intimately related, as the economy is one of these very important areas. In Kazakhstan it is the executive power to control the most important economic outlets and strategic resources, through a system of state holdings.

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[29] The President's power of legislative initiative was further enlarged with the Presidential decree N. 413 of September 21st 2007.

Although most members of the cabinet are members of Nur Otan, this does not seem a sign of influence of the party on the government. Membership in the "party of power" is actually better understood as a "loyalty card", a way for politicians and civil servants to show their loyalty to the leader. Many important political actors, including cabinet members, joined the party in the summer of 2007, in coincidence with the announcement that the President Nazarbayev would become the party chairman (interview, Nurmakov, 2011)[30]. Presumably by that time it was clear that the President and his close circle were giving unconditioned support to the project, and these personalities felt compelled to give a clear sign of their loyalty.

Dominant parties are also supposed to have a role in facilitating regime succession in closed regimes, where the struggle for leadership can cause elite splits (Way & Levitsky, 2006). As Roberts notes, the dominant party works as a conveyor belt, which regulates the competition for the highest executive office (Roberts, 2010).

In Kazakhstan, the current President has been in power since the country got its independence, in 1991. Hence, the country has yet to experience alternation in power.

Recently, there were talks of Nur Otan becoming the regime's "collective heir" (*kollektivny preemnik*). This expression started to be used especially after the abovementioned Constitutional

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[30] The announcement was made public on July 4th 2007 http://news.gazeta.kz/art.asp?aid=218151. Four ministries received their party cards in July 2007: Bakhtykozha Ismukhambetov (Energy), Gulzhan Karagusova (Social Security and Labour), Ermukhamet Ertysbaev (Culture and Information) and Akhmetzhan Esimov (Agriculture) http://news.gazeta.kz/art.asp?aid=218824. Other important personalities received their *partiinniy biliet* (party card) in those days, including the Speaker of the Senate Kasym-Zhomart Tokaev and the akim of Almaty Ismangali Tasmagambetov.

reform, which gave, at least in theory, larger powers to the parliament and to the party of power. In fact, the President had even declared his will to transfer some powers to the political parties and the parliament (Shaymergenov, 2007).

At the moment, as noted by the expert Natalia Kharitonova, the mechanism of transmission of power in Kazakhstan is problematic. In the last twenty years the leadership of Nazarbayev was never in doubt, and no other relevant political figure emerged. Also, it was not possible to find an heir within the President's family circle, despite some attempts. This is partly due to the risks connected with being the designated heir, exposed to the attention of several competitors[31]. The idea to have a ruling party succeeding the President originates from this situation, and involves the transformation of the system into a parliamentary-republic, where the head of State is elected by the Parliament. The conditions for such a change, though, are not in place yet: the ruling party exists and dominates the parliament, but the President has not yet initiated the necessary modifications in the legislation (interview, Kharitonova, 2011). Therefore, the possibility that Nur Otan becomes the President's "collective heir" seems remote.

Roberts (2010) finds yet another strategic area where a dominant party potentially exercises its control, and it is the coercion system. The party supporters, as well as organized youth groups could be used to control the public sphere, deter opposition, harass voters and even as tools of violence.

Nur Otan has recently created a youth branch, Zhas Otan, but this organization, has so far been involved mostly in non-

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[31] The example of Rakhat Aliyev, son-in-law of the President Nazarbayev and for some time designed heir, is indicative. See also chapter 5.

political initiatives, such as charity and socializing events. While it could have potentially a role in controlling civil society and in diverting active young people from joining the opposition, this kind of activities seems very different from the political mobilization enacted, for instance, by the Communist party of the Soviet Union.

The answer to the question: "is Nur Otan a dominant party?" is therefore not univocal. As seen in this review of Nur Otan's dominant features and functions, the party has indeed a dominant position, but only when considered in the context of the party system. On the other hand, it seems to have little influence on the executive branch of power. In other words, it is "dominant, but not ruling" (Roberts, 2010), more of a tool in the hands of the executive and of the ruling elites around the President.

It follows that the dominant party framework is probably not the most appropriate to understand parties like Nur Otan[32]. Not only should its position within the party system be considered, but also its relation with power-holders.

A successful strategy (Roberts, 2010) is to switch the focus of analysis from the party-system to individual parties, in particular to the problem of their origins. Nur Otan is the result of a party-building process, carried out by elites during the 1990s and 2000s, and the consequences of these origins are reflected on its structure and strength.

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[32] And like United Russia, as successfully explained by Roberts.

3.2 Party genesis and the problem of independence

Political parties can be analyzed at different levels. One approach is to consider them as actors, interacting with other parties and with the State institutions. This is the approach adopted by theories on party dominance, as it was noted in the previous section. It is also possible to look at parties as "organizations" (Panebianco, 1988). This approach considers the internal features and dynamics of a political party, and the way these processes influence the party's structure and choices.

The moment of foundation is considered particularly relevant (Duverger, 1964; Panebianco, 1988). It is in the very first stages of development that the party's most important features are decided. Using Panebianco's words, "a party organizational characteristics depend more upon its history, i.e. on how it consolidated, than upon any other factor".

3.2.1 The "genetic model"

Although dated, Panebianco's "genetic model" offers an interesting view on the consequences of the founding conditions on the future features of a political party, particularly in terms of dependence of the party from external actors.

Departing from Duverger's distinction between "internally created" and "externally created" parties (Duverger, 1964), Panebianco elaborates a complex model, where he relates a number of factors with the way a party consolidates.

Influencing factors include the party's territorial organization, which can be based on *penetration*, *diffusion* or a combination of the two; the presence or absence of an external sponsor

institution; and the presence of a charismatic leader (Panebianco, 1988: 51-52). The process of party consolidation, called "institutionalization", takes place according to two dimensions, "autonomy" and "systemness" (Panebianco, 1988: 56-57). Autonomy is connected with the capacity of a party to control, and possibly change, its external environment. Parties with a low level of autonomy, instead, tend to adapt to the surrounding environment. Systemness, on the other hand, concerns the relationship between the party and its resources and subgroups. Strongly institutionalized parties have a firm control on these elements, while weakly institutionalized ones have a weak centre and more authoritative sub-groups.

Panebianco describes in detail the three main influencing factors, and connects them with the level of institutionalization reached by a party.

The first element is the way a party is organized on the territory: its development could start from a centre, a "restricted group of national leaders" which forms the nucleus of its dominant coalition (penetration). Or it could originate from a "spontaneous germination", where several organizations come together and form a sort of federation (diffusion).

Panebianco argues that parties originating through diffusion tend to be less institutionalized and more prone to internal power struggles than parties where the centre guides the development of periphery.

A second conditioning factor is the presence, or absence, of an external sponsor at party's origins, which affects the party's source of legitimation. If such a sponsor exists, the party will be considered as its "political arm", and the loyalty to it will be only indirect (Panebianco, 1988: 63). Moreover, the leadership's

loyalty will be divided between the party and the external institution, and the latter can change the balance in the power struggle.

Finally, Panebianco considers as a crucial circumstance, whether the party was, or not, created by, and a vehicle for, a charismatic leader[33]. According to Panebianco, parties created by a charismatic leader tend to resist institutionalization, unless charisma is "routinized". These parties are bound to a short existence: "they are parties which pass like a meteor over the political firmament, which spring up and die out without ever institutionalizing"(Panebianco, 1988: 53).

3.2.2. Origins and dependence of parties of power

At various points, also the literature on the post-Soviet phenomenon of parties of power has focused on the problem of party origins, stressing the role of executives in the composition or in the creation of the party of power[34].

The fact that they have been created by, and serve the interests of the executive branches of the State is actually one of the defining elements of parties of power (Gelman, 2006; Meleshevich, 2007). As Likhtenshtein notes, parties of power do not simply correspond to Duverger's *internally*-created parties: they did not just originate from parliamentary groups, but were created on an initiative of the *executives* (Likhtenshtein 2002, in Meleshevich 2007: 196). Golosov & Likhtenshtein (2001) even treat the "party

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[33] Meant as Tucker's "situational charisma", an influence that is connected with "a state of acute social stress that gets the people ready to receive as extraordinary qualified and to follow with enthusiastic loyalty a leadership offering salvation from distress" (Tucker, 1968; in Panebianco, 1988: 52).

[34] A wider discussion on the concept of "party of power" is presented in Chapter 2.

of power" as a strategy of the elites, enacted in order to adapt to changing conditions of the political environment, and not as a type of political party.

A discussion strictly connected with the origins of parties of power, but not a very developed one in the literature, is the one on the degree of autonomy of such parties. Meleshevich notes that parties of power "do not and cannot exist outside of the realm of executive power" (Meleshevich, 2007: 203). They are created in order to achieve specific goals, including electoral participation, and have their main source of strength in their access to "administrative resources" and their main source of popularity in the leader and his personal reputation. Moreover, parties of power are often discarded, usually whenever their electoral performance is not satisfying (Gelman, 2006; Reuter & Remington, 2009).

Oversloot & Verhuel (2006) stress the subordinate nature of the party of power in a clearer manner, pointing out that "the party of power's centre of gravity is always located in the executive branch of government", and that "the so-called 'ruling party' does not have a life of its own; it is in fact neither 'ruling' nor much of a party at all." (Oversloot &Verhuel, 2006: 394).

The party of power, hence, has in its own origins the reason of its dependent position from the executive elites which created it. This view is resonating with the "genetic model" presented before, although it presents the connection in a less systematic manner.

This perspective still has an advantage, as it highlights the relation between the party and the power-holders. In particular, the literature on parties of power focuses on the ways executive elites can directly affect the development of the party and the

conditions of the party system. Elites could be favouring their party over competitors by establishing a favourable electoral legislation, or by providing their party with various types of resources, including privileged media access and a close connection with the overly popular country leader (Gelman, 2006; Colton & McFaul, 2000). Founding elites are also able to influence the party in the choice of a weak ideological platform: by adopting a centrist, "catch-all" position, parties of power manage to attract wider majorities (Gelman, 2006, Smyth, 2002).

While a detailed discussion on these strategies and how they are implemented in Kazakhstan will be presented later, the aim of this section is to present the process of party-building which took place in Kazakhstan since independence, looking at the role of executives in party-building.

In particular, I focus on the top-down origins of Nur Otan – created within the executive branch of power – and on how its features at origins may influence its position and role within the political system, according to the "genetic model".

3.3 Nur Otan's origins and their consequences

In 1992 Nursultan Nazarbayev, former Secretary of the Kazakhstani Communist Party and nominated to the office of President of the newly independent Republic of Kazakhstan, tried to organize a presidential party which would be the "functional equivalent of the banned CPSU" (Brill Olcott, 2010: 93).

After several – failed – attempts to take control of the Socialist Party and of the Congress Party, the President sponsored the foundation of the Union of People's Unity (SNEK). The party was supposed to facilitate the control of the legislative chamber, which had proved to be difficult after the 1991 coup (Brill Olcott, 2010).

At this time, the efforts of the President and of his close circles did not focus exclusively on the party of power. In occasion of the legislative elections of March 1994, the executive elites tried to influence the parliament composition by making sure that loyal functionaries were elected in the so-called governmental list (*gos-spisok*). This list included 42 deputies, two from each oblast' as well as from the two cities with special status, then Almaty and Baikonur.

However, the Union of People's Unity was still the party of power: institutional measures, such as the re-designing of districts to guarantee Kazakh majorities and restrictive norms on party registration, were adopted. Also, a large use of "administrative resource" in favour of Nazarbayev's party was reported in the regions (Kuttykadam, 2010). Indeed the voting process presented evident irregularities, and the OSCE decided to certify the elections only after long consideration and despite the criticism of the international community (Brill Olcott, 2010).

Even with these efforts, the new parliament had a diverse composition, reflecting the different political forces present in the political landscape at the time[35]. In particular, the deputies elected through the governmental list joined different parliamentary fractions, and in the end the pro-presidential party was supported by a mere 31% of the deputies (Kuttykadam, 2010).

This parliament proved to be vocal and independent: the privatization program proposed by the Prime Minister Tereshenko encountered several obstacles, leading even to the government's resignation. The parliament was eventually dismissed in March 1995. The official reason was a constitutional court decision which ruled that the 1994 parliamentary elections were invalid, due to administrative irregularities involving the vote counting process (Brill Olcott, 2010)[36]. For nine months the parliament was replaced by a "People's Assembly" appointed by the President. Using powers that he had been granted by the 1990 Parliament, in these months the President ruled by decree and managed to organize two referendums, which respectively approved his mandate extension until 2000 and a new Constitution. New elections were held in December 1995: the SNEK, now renamed People's Unity Party, or PNEK, acquired a slightly steadier position in the new legislative body, the Mazhilis. Its majority was not sufficient, though, to avoid new legislative rebellions.

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[35] Totally, 177 seats were contested, of which 42 in the governmental list and 135 uninominal mandates. Just fewer than 74% of voters participated in the election. A table showing the distribution of seats is in the Appendix Three.

[36] Some accounts openly accuse the President to have manipulated the Court towards this decision (Kuttykadam, 2010). Whether this is true or not, it is undeniable that the President Nazarbayev responded to this crisis with an increase of his personal power and ruling by decree for the following nine months.

In 1999, the scarcely successful PNEK was abandoned in favour of a new pro-presidential party, Otan (Fatherland), founded by the former Prime Minister Tereshchenko. In the same years the elites around the President started sponsoring also other pro-regime parties, hoping to appeal different categories of voters: the Civil party was founded in 1998 by influential businessmen, including those in the Eurasia group, in order to protect their business interests in the Parliament; the Agrarian Party was formed in January 1999 and appealed to proponents of private property in agriculture (Brill Olcott, 2010). We can include in this group also Asar (Together), formed a bit later, in 2003: this party was set up by the daughter of President Nazarbayev, Dariga, to promote her political ambitions and constitute the basis for her political authority. These parties obtained a certain success: prior to the decision to merge, Asar and the Bloc "Agrarian and Industrial Union of Workers", made up of the Civic and Agrarian parties, were the third and second largest blocs in the Mazhilis, respectively (Kennedy, 2007). These parties formed pro-presidential coalitions in the Mazhilis both after the 1999 and 2004 elections, and eventually were incorporated into Otan in 2006 to form Nur Otan (Fatherland's Light). Nur Otan has since dominated the parliament and the political landscape. In the Mazhilis elections of 2007 it received 88.41% of the votes and all the seats (Bowyer, 2008: 6), and maintained an overwhelming majority also after the January 2012 elections[37].

As seen in this brief reconstruction, Nur Otan originated from a project of the President and of the people who were most close to him, like the former Prime Minister Tereschenko.

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[37] The election results are available on the website of the Central Electoral Commission of Kazakhstan
http://election.kz/portal/page?_pageid=153,511661&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL.

Using Panebianco's terminology, Nur Otan originated mostly by penetration, starting from a solid centre and then proceeding to spread on the territory.

Nur Otan has a hierarchical and centralized structure, maintaining a strong control on its local branches. Officers from local party representations are invited to join initiatives like the High Party School and host regular visits by inspectors from the party's central bodies, including the Control Committee.

The other important element is that Nur Otan did emerge from within, and thanks to the impulse of, the executive branch of power. The executives, and in particular the President, can be considered as the party's "sponsoring institution". Indeed Nur Otan seems to have only an indirect legitimation. The first object of loyalty of party members is the country leader, not Nur Otan. Actually, as it was mentioned previously, membership in the party can be considered as a proof of loyalty towards the leader.

The country leader is also behind the party's foundation, and is the party's charismatic leader. This contributes, according to Panebianco's model, to put the party in a weak position: just as the SNEK and other pro-presidential parties before, Nur Otan could be easily discarded, substituted or merged into another body. The eventuality of the party becoming a "collective heir" is, at the moment, quite remote, as there is no sign of "routinization of charisma", which is instead firmly retained by Nazarbayev. A similar development is actually not foreseeable in the near future, despite some declarations in this sense (Shaymergenov, 2007): the party would need to acquire more power within the institutions and act as balancing force towards the executive, instead of being its extension. Such a process would require extensive institutional change, as well as a radical transformation in the style of leadership and an increase in the

professionalism and sense of responsibility of party officials themselves.

Chapter 4. Supporting the party of power: Substantive and intangible resources

4.1 Introducing Resources

As shown in the previous chapters, Nur Otan was established thanks to the efforts of a group of people closely connected with the centre of power. This means that from the very first moment of its existence, the party of power could benefit from a series of resources, which contributed to create and maintain its dominant position within the political system of Kazakhstan.

This topic is closely related to the strategies that dominant parties enact in order to stay in power: the use of legislation in order to maintain an hegemonic position in the electoral arena and in the legislature (Boix, 1999); the adoption of a flexible ideology (Tarrow, 1990); the mobilization of selected parts of the population through the use of material resources and extensive propaganda (Arian & Barnes, 1974).

Using Pempel's terminology, a party which manages to maintain its policy-making position for a long time becomes able to implement its "historical agenda", using everything at its disposal to become stronger and weaken the opposition (Pempel, 1990: 16). Pempel uses the expression "virtuous cycles of dominance" in order to indicate this "interrelated set of mutually reinforcing processes that have the potential to beget even more dominance" (ibidem).

In the case of Nur Otan, though, the party is not the main factor behind these strategies, elaborated and implemented by same restricted group of people who established the party in the first

place. This is particularly evident for mass media: Nur Otan has almost no control on media outlets, but still it manages to obtain a much larger visibility than any other political party.

Hence, I think it is more sensible to refer to these measures as *resources*: the party of power is only endowed with these advantages, without significantly contributing to their creation. The aim of this chapter is to illustrate these resources, the way they are made available to the party and how Nur Otan uses them.

I distinguish between two types of resources. One involves substantive resources, consisting of institutional and economic forms of support which were put forward with the explicit purpose of favouring the party. These include the creation of *ad hoc* institutional constraints, and their selective application; and the use of "administrative resource", which I examine in its form of privileged access to State media.

The other category comprises less tangible resources, better understood as advantages that the party gets from its very position of power. I try here to show how the success of Nur Otan is due mostly to the popularity it receives from being the "President's party", and from the general consensus enjoyed by the regime, especially in connection with its positive economic performance. Moreover, by maintaining a flexible ideological profile, Nur Otan is able to present itself as an acceptable entity to most of the population.

4.2 Institutional Engineering

The role of the institutional setting in shaping party competition has been widely studied, particularly in the context of transitional regimes. A debate on this topic developed in the 1990s, as a result of the third wave of democratization. It regards the effects of two aspects of institutional design on democratic consolidation: the choice between a presidential and a parliamentary regime and the selection of electoral system (majoritarian over proportional representation). Another aspect of this debate regards the reasons bringing to one or another institutional design. Factors influencing such a choice include cultural and structural legacies, elite bargaining and the uncertainty of transition have been found to be relevant in this respect (see Isaacs 2011)[38].

While this literature is useful in understanding the general effects of institutions on the behaviour of actors, it is necessary also to look at the behaviour of actors in shaping the institutions themselves. Talking about post-Socialist parties, Gryzmala-Busse (2007) talks about the "re-building of the Leviathan". Parties in the former socialist bloc have in fact used their position within the state structures in a moment of uncertainty (the transition period) in order to build institutions which would help their staying in power and next to resources. In general, parties already in power have been found to have strong incentives to modify the electoral regime whenever they feel it will not serve them well (Boix 1999), reproducing the "cycle of dominance" described by Pempel.

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[38] Isaacs mentions: cultural and structural legacies, elite bargaining and the uncertainty of transition (Jones Luong 2002; Frye 1997; Bawn 1993).
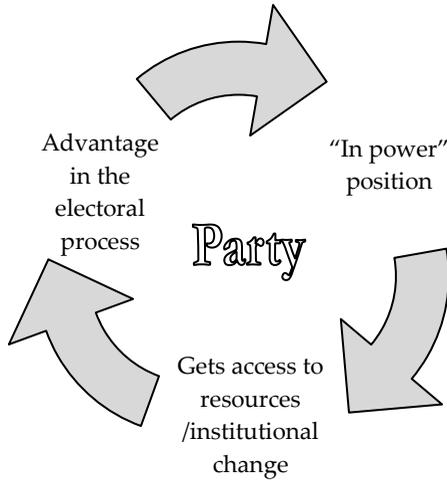
Figure 4.1 The cycle of dominance

This discourse applies to Nur Otan in a different way, given its subordinate role to governing elites. The mechanism of generating change to maintain an electoral advantage is similar to the one found in contexts of party dominance. The difference is in the way these parties first get in power and in the extent the electoral context is manipulated. As shown before, Nur Otan is in fact a party of power, originating within the power structures and endowed with extra resources since its very foundation. It did not need to *get in power* in order to modify the rules in its favour. It was actually created by the same people establishing the rules of the game.

Another difference is the degree of competitiveness in the political system. In this context the adoption of *ad hoc* rules for favouring the party of power is combined with a great informal

influence of the executive, and of the President in particular, on the party system (Isaacs 2011). This includes a series of informal ways of supporting the party of power and frequent manipulation of electoral results.

The role of institutional measures as a way to create advantages for a "party of power", erect higher barriers for new political actors and marginalize opposition has been studied in reference to the Russian case (Oversloot and Verheul 2006; Hale 2006; Smyth *et al*. 2007; Gelman 2008). In studying the recurrent use of institutional engineering, the degree of intentionality and awareness of elites regarding the effects of such measures has been highlighted (Gelman 2008). This literature mainly points at two institutional constraints, used by authorities to maintain control of the party arena: the legislation on political parties and the electoral rule. Recent research on Kazakhstan has also focused on the same aspects, confirming them as the most relevant elements of this strategy (Isaacs 2011). As the discretional application of these rules also constitutes a further lever to shape party competition, a brief final section will be devoted to the analysis of a few cases illustrating these dynamics.

4.2.1 The Law on Political Parties

The Law on Political Parties was first adopted in 1996, and initially presented no particular restrictions on the basis of which parties could organize. For registration, it required that parties had a minimum of 3.000 members in at least half of the oblasts.

This law was emended in 2002 introducing a series of restrictive norms, especially concerning the requirements for the

registration of political parties (Law on Political Parties 2002). The reasons for the sudden increase of restrictions are to be looked for in the appearance of organized opposition movements in the 1990s, apparently able to pose a serious challenge to the elite party-building project (Isaacs 2011: 97).

The emended law created indeed many limits to the appearance of new party formations. The number of valid signatures to be presented in order to formalize the registration was raised from 3.000 to 50.000 (Art. 10.5). This requisite sounds even more demanding considering that the country population was at the time of less than 15 millions. Moreover, a requirement that at least 1.000 people participate in the party's founding congress was added (Art. 6.1). This introduced significant difficulties for small parties, which struggled in getting the necessary funding for travelling expenses and had to require permission from local *Akimats* for the use of suitable venues (Isaacs 2011: 98). Finally, limits on the nature and ideological scope of political parties were introduced, prohibiting parties based on the basis of a particular profession, race, nationality, ethnicity or religion (Art. 5.8). The limits regarded also the formation of parties within the structures of central and local administrations (Law on Political Parties 2002).

As it is often the case, the rules were applied with a great deal of discretion. The officials of the Ministry of Justice could discretionally judge about the authenticity of signatures, checking them with an almost fastidious zeal when the proceeding regarded opposition parties. Also, they were able to invalidate the whole application when only an illegitimate signature was found (Isaacs 2011: 98).

The effects of the law on the party systems were immediate, as the requirement was applied also to existing and active parties,

which were asked to re-register under the new rules. For instance, its violation was the reason for closing the Republican People's Party, one of the most important opposition actors of the previous years (Interview with Kosanov, October 18 2011). Other parties were refused re-registration, including Azamat, Alash, the People's Congress of Kazakhstan (NKK), the Socialist Party of Kazakhstan (SPK) and the Party of Compatriot (Isaacs 2011).

Some of the restrictions were lifted in 2008. The number of required signatures was reduced (to 40,000), as well as the number of people that have to be present at the founding congress (from 1000 to 600) (Brill Olcott 2010: 253). Also, it was given more time to parties to prepare their documentations (four months instead of three) and it was stated that minor violations could not be used anymore as a reason to reject the whole application. The decision was related to the commitments taken by Kazakhstani authorities before the OSCE Chairmanship, in 2010. However, the application of such norms continued in many cases to be biased in favour of pro-government parties (Isaacs 2011: 99).

4.2.2 Electoral rule

Hale (2006) had studied the effects of changes in the Russian electoral system (from mixed to proportional representation) on party consolidation, finding that institutional change can be not only an incentive but actually a tool that the executive elites use to shape party competition. In Russia the introduction of a single-member districts quota in the early 1990s had the objective to hinder party formation and to make it easier for the Kremlin

to negotiate with members of the Duma elected as independents. Conversely, the adoption of proportional representation for all the 450 seats in the mid-2000s supposedly served the purpose of strengthening national parties and contrasting the formation of strong regional political entities, favouring greatly the pro-regime party United Russia (Hale 2006: 29-33).

In Kazakhstan the electoral rule has undergone a similar change in 2007, possibly with comparable effects. Before then, the electoral system in place was a majoritarian one (1993-1998), and then a mixed one (1999-2007) (Isaacs 2011: 87).

 With the electoral system established in 1993, 135 of the 177 MPs were elected in Single Member Districts, while the remaining 42 were selected from a state list, two from each oblast' as well as from the two cities with special status, then Almaty and Baikonur. This appointed quota seemed to have the goal of ensuring a number of deputies loyal to the President. However, this measure did not guarantee the formation of a pliable legislature: the parliament so elected entered into open conflict with the leader and was eventually dismissed in 1994 (Brill Olcott 2010).

The system was partially changed in 1995, when a new Constitution was approved, as well as a Constitutional law "On Elections" (Constitutional Law on Elections). The new parliament had two chambers: a lower, the Mazhilis, with 67 elected deputies; and a higher, the Senate, where members are elected from each oblast (two per oblast plus major cities), apart from seven who are appointed by the President of the Republic. Isaacs notes that this measure was necessary to maintain control of the Parliament in absence of a strong party, as the PNEK was still in its initial stages of formation (Isaacs 2011: 87).

It was in fact in 1999, when the new party of power was created, that the first institutional measure toward a "partizanization" of the Parliament took place. A new electoral law established that a small quota of seats (10% of the total) was to be assigned through national distribution to party lists. Still, party affiliation was not yet a prerequisite for being elected in the Single Member Districts, and many deputies entered the parliament as independents (*bezpartinniie*) until 2004.

In 2007 Proportional Representation (PR) was extended to the totality of seats, requiring that all the candidates would be party-affiliated. Just as in Russia, this change created an advantage for the main national parties and in particular for the party of power. Establishing a centralized distribution of seats, it discouraged the formation of regional party organizations, and made much less significant the advantage opposition parties had in the main cities. Most of the opposition parties, in fact, are based in the southern capital, Almaty and have representations only in the main cities, lacking resources for reaching the rural areas (interview, Satpayev, 2011).

The change of electoral rule was combined with an increase of the threshold for entering the parliament, which was brought to 7% by the May 2007 Constitutional reform (Vadurel, 2008). These measures favoured significantly the concentration of the political market: the high threshold guaranteed an advantage for the party of power – a huge organization with branches even in the most remote provinces - over opposition parties, smaller and, as mentioned, concentrated in the main cities.

Indeed Nur Otan was the only party which could overcome the threshold in the August 2007 elections, forming a single-party parliament. In its observation mission report, the OSCE recommended that the threshold was lowered, "in order to

promote pluralism" (OSCE 2007)[39]. Recommendations in favour of political pluralism were included also in the list of steps Kazakhstan should have taken before its chairmanship of the OSCE, in 2010. The threshold it is felt as a particularly strong constraint for the political system by many observers and political actors, including Nur Otan senior members (interviews, Sarym,2011; Bokayev, 2011; Karin, 2011).

The electoral law was emended in 2009 but, contrarily to the expectations, the 7% threshold was not lowered. Instead, a special provision was added: in the case of only one party overcoming the 7% limit, also the first runner-up is now allowed to enter the Mazhilis (Constitutional Law "On Elections" Art, 97. 1. 2). In the latest elections (January 15th 2012), this measure proved superfluous, as three parties managed to reach the threshold and entered the Parliament: Nur Otan, which conquered 80.99% of votes and 83 seats; the business party Ak Zhol (8 seats); and the Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan (7 seats). While it is now nominally a multi-party legislative chamber, it is still very unbalanced in favour of pro-regime forces: Ak Zhol is a pro-presidential party, led by the former Civil Party leader and Nur Otan member Azat Peruashev. The Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan is the most moderate among the two communist parties, and is generally considered as a representative of the "loyal opposition".

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[39] The recommendation to lower the threshold has been renewed in the Preliminary Observation Report for the 2012 elections (OSCE 2012a)

4.2.3 Some cases of selective rule application

Chosen institutional features are often combined with a *selective* application of rules. Similarly to what happens in the media sphere (see 4.3) very high requirements in legislation come together with a great deal of discretion endowed to the officials in charge of verifying compliance. Hence, regulations become a powerful lever in the hands of authorities for shaping the party system in favour of the party of power. The most common cases regard the registration of new party organizations.

The Republican People's Party was the first "victim" of the party legislation adopted in 2002. Founded by the President's former ally and former Prime Minister Akezhan Kazhegeldin in 1999, the party was closed soon after and as a consequence of the adoption of the 2002 law on political parties, which, in this case, had retroactive effect (Bowyer, 2008; Isaacs, 2011).

The opposition party *Alga*'s is the most explicative case of selective rule application, related in particular to the registration procedure. Formed after the dissolution by the Ministry of Justice of the DVK movement, Alga has been repeatedly refused registration and is still not able to compete in elections. Isaacs (2011) illustrates in detail the repeated attempts of the party to get registered and the motivations and techniques used by officials, including delaying the procedure and suspending the whole process on the basis of minor falsifications (Isaacs 2011: 100-101).

The Socialist party OSDP-AZAT has also experienced difficulties in registration due to its opposition stand. Formed by the merger of two separate parties, OSDP and the People's Democratic Party Azat in 2009, the organization still waiting for registration as a united party, despite the repeated applications (Interview with

Kosanov, 2011). The two parties are allowed to compete in elections, but only as a coalition bloc.

The difficulties encountered by these parties are even more striking when compared with the ease pro-government parties go through their registration process. Otan/Nur Otan is the least surprising case, having been founded within the state administration, and it has received registration quickly and without problems of sort, as well as the other pro-government parties Adilet and the Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan (see Isaacs 2011). More recently, Ak Zhol has been re-registered as a party in record times before the 2012 elections.

Not only registration requirements are used. On October 4, 2011 the activities of the Communist Party were suspended for six months by a court decision. Such suspension was due to the participation of the party leader in the activities of an unregistered political association, the *Khalykh Maidany* (National Front). The October 4 decision of the district court was upheld by the appellate court in Almaty on 24 October[40].

Many analysts and politicians agreed that this measure was aimed at making sure that the Communist party would not compete in the 2012 early parliamentary elections. While in September 2011 the date of elections had yet to be announced, there was a generalized expectation that elections would be held earlier than the natural term of the legislature and probably at the beginning of the year[41]. Actually, a few politicians took the suspension of the Communist Party as a secure sign that elections would be held within six months from October (Interviews, Satpayev 2011; Bokayev, 2011).

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[40] See http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/86985
[41] This was reported by almost all my interviewees, belonging to the pro-regime and oppositions fields alike.

4.3 Control and use of *administrative resource*: the case of mass media[42]

Financial and material support is another crucial factor for the success of Nur Otan. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, Nur Otan is, in this regard, similar to other types of dominant parties, which are known for "their ability to access state resources and monopolise key media resources to strengthen their hold on power" (White, 2011: 661). Parties of power like Nur Otan, though, are involved only marginally in the process of monopolising key resources. The main actor is same elite who initiated the party-building, while the party is a simple user of these resources.

The literature on post-Soviet parties of power refers to this form of elite support as "administrative resource", defining it as the ability of political candidates and parties to use their official positions or connections to government institutions to achieve party objectives" (Meleshevich, 2007: 196)[43]. Concretely, administrative resource includes: funding, support networks on regional level, personnel and structures of administration,

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[42] This chapter in part draws and expands my conference paper "Media, Parties and Power in Post Soviet Russia and Kazakhstan", presented at the 3rd ECPR Graduate Conference (Dublin, 30 August – 1 September 2010). I am indebted to the participants to the panel for their valuable comments. I am also thankful to Dr. David White (CREES, University of Birmingham, UK) for his helpful remarks on an earlier version of the paper.
[43] The term "administrative resources" is used almost exclusively in reference to the Russian case. The first to use of the term was Dimitri Ol'shanskij, Director of the Centre of Strategic analysis and forecasts of Moscow in August 1995. He included "adminresursy" into a series of indicators used to evaluate parties and blocs competing in the following parliamentary elections. See "*Slovar Russkogo Publichnogo Yazyka Dvadcatogo Veka*", published on Kommersant-Vlast, 23 June – 23 September 2003. Retrieved on January 23 2010 from http://krotov.info/history/20/1950/history.html.

relations with business people, privileged access to state media (Colton & McFaul, 2000: 208; Gelman, 2006).

A distinction is necessary at this point: the use of state resources to distribute various goods among voters is a common practice also in democratic systems, and needs to be differentiated from the use of resources with the aim of suppressing opposition by unfair political competition or eliminating competition. In her study on Russian parties of power, Smyth argues that the Kremlin chose almost always the second solution, because of their need to get results in the short term while investing relatively little into the process of party building (Smyth, 2004, in Gelman, 2006: 12)[44].

In Kazakhstan, a combination of these measures is adopted: the use of the general economic growth as a source of legitimacy for the party and the regime will be considered later in the chapter. Also, money from the state budget has been allegedly used in order to build Nur Otan branches in the regions (Isaacs, 2011: 187).

This section will deal with one of the concrete forms of creating a disadvantage in favour of the party of power: privileged access to mass media.

There are a few reasons to focus on this specific element. The first one is the relevance of this particular asset in the context of Kazakhstan. The Kazakhstani regime tends to relies more on techniques of persuasion and mass communications than on hard repression (Schatz, 2009). Elections, thus, although offering

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[44] See Regina Smyth, *Translating State Resources into Political Dominance: The Prospects for the Consolidation of Dominant State Party in Russia,* Manuscript, Pennsylvania State University (2004), in Gelman, 2006, p. 12. There is some evidence, though, of the Kremlin also increasing public spending just before an electoral cycle, for example in 1999 (Colton & McFaul, 2000: 213).

little alternation and having often predictable results, have an important role in the Kazakhstani political system, acting as a source of legitimacy for the current regime at the internal and the external levels[45]. In this context, privileged access to media is indeed very important, because it contributes decisively to the party's electoral success.

The other reason attains to feasibility: it is quite difficult to quantify the amount of financial resources endowed to the party of power – information that most of the times is kept secret – or about the use of personnel or State facilities – being very difficult to distinguish the cases when they are used by party-men in order to campaign, for example, or for other, legitimate, uses. Information about media is on the other hand, relatively more accessible, for the presence of a number of national and international NGOs acting as watchdogs. Also, the effect of the disparity in access is measurable, being possible to monitor media outlets and compare the number and tone of mentions of the various political parties.

4.3.1 The Media in Kazakhstan

The Kazakhstani media scene does not totally lack pluralism, though this is mostly limited to print and electronic new media; and also there, diversity is given more by the presence of antithetical voices than by balanced and constructive commentaries. Generally, Kazakhstani media lack professionalism and actors share the perception of media as "ideological weapons" (Interview, Sarym 2011). A legacy of Soviet times, this tendency to use media to discredit political

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[45] More about this role will be said in Chapter 6.

adversaries is widespread among pro-regime and opposition media alike: the latter are often violently critical towards the regime and show strong biases towards political formations close to their owners.

The advantage of the party of power is particularly strong in accessing broadcast media. This is partly due to the specific economic structure of television, with high management costs and a monopoly regime on frequencies, which make it easier to control. Another reason is the perception of its strategic role. Television channels reach even the most remote areas, and TV is still the main source of political information for the majority of population (Nurtazina 2010).

However, differently from Communist times, the party of power has almost no direct control on media. Media outlets are owned either by State bodies or by groups close to the presidential circles, reflecting the complex and asymmetric relation between the party and the ruling elite. Even in the case of party-owned media, they look more like an endowment of the State to the party, rather than the result of a takeover from the party's side.

The strategies put in place to ensure media control are thus "outside" of the party. With rare exceptions, the party does not own media outlets; the opposition media is kept in a marginal position through "draconian" rules, implemented mostly by government agencies; a government agency is also in charge of the most powerful tool of content management in the media, the *Goszakaz* program.

The result is still an immense advantage for the party of power in terms of access, visibility and positive image.

4.3.2 Media Control

(i) Ownership models

The control of media by the State is mostly indirect. Media outlets in Kazakhstan are mostly owned by private entrepreneurs: recent statistics show that only about 20% of media outlets are State-owned (Kazakhstan, Country Report on Human Rights Practices, 2010; Nurtazina, 2011). This is scarcely a sign of diversity. The political and business elites often coincide in Kazakhstan, and the steady economic growth has led successful groups and companies to acquire stakes in the media sector, creating a situation of almost total control (Pannier, 2007). From time to time there is an attempt to break this monopoly, but it usually comes from the spheres of power, leaving the general situation unchanged.

Since the mid-1990s the Kazakhstani State has exerted its control on the mass media in a decided, albeit indirect, fashion. Between 1992 and 2006 the sector was privatized, putting an end to the monopoly of the media maintained by the State in Soviet times (Nurtazina, 2011: 141). The privatization was a "clever" way to establish control on the sector, especially in regard of electronic media: the goals of economic restructuring were said to be more relevant than those of political reform (Brill Olcott, 2010: 105). Mostly through a system of bids for air frequencies and licenses, the property of the most important media groups was distributed among business people related or loyal to the President Nursultan Nazarbayev (Karin, 2001). According to experts close to the President, this move was addressing the situation of potential political instability created by repeated scandals and never-ending information against the President's figure. In this situation, the "only correct move" for the President

would be to take over the initiative in the information field (OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, 2002: 11) [46].

Already by 2000 only 25% of the country's media outlets were owned directly by the State (Kazakhstan, Country Report on Human Rights Practices, 2001, in Brill Olcott, 2010: 105).

A large part of the national media assets came in the hands of Nazarbayev's eldest daughter, Dariga, and her husband Rahat Aliyev, who at the time had a relevant position in the National Security Committee. The Nazarbayeva-Aliyev's group controlled the media holding *Khabar* and a series of satellite companies. Among others, they owned the television channels *Khabar*, *Khabar*-2, and NTK, the National TV and Radio Corporation Kazakhstan-1, a number of radios and print publications and the news agency Kazakhstan Today (Karin, 2001: 2). Thanks to their large financial resources, the group easily expanded, acquiring also "independent" media which had been critical of the government in the early 1990s, including the television channel KTK and the publication "*Karavan*" (Pannier, 2007; Brill Olcott, 2010). Ms. Nazarbayeva stepped down from the direction of the holding to enter national politics in 2003, but she was said to retain "great influence" in the media sphere (Pannier, 2007) [47]. No essential change followed the scandals that involved Aliyev in 2007, apart from the brief suspension of two media outlets belonging to the group – officially for language-related issues[48]. Nazarbayeva gave up her stakes in the Khabar group only in

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[46] Erlan Karin, at the time the Director of the Central Asian Agency for Political Research, made these declarations in an interview with the newspaper *Argumenty I Fakti*.

[47] Dariga Nazarbayeva founded the political party Asar, which obtained a considerable success in the 2004 Parliamentary elections. Re-elected in the Mazhilis in 2012, Nazarbayeva is now heading the Cultural Development Parliamentary Committee.

[48] "Kazakhstan's Powerful President", The Economist, July 8 2007 available at http://www.economist.com/node/9320660

2008, when the group, after a brief passage in the hands of the State holding *Samgau*, returned under direct control of the Ministry of Culture and Information[49].

Since November 2008, the party of power controls directly the media holding Nur-Media. It includes the TV channel "*Astana*", the radio stations "*NS*" and "*Delovaya Volna*" and the newspapers "*Aikyn*", "*Liter*", "*Nur Astana*", "*Izvestia-Kazakhstan*", "*Turkystan*", "*Kazakhstan Temirzholshysy*", "*Strana i mir*" and "*Dala men kala*" (the last two are the official press organs of the party).

(ii) Legislation

Formal rules are often used in order to maintain a firm control of the media sphere. Similarly to what happens in the political sphere, norms on registration and administrative rules – often applied discretionally – are commonly used to marginalize opposition media.

The legislation that Kazakhstan inherited from the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1990s was incomplete, as in Soviet times the subject was regulated through party directives and administrative acts. The USSR Supreme Soviet adopted the first law on mass media in June 1990, as a result of the *glasnost* policy: this law abolished censorship and proclaimed freedom of information (McCormack, 1999).

The 1991 law "On mass media" adopted in independent Kazakhstan was largely based on this text. Freedom of information was included in the catalogue of fundamental rights

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[49] "Holding Samgau peredast svoi 49% akcii agenstva "Khabar" ministerstvu kultury i informacii", Gazeta.kz. June 12 2008

of the 1995 Constitution (art. 20). The provision was mostly modelled on the article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, prohibiting censorship and proclaiming free access to information. However, several limitations were already included at this stage, including State secret and the prohibition for anti-system propaganda. The latter provision is not accompanied by an obligation to discipline the matter by law, a sign, this, of the priority accorded to those interests (first of all State security and integrity) respect to freedom of expression[50].

As in the party sphere, registration procedures are often used as a lever to decide which media are allowed and which ones are not. The establishment of complicated procedures and their discretional application give authorities the opportunity to close opposition media on the basis of formal irregularities.

The registration (*postanovka na uchyot*) of new media outlets, as well as their re-registration (*postanovka na pereuchyot*), is regulated by the Law "On Mass Media" (N. 451-I of July 27th 1999, last modified with the Law N. 354-IV of November 23rd 2010). Media owners have to register their outlet with a certification body (*upolnomochenny organ*), whose procedures and guidelines are indicated by the Government of Kazakhstan (art. 4.2).

A first problem is that this body is not independent, but instead is directly managed by the Government: there are not guarantees

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[50] The full test of the Article 20 recites: (1) The freedom of speech and creative activities shall be guaranteed. Censorship shall be prohibited. (2) Everyone shall have the right to freely receive and disseminate information by any means not prohibited by law. The list of items constituting state secrets of the Republic of Kazakhstan shall be determined by law. (3) Propaganda of or agitation for the forcible change of the constitutional system, violation of the integrity of the Republic, undermining of state security, and advocating war, social, racial, national, religious, class and clannish superiority as well as the cult of cruelty and violence shall not be allowed.

of impartiality in its decisions. While the decision to revoke registrations is to be taken by the owner or a judicial decision, the State can suspend or block publication in case registration is found not to be valid. Regular checks (planned as well as unannounced) are carried on through local administrations (*gosudarstvennii kontrol*, art. 4.4).

Though it has been simplified in January 2009, when Kazakhstan introduced a few OSCE-recommended amendments to the media law in preparation for the 2010 chairmanship, the registration procedure remains quite complicated: a number of documents have to be presented, including a notary certified copy of the owners' identification document and a declaration (*zayavlenie*) on the publication features (language, orientation, name and data of the editor in chief - art. 11).

On the other hand, the list of reasons for denying registration is long and articulated (art. 10.4). Apart from procedural faults, registration can be refused if there is already a media outlet with a very similar name, or if a media outlet with the same name had been previously suspended by a tribunal. According to Adil Soz, a respected media organization in Kazakhstan, this has been frequently the reason for refusing registration or re-registration to critical media in the last years[51]. Reportedly, in some cases the "homonymous" papers or radio channels were created *ad hoc* by state authorities in order to silence "uncomfortable" media outlets (Interview, Kalsin, 2008). Moreover, despite several official announcements, a central register of existing media names has yet to be published[52].

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[51] See http://www.ifex.org/kazakhstan/2011/01/31/defamation_law_amendments/

[52] A recent example of dubious application of this rule is the case of the editor in chief Tokbergen Abiev, a journalist who had previously been jailed for alleged violations of media laws. In 2011, he was refused registration of two new papers – "The corrupted should be in jail" (*Korrupcioner dolzhen sidit' v tiurme*) and "Kazakhstani Media Alliance:

Among the reasons to suspend or revoke registration (art. 13) there is a specific mention of the use of media in order to disturb electoral campaigns and illegitimately influence the results. In particular, the latter refers to actions performed "by foreigners, people without citizenship or foreign organizations" (art. 13.3). The formulation of this norm seems to have been strongly influenced by the experience of "colour revolutions" in Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. The dominating narrative of these events among post-Soviet leaders saw them as the result of pre-determined actions by external agents, often suspected to be U.S.-backed, which manoeuvred the local population through pro-western NGOs and mass media (Cooley, 2010). Indeed, the whole Eurasian region experienced a tightening of the control on mass media and civil society organization as a result of these events (Finkel & Brudny, 2012).

In 2009 these restrictions were expanded to the Internet. The Law N. 178-IV (10.07.2009), which introduced amendments to the legislation on information and communications, states that online resources, including websites, blogs, online shops and libraries, should be treated as mass media in terms of civil and penal responsibility. While the most restrictive aspects were corrected after OSCE's recommendations (initially the Procurator would have been able to block the incriminated websites in any moment), the law still creates confusion, making forums, blogs and other sites where the content is public-generated equivalent to mass media (Human Rights Watch, 2009). This restricts significantly freedom of expression, generates self-censorship

Law and Justice" (*Alians Kazakhstanskikh SMI: Zakon i pravosudie*) – on the basis of this rule. See http://www.ifex.org/kazakhstan/2011/01/31/defamation_law_amendments/

and creates problems for media quality and professionalism, also lowering media social responsibility (OSCE 2009).

The law leaves the State authorities great discretion in determining which behaviours are in violation of the law. Interestingly, the norms of the media law forbidding the use of the media in order to interfere with election campaigns and disturb social order, especially from foreigners, foreign entities, and international organizations, have been extended to internet sites, blogs and forums. Authorities did not make a mystery that the intention of this law is to prevent the use of the Internet as a channel for social and political instability. Presenting the law draft to the Parliament, the Chairman of the Commission on Information and Networks Kuanyshbek Esekeev declared that this law serves the purpose to avoid "Moldova-like" scenarios, where strikes and protests were organized and mobilized through the Internet[53].

Similar concerns may be also behind the decision to reduce the presence of international electronic media in Kazakhstan. The new law "On Broadcasting" (N. 545-IV of 18.01.2012) makes it more difficult for foreign media to obtain air frequencies and extends to international channels the system of State control on the contents (Article 19, 2011). Also there, particular emphasis is given to anti-system and de-stabilizing propaganda (art. 21.3).

Licensing procedures are problematic for other reasons as well. Electronic media are required not only to register, but also to participate in bids (*konkurs*) in order to receive air frequencies for their transmissions. The matter was previously regulated by a

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[53] "V Kazakhstane vstupil v sil zakon, reguliruyushchy internet", August, 4 2009. Available at: http://www.profit.kz/news/5092-V-Kazahstane-vstupil-v-silu-Zakon-reguliruuschij-internet/.

general law "On Licensing" (N. 2200 of 17.04.1995) and a series of Government acts. The legislative void had allowed the State wide discretion in managing the matter, as we saw when looking at the distribution of frequencies among loyal allies of the President in the 1990s. The new law "On Broadcasting" is not likely to change this situation: it creates a licensing body which is not independent, but is a direct emanation of the Government (art. 5) and maintains a tight control on media contents (Article 19, 2011).

The discipline of defamation and of other violations of the right to personal dignity is also used to control the media. The Soviet practice of criticism towards political enemies is still well alive and there is a tendency to use media as weapons against adversaries (Interview, Sarym 2011). For paradoxical that can seem, criticism towards officials is tolerated, and sometimes even encouraged from the centre, as long as the President and his narrow circle are not involved, possibly to give an impression of publicity and maintain local officials under the "eye" of the centre (Interviews, Satpayev, Nurmakov 2011).

On the other hand, defamation of public officials is a criminal offence: punishment usually includes extremely high fines and sometimes condemnation to jail (Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan, art. 129 and 130). Also, the burden of proof lies in any case on the journalist, and the criterion of "reasonable publication" is not considered (Article 19 2000: 12). The difficulty in proving their claims and fears for high fines or even imprisonment have often the effect of generating self-censorship among journalists, and the recent lessening of punishment measures for such violations is not likely to change this situation (Law "On Introducing Amendments to Some Laws of Kazakhstan for the Further Humanization of Criminal

Legislation and the Strengthening of Legal Safeguards in the Criminal Process" of February 4th 2011)[54].

(iii) Social Procurement - Goszakaz

In the mid 2000s the Kazakhstani State has started to implement another indirect system to influence media content: the so-called goszakas (Gosudarstvenniy Socialniy Zakaz – State Social Procurement) program[55]. The program regards mass media as well as non-governmental organizations and is aimed at improving the interaction between the State and civil society (Law on State Social Procurement, 36-3 2005).

In the media sphere, *goszakas* is run at the central level by a specific body (*upolnomochenny organ*), managed by the Ministry of Culture and Information, and at the local level by *oblasts'* administrations (Law "On Mass Media", Art. 4.2 and 4.4). The State allocates funds to media outlets by commissioning articles and reportages on themes of public interest, for instance about tolerance and interethnic harmony, or in order to stimulate the use of Kazakh language. By promoting publications on socially relevant topics, the system works as a partial substitute for the absence of public service media. In Kazakhstan, in fact, State media have not developed according to a public service model and there are few examples of community media as well (Interview, Karpov 2011).

According to local experts, however, Social Procurement has also negative consequences, both on the independence and quality of

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[54] See also http://www.ifex.org/kazakhstan/2011/01/31/defamation_law_amendments/
[55] In reference to media, it is also commonly called *gosinformzakaz* or *gosdotaciya*.

publishing (Interview, Mednikova 2011)[56]. Needing no revenues from advertising or sales to survive, editors lose motivation in finding and developing interesting stories to reach their audience; on the other hand, in exchange of generosity, loyalty to the regime is expected, limiting the possibility of media to act as a watchdog. Moreover, just by increasing the coverage of authorities' initiatives – including Nur Otan's –, the system contributes to the creation of a positive image of the regime. A specialized report confirms that, this way, the State has profited of the lack of independent financing sources connected to the 2008 economic crisis in order to put media effectively under control (MediaNet, 2010). The extension of Social Procurement seems to be quickly increasing and to have had a spur after 2008: between 2007 and 2008 the number of media outlets involved practically doubled, and they reached 50% of the total media outlets in 2009 (MediaNet, 2010: 5)[57]. Also the resources destined to this formula have increased, reaching the sum of 7,3 millions of US Dollars in 2009[58]. According to independent experts, in 2010 almost 70% of the media outlets were regularly commissioned articles by State authorities (Interview, Mednikova, 2011)[59].

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[56] Also the 2009 Annual Media Kurultay (Council) has pointed at the extensive use of Goszakaz as one of the most relevant problems for Kazakhstani media, particularly because it strongly increases the State's influence on media content and at the same time generates self-censorship. A full report on the contents of the conference is in Gazeta.kz (2009) *SMI legli v dreif*, November 26, 2009.

[57] "*V Kazakhstane v tekushem godu vdvoe uvelichen ob'em gosudarsvennogo zakaza v SMI – Glava MKI*". Zakon.kz, October 10 2008

[58] "SMI legli v dreif" Gazeta.kz November 26, 2009.

[59] In his speech at a roundtable organized by the Club of the Institute of Political Decisions (KIPR), Vyacheslav Abramov from Freedom House Kazakhstan mentioned the same percentage. During the event, several independent experts voiced their concerns about the dangers for media freedom related with the Goszakaz system. The script of the roundtable "The Role of Media in contemporary Kazakhstan", Almaty 24 November 2011 is available at: http://ipr.kz/kipr/3/1/66#.T7VdclIZQnM

4.3.3 Media and Elections: an advantage for the party of power

The results of such efforts are an overwhelming presence of the party of power in Kazakhstani media. A look at the number of mentions of parties in the press confirms that Nur Otan (and Otan before 2006) enjoys much wider coverage than any other political formation, both in the pro-regime and in the opposition camps (See Appendix Four).

This advantage is particularly relevant during electoral campaigns, and it is likely to have a role in the party's overwhelming victories.

The use of biased television news in electoral campaigns is a particularly interesting media effect. While electoral advertising is perceived for what it is, propaganda, news is more credible in the eyes of the audience, because it is generally considered impartial. This happens also in other contexts, but this effect is usually limited because it is counter-balanced by other news, neutral or biased in other directions. But when this happens in a situation of significant control of the national TV channels, it results in a very powerful tool to shape public opinion and influence electoral results (Oates & Roselle, 2000: 34).

Theories on the effect of media on the political process have found that the association between media messages and electoral results is stronger when the political competition is weak and the participation to the political debate is mediated by television for the majority of citizens. The influence of the media, and in particular of television, is especially strong on audiences which are less sophisticated, less informed and not interested in politics (Oates & Roselle: 2000: 34).

Television is known to have a greater impact on receivers, compared to printed media. The quality of its message is

somewhat different: it does not appeal to people's logic, but uses a more emotional language, downing the individual's "immunity system" against manipulation.

In Kazakhstan, television has a wide territorial diffusion: the two state-run channels (TV Kazakhstan and TV Khabar) cover almost the entire territory of the country[60].

Television is also the main source of political information in Kazakhstan, even among young people: while the use of Internet is rapidly increasing, it is doing so in an unequal way, especially in the poorest regions of the country. A survey conducted in the mid-2000s shows that national television is still the most relevant source of news about politics, preferred by 74% of Russian young people, 66.8% of young Kazakhs and 71.8% of youths belonging to other nationalities (Shoikin, 2006, in Nurtazina 2011). According to a recent survey, 82% of Kazakhstani citizens declared to get their information about the latest Presidential elections from television (IRI, 2011, in Nurtazina 2011).

In 1999 the coverage of parliamentary elections (organized in two rounds, the 11 and 25 October). Among the party lists, however, the pro-government Otan and Civic Party received the most coverage. In overall news content, pro-governmental parties fared better in terms of "positive coverage" than opposition parties. Of the private channels monitored, KTK demonstrated a distinct bias toward Otan, which enjoyed nearly 60% of the coverage given to all parties. Otan also monopolized the market with 65.7% of paid political advertisements (OSCE/ODIHR, 2000).

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[60] As of 2010, the channels Khabar and Kazakhstan reach respectively 92% and 93% of the total population. See Nurtazina 2011. See also OSCE, *Final report on the parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan*, *18 August 2007* (October 30, 2007), www.osce.kz.

By 2004 the control of the State on the media consolidated, and the OSCE media monitoring during the electoral campaign for the Mazhilis revealed a strong bias in the news coverage of the election campaign, particularly in favour of the dominant pro-presidential parties. The state television station Kazakhstan-1 devoted 64 percent of its political news coverage to Otan and its members. The tone of coverage was mainly neutral, but the other nine registered parties or blocs received little coverage. Khabar television station largely favoured Otan and Asar, with 31 percent and 44 percent of coverage respectively. These two parties also fared better in terms of positive coverage, while the opposition party Ak Zhol and the bloc formed by the Communist Party of Kazakhstan and Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan received little coverage, often negative (OSCE/ODIHR, 2000).

The news program of the private station Channel 31 was more balanced in its coverage of the main contestants, although favouring Ak Zhol (36 percent of political news coverage). Conversely, the commercial television station KTK was notably biased in favour of Asar and its candidates, (45 percent of all political news coverage). KTK newscasts repeatedly contained editorial attacks against opposition parties, mainly against Ak Zhol (OSCE, 2004).

The situation did not change much also in 2007, with an important difference. While in 2004 the support of some of the TV channels was divided between Otan and some of its allies, now Nur Otan, the new party of power, was enjoying all the possible advantages of its privileged position: state media gave preferential treatment to Nur Otan in news coverage, particularly by giving coverage of President, who is also the

party leader, and promoted his achievements[61]. Coverage was almost exclusively (99.8 per cent) positive or neutral in tone (OSCE 2007).

In 2012, the OSCE/ODIHR EOM conducted quantitative and qualitative media monitoring of six TV stations during the entire campaign period: Channel 31, Astana TV, *Kazakhstan TV*, *Khabar*, KTK and Channel 7. The most balanced shares of visibility among political parties were given by Channel 31 , *Kazakhstan TV*, *Khabar* and KTK, although in all cases the largest share was for Nur Otan. Channel 7 and Astana TV, instead, mentioned almost only the party of power, leaving little or no space for the others[62].

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[61] On state-funded television, which has a particular obligation to provide balanced news coverage of an election campaign, Nur Otan received 20 % of the political news coverage on *TV Khabar* and 17 % on *TV Kazakhstan*. In contrast, the ANDSP (All National Social Democratic Party) received 3 and 4 per cent respectively, while Ak Zhol received 7 and 12 per cent respectively. The other parties received between 3 and 6 per cent each. OSCE, *Final report on the parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan*, *18 August 2007* (October 30, 2007), www.osce.kz

[62] http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/89401

4.4 "Intangible" resources

The very position of the "party of power" within the political system brings significant advantages to Nur Otan.

Unlike the use of legislation and media seen before, these advantages are not of the material type. They are intangible, related with the party's image, popularity and ideological basis.

Nur Otan's popularity, for instance, has its primary source in the leadership of Nursultan Nazarbayev. Being the President's party is Nur Otan's label, its most characterizing feature.

The adoption of a flexible and vague ideology is also a factor of success for Nur Otan. Adopting a flexible ideology is a common strategy of dominant parties, which need it in order to maintain their dominant position by appealing to a larger pool of voters. Nur Otan, an executive-based party in a soft authoritarian context, needs this with less urgency, as the extensive elite support already guarantees that it has a decisive advantage on competitors.

It still needs it, though, in order to address the whole population, and increase regime legitimacy. In particular, the party benefits from its association with the country's economic success and with its position of promoter of national unity.

4.4.1 Nur Otan, or the President's Party

Nur Otan's success is mostly due to its connection with the President Nazarbayev, an immensely popular figure in Kazakhstan.

The support from the executive – and in particular from the leader - seems a crucial factor in the success of post-Soviet parties of power. Colton & McFaul (2000) connect the success of Unity, in comparison with previous parties of power, with Putin's declaration of vote, made on November 24th 1999. This sole event has been believed to increase the success of the party by a dozen percentage points (Colton & McFaul, 2000: 211). Also the elites seemed to be influenced by Putin's support of Unity, as well as his personal increased popularity (Markov, 1999: 19 in Colton & McFaul, 2000: 211).

This is true also for Unity's successor, United Russia. Putin never accepted to become the leader of the party while he was the President of Russian Federation: nevertheless he always supported United Russia, and his high approval rating was always "a major resource for the party of power" (Gelman, 2006: 8). Eventually, after stepping out of the presidency and becoming Prime Minister, he accepted the role of party leader.

In Kazakhstan, the relation between party and leader is even more intense. The party of power has a primary role in the political scene, and the president accepts and encourages its growth, using his popularity to increase the one of Nur Otan.

Nazarbayev's popularity is immense. Over time, he built a personality cult in which he is seen as the guarantee of prosperity for the multinational and multi-confessional Kazakhstani society and as the 'father of the nation and a symbol of unity and stability' (Isaacs, 2011: 121). Pictures and quotations

by Nazarbayev are common sights in towns and big cities alike, and there is a number of President's Museums.

This effort is indeed repaid by the trust the majority of Kazakhstani seem to have toward Nazarbayev. A recent survey of the Strategic Center of Social and Political Studies in Almaty has found that most citizens are happy with his government (see Lillis, 2010)[63]. On the other hand, especially in big cities and among young people, a feeling of discontent about the lack of change in leadership is increasing, although most young people seem to live in their private sphere and do not engage in politics, caring more about their own education and career perspectives, at least for the time being[64].

A big component of Nazarbayev's rhetoric is connected with the idea of stability: Nazarbayev managed to lead the country through the difficult phase of independence and the drastic economic reforms of the 1990s without serious societal and ethnic clashes. This was not the case in neighbouring countries, such as Tajikistan, which experienced a civil war in the early 1990s, and especially Kyrgyzstan, where the consequences of a frail political and ethnic balance are still well evident and continue to be a reason of instability. Nazarbayev has always relied on this element, which earns him a great share of genuine popularity, and has associated it with a discourse about gradual democratization.

An example is the organization of early presidential elections in 2011, where both the timing and the type of slogans used in the campaign show that Nazarbayev tried to convince the

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[63] The survey was conducted in 2010 and interviewed 1,592 people: 89% said to be satisfied with Nazarbayev's government.
[64] Although this could be only a phase, due to the previous (Soviet) over-saturation of the society with politics.

citizenship that he would avoid a *contagion* from the recent events in Kyrgyzstan[65]. Also in this case, the party positions itself on the same policy goals and values as Nazarbayev. As noted by Isaacs, "the party espouses the same message as the president and shares his commitment of stability and gradual democratization" (Isaacs, 2011: 143).

The association between party and president is very strong in Kazakhstan: Nazarbayev has been the leader of the party since its foundation and simply reflects his position and ideas in its program: according to the party program, the first objective of the party is the "successful realization of the First President's policy agenda" (Nur Otan, 2007). In the "National strategy 2009-2012" it can be read that the "fundamental national values, as they were formulated by the Leader of the Nation, constitute the substance of Nur Otan's ideological platform" (Nur Otan, 2009).

Also, Nur Otan largely depends on Nazarbayev's popularity and charisma: electoral posters of Nur Otan often depict Nazarbayev, and Nur Otan proudly presents itself as the "President's party"[66].

Obviously this has consequences on the party's success, because Nur Otan can rely on higher vote shares because of this association. This circumstance has consequences also on the relative position of the party in comparison to the leader.

As already introduced (Chapter 3), the leader's charismatic popularity is one of the fundamental features conditioning the

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[65] In June 2010, Kyrgyzstan experienced serious ethnic clashes in the Southern region of the country, especially in the region of Osh, where both Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities live. The violent events followed an earlier coup in April 2010, which substituted the former leader Bakyev with a new coalition. In his pre-electoral speech, Nazarbayev called the country to make a choice in favour of "maintaining stability", and mentioned the events of Osh as the result of the absence of "order", "harmony" and "stability". See: http://www.newskaz.ru/society/20110315/1240160.html

[66] See the party's website: www.ndp-nurotan.kz/

origins and the future institutionalization of a political party (Panebianco, 1988). Panebianco describes a situation where competition exists and the party uses its leader's charisma to get into power, by convincing people that he is the necessary person in that specific moment, what is called "situational charisma" (Tucker, 1968; in Panebianco: 1988: 52). However, the case of Kazakhstan is slightly different. While it is undoubted that Nazarbayev's personal charisma was crucial for his remaining in power after independence, and that Nur Otan's popularity is heavily relies on the leader, the two things did not happen at the same time, as in Panebianco's scenario. Nazarbayev's power position was already more or less established when he tried to establish a party in order to consolidate his rule. This means that the party of power has even more of a dependent position on the leader's popularity, because the leader, in a way, comes before and stays above the party.

In this context, the "routinization of charisma" is totally dependent on the leader's will[67]: being in a superior position, Nazarbayev is connected to the party only until when he decides so. In the same way, he can decide easily to discard it, as he did with previous parties of power.

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[67] With this expression Panebianco meant the transfer of personal charisma to the party, in order to make it a more durable institution.

4.4.2 Ideology: strategic vagueness, economic growth and national unity

The ideological basis is one of the fundamental features of political parties, even when it is vague and flexible.

In his seminal work on the transformation of Western party systems, Otto Kirchheimer showed how the detachment from a strong ideological basis is a progressive phenomenon, by which the pre-war mass integration parties started looking at the electoral scene and abandoned their sharpest claims and class lines in order to reach "a wider audience and more immediate electoral success" and transforming, thus, into "catch-all" parties (Kirchheimer, 1966: 184) 68.

Ideological flexibility is even more relevant for dominant parties. Pempel (1990) noted that dominant parties experience a tension when, from the initial moment of mobilization, they pass to the position of power. While they have to maintain some rigidity, in order to maintain the core of supporters, they have to become flexible enough to attract new political support. Tarrow refers to this approach as "soft hegemonic": the party needs to appeal to the wider public (Tarrow, 1990: 308-309). The adoption of a flexible strategy is functional to this, because it allows the party to co-opt opposition policies, as well as opposition politicians (White, 2011).

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[68] In the post-war period, bourgeois parties, or "parties of individual representation", failed to become parties of integration, and did not evolve from their nature of "clubs for parliamentary representation" to "agencies for mass politics able to bargain with the integration-type mass parties according to the laws of the political market" (183). At the same time, mass integration parties, which imposed themselves in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century and contributed to socialize masses, lost their sharpest class lines and claims and started looking at the electoral scene, transforming into "catch-all parties".

One may argue that, in the case of authoritarian politics, this flexibility is of little relevance, if relevant at all. The electoral process is biased in favour of the ruling party, and in some cases is not meaningful at all, being only a sort of farce.

In the context of Kazakhstan, where indeed the elections have only a relative meaning, a flexible ideology contributes to improve the perception of the regime at a wider level: by showing that its goal is to improve the general wellbeing, rather than favouring one or another part of the society, the party of power and the regime become more acceptable for the population. In a way, this is an easier method than having to impose an ideology and creating a complex system of indoctrination, as it was happening in Soviet times.

It could be also that the adoption of a vague ideology is more apt to the post-Soviet context, which had been characterized by ideological saturation. Indeed, this ideological flexibility it is not only a feature of Nur Otan but also of the other Kazakhstani parties, which have very similar platforms, characterized by centrist positions (Brill Olcott, 2010; Isaacs, 2011; interview, Satpayev, 2011). Also, this feature is common to many parties in the post Soviet space, including the Russian party of power United Russia, where the lack of a clearly defined ideological position actually is said to have contributed to the success of the Russian party of power (Gelman, 2006: 10)[69].

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[69] Ideological flexibility has been pointed out as a characteristic feature of the party of power and as a crucial element for its success. Igor Tanchin noted that "ideology for a party of power is an impermissible luxury since ideology should not prevent the authority from achieving its objectives" (Tanchin 2005, in Meleshevich 2007: 195)This was clearly perceived also by the masters of parties of power: Sergeii Shoigu, founder and leader of Unity, described it as a party "without program, without members and without ideology" See: Stephen White, Ian McAllister, Sarah Oates, "Was It Russian Public Television That Won It?", *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 7, n. 2 (2002). on the same party, Yevgenii Nazdratenko once declared that "the ideology of Unity is the

Nur Otan's ideological position is indeed very vague, focusing on universal worries of the people of Kazakhstan: economic development, societal, inter-ethnic and multi-confessional stability (Nur Otan 2007).

The economic welfare of Kazakhstani citizens is the first priority of Nur Otan, in its double aspect of economic growth and redistribution. For instance, in the new party strategic goals for 2017, the first section is totally devoted to economic objectives, including measures encouraging growth, anti-crisis legislation and better life conditions for the citizens of Kazakhstan (Nur Otan, 2011).

The impressive economic growth experienced by the country in the last two decades is indeed a very important source of legitimacy for the regime. While a fair economic performance could be regime-supporting in itself, because it decreases the risk of coups of rebellions[70], a strong economic growth has also been

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lack of any ideology". *Nezavizimaia Gazeta*, October 2, 1999, in Hale, 2004. In particular, Gelman underlines the advantages of occupying a centrist position in the political spectrum, in particular in a context like the Russian one, where the role of ideology has shrunk. See Steven Hanson, 'Instrumental Democracy: The End of Ideology and the Decline of Russian Political Parties', in Vicki L. Hesli and William M. Reisinger (eds.), *The 1999-2000 Elections in Russia: Their Impact and Legacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.163-185. United Russia has located itself on the "zero point on the left-right continuum between pro-statist and pro-market parties", as well as on other ideological axes. This "median-voter" position allowed United Russia "wide room for political manoeuvring that was unavailable for the disunified segments of the opposition", too distant to create an anti-regime coalition (Gel'man 2006: 10-11). Centrism is considered an asset of such parties also by Regina Smyth, who argues that the success of the party of power is actually "contingent" on its ability to portray itself as a centrist organization (Smyth 2002: 558).

[70] Economic performance has long been considered crucial for regime survival, with failure raising the probability of either mass protests and loss of legitimacy, or splits within the regime over diminishing rent sources (see Cho 2005). Insights from political economy theories confirm that higher levels of wealth and greater equality in the redistribution of resources decrease the incentives for actors to support revolutionary movements (Acemoglu & Robinson 2006).

one of the most convincing arguments in favour of autocratic government. The opinion that autocracies have better capacities to deliver economic development is known as the Lee thesis, named after former Singapore's political leader Lee Kuan Yew (Sen, 1999). The central claim of this thesis is that political freedoms hamper economic development because a democratic government has to cater to short-term populist demands instead of implementing pragmatic long-term policy. According to this view, an authoritarian government is more able to implement sensible economic reforms that are good for society as a whole.

Indeed Nazarbayev has tried to associate their mode of rule to the style of the Singaporean leader, and this is reflected also into the programs of Nur Otan. In particular, Nazarbayev's most popular slogan, "first, the economy and then politics"[71], summarizes the essence of the Lee thesis, justifying with the necessity of economic growth the delay of political reforms.

This is indeed a popular position among Nur Otan party-men: in the interviews conducted, often the necessity of giving priority to economic development went together with a strenuous defence of the gradualist approach adopted in politics[72].

Nur Otan, as well as the president, also dedicates a great attention to the theme of national unity. This is actually an application of the *gradualist* and *harmonizing* approach of the regime to a very controversial issue, the one of nationality and linguistic policies. Kazakhstan is in fact a multi-ethnic country, where ethnic Kazakhs live together with a number of minorities, among which the most consistent in number and importance is

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[71] Shulembaeva R. "Politaren priamie paralleli", *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, No. 124, August 10, 2007

[72] One of the most popular objections is that "it took 200 years to the United States to become a democratic country". Zhas Otan activist (2011b).

the Russian one. Actually, as noted by Dave (2007) Kazakhstan still deals with ethnicity in the same way Soviet authorities did, focusing on culture and ignoring its political aspect (Dave 2007).

The policies of "Kazakhsification" (Dave, 2007: 151) adopted after independence have been limited to top-down processes aimed at the elites. Even the adoption of a new language legislation, which made Kazakh the first language, has had limited effects, although it has created advantages for Kazakh speakers[73].

This indecisiveness is probably the result of a strategy of authorities, using again the instrument of vagueness and of appealing to the totality of citizens with general considerations of harmony in order to maintain consensus. In particular, the fact that Russian is still widely spoken and has maintained a status of almost-official language makes sure that the Russian-speaking community continue to support the regime. There is a general sense of fear among ethnic Russians, in fact, relatively to the development of a Kazakh nation-state, which would exclude their community (interview, Sarym, 2011).

On the other hand, the President, as well as Nur Otan, often declare themselves as the promoters of the Kazakh nation, in order to appease the growing Kazakh population, which starts to demand more decisive nation-building policies. In this respect, maintaining a vague position is only a temporary equilibrium, which may reveal very dangerous for the regime[74].

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[73] For instance, with the 1997 Language Law it became mandatory that at least 50% of all TV and Radio broadcasts be in Kazakh (Dave 2007).
[74] For these considerations, I am partly indebted to Marlene Denice Elwell, who presented a paper on "Ethno-nationalism in Kazakhstan" at the ASN Conference, Moscow, 2011.

Chapter 5.
Nur Otan's and the stability of the Kazakhstani regime

The topic of how authoritarian parties contribute to regime stability is deeply intertwined with the reasons why authoritarian leaders should create and support a political formation.

This chapter focuses on both topics. On the one hand, it is seen how the party-building process was deeply connected with a series of regime-threatening *challenges*, such as the presence of an unruly legislative chamber, splits within the elites and the possibility of destabilizing external influences, coming from the international community in the form of criticism to non-democratic elections, or from the region, in the shape of "colour revolutions". On the other hand, the regime-supporting functions of the party of power Nur Otan are analyzed in detail.

The chapter is placed in the literature on authoritarian institutions, in particular on authoritarian parties.

5.1. Why a party at all? The party of power as an answer to regime-threatening challenges

We have seen how the formation and the success of the party of power Nur Otan resulted from a deliberate and complex party-building strategy of the ruling elites. It is not yet clear, though, why did the elites, and especially the President, engage in such enterprise, which undoubtedly involved a long-term investment of political and material resources.

A conventional explanation for the presence of parties and elections in non-democratic regimes is the need for international legitimacy and the influence of international trends in favour of democratization triggered by the end of Cold War (Gelman, 2008b; Brill Olcott, 2008). This argument alone seems not sufficient to give account of the presence of strong executive-supported parties, though.

Starr (2006) considers the establishment of pro-regime parties in Central Asia as a necessary step in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. In that moment, Central Asian leaders, including Nazarbayev, were in a position of weakness, depending heavily on the domestic elite groups that helped them re-gaining power after Gorbachev's attempt to break local power networks. Elections and parties were the leader's corrective tool for this situation: they served the purpose of "engaging the populace with the president's programs and ratifying the presidents' general course", while the control guaranteed by election management and by a party of power ensured that the elective principle did not undermine the presidency and the informal deals on which it depended (Starr, 2006: 11). While the description of that condition as a one of "weakness" is debatable, as Nazarbayev had large personal power already in 1991, the intuition that the President was looking for a direct and "manageable" source of legitimacy, which would make him more independent from other elite groupings, seems correct.

The Soviet legacy may also have had a great influence in the establishment of a ruling party of this type.

The long experience under the Soviet Union has probably had an important role in shaping the relation of the society with political parties, by creating a lack of engagement in politics, increasing scepticism regarding politicians or even a totalitarian regime

dependency (Isaacs 2011). In a way, the post-Soviet Kazakhstani state sought symbolic legitimacy by adopting a social contract totally similar to the one in force in Soviet times: in exchange of security and welfare guarantees, the general public had to offer compliance. This contract allowed individuals to "preserve their autonomy from the state through a structure of overt compliance and routine subversions of policies that impinge upon the private domain" (Dave 2007: 115-116).

Also, the choice of establishing a system based on party rule has been possibly influenced by the familiarity of the post-Soviet elites with this instrument, developed and refined in more than seventy years. Possibly, the establishment of a party that was declaredly the "functional equivalent" of the CPSU (Brill Olcott, 2010: 93) was more the continuation of an established practice, rather than the instauration of something new.

There are indeed signs of influence, although it is not possible to treat Nur Otan as a simple replica of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Nur Otan shares several commonalities with the CPSU: for instance, its formal structure, which is highly hierarchical and includes a youth branch (in this case, Zhas Otan, in that case the Komsomol) and a specialized "school" for the ideological education of its activists (in both cased it is called the Higher Party School, the *Vyshaya Partiinnaia Schkola*). These features are common also to another example of party of power, United Russia.

However, Nur Otan, as well as United Russia, emerged in extremely different conditions of the political system than those in place in Soviet times, even at the very end. At the beginning of the 1990s, it was clear that the leadership had lost its monopoly on political power, and that it would have been impossible to continue ruling in the old fashion. Nazarbayev had to face since

the very beginning the opposition of several segments of society and of fragments of the elites, and he managed to maintain his authority after independence only forcing the situation in a state of emergency and ruling by decree (Brill Olcott, 2010; Kuttykadam, 2010)[75].

There was not such a thing like the "continuation" of party rule. When the Soviet regime collapsed, also institutions, including the party underwent a serious crisis. This phase, in other words, represented a break in party rule, which was then re-established in a different form.

The nature of the party which emerged from this situation is inherently different from the CPSU.

The discussion on party origins is helpful also in order to highlight this difference. The CPSU originated outside of power. Only through massive mobilization and violent outbreaks it managed to get in power. Its successors, instead, were created within the executive branches of power in order to maintain the situation. This reflects the difference, highlighted by Shefter (1994) between parties created *by* power and parties created *to break into* power. It can be argued that the late CPSU had little in common with the Bolshevik party which took control of the Russian empire in 1917, and that evolved in an organization more interested in maintaining power than in conquering it.

The key consideration here regards the subject of the proposition: although the goal and the methods were changed, it was still the party to be interested in maintaining power, and

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[75] In a way, this necessity of using the hard hand is related to the condition of weakness proposed by Starr (2006). The resort to force possibly meant that the leader had insufficient institutional strength to maintain authority.

enacting strategies to achieve its goals. The CPSU was a party-state, a pervasive structure which controlled policy-making at all levels, through a capillary network of party officials (Hough, 1979).

Nur Otan, instead, is a state-party, created and controlled by an external group, the executive elites. In a way, the relation between party and power in this case is reverse.

Moreover, although widely relying on its leaders' personal power, the CPSU managed to "routinize charisma" (Panebianco, 1988) and establish collective and party-based tools of rule, first of all the Politbureau[76]. Nur Otan, instead, is still depending on the will and popularity of Nursultan Nazarbayev, and could possibly be dismissed if the President decides so.

A last important difference regards ideology, which was a fundamental component of the CPSU. As it was seen in chapter 4, instead, ideology is a secondary and almost accessory element for Nur Otan, coming *after* the party structure.

Parties in autocracies may as well be needed for their ability to sustain the regime (Magaloni, 2008). While authoritarian leaders would prefer to rule unchecked, they are ready to establish "authoritarian institutions" whenever these help lowering the risks of instability and crisis. In particular, dictators seem to resort to the creation of parties especially when they confront strong opposition (Smith, 2005; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006). In this chapter it is argued that the choice of the executive elites to establish a strong party of power, as well as the later decisions to enhance and support it, are the result of a prolonged learning process, taking place since independence; also, it is argued that

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[76] It is probably more correct to talk about more or less personalist phases of Soviet Rule.

the founding of a party of power was contemporary and contingent to the establishment of a soft authoritarian regime.

There were a few crucial moments in this process, represented by important challenges for the regime, mostly related with internal stability, but also to international events. The party of power was always central in the executive elites' answers to these challenges: enhanced through *ad hoc* legislative measures and administrative resources, it contributed to the effective management of conflicts and to the improvement of the regime's legitimacy.

Three main phases are individuated: the first phase corresponds to the establishment of the party of power, and corresponded to the necessity of having a better and more cost-efficient control of the legislature, which had shown to be quite unruly in the early 1990s. The second phase, taking place in the early 2000s, corresponds to a wave of elite splits, which posed a serious threat to regime stability. The party was then reinforced and transformed in a *super-party*. The new party, sending a message of invincibility, proved an effective deterrent for the rebel segments of the elites, as well as for the opposition in general. The last phase, in the late 2000s, corresponds to an attempt of the party to become closer to the population and to increase, this way, the legitimacy of the regime. It corresponded to the attempt of Kazakhstan of improving its legitimacy also on the international scene, with the bid for the OSCE Chairmanship. Another challenge that was dealt with in this phase was the increase of youth activism and the fear of contagion from protest events in the post-Soviet region, a phenomenon that goes under the name of "colour revolutions". The main challenges, with corresponding strategies and party functions are schematically introduced in Table 1.

As the learning process is to be intended as dynamic and extended over time, in some cases strategies were implemented some time after the challenge. It is therefore important to highlight in every case the connection between events and elite reactions.

Moreover, challenges and strategies are connected with what are considered the regime-supporting functions of the party of power. These are closely related with the perceived threats to the regime, although the correspondence between the two categories is not total, the party possibly going beyond the initial scope, or evolving along different lines.

The method used here is theory guided process-tracing (Aminzande, 1993), with the appearance of potential regime challenges and the establishment of certain party-supporting measures serving as my primary data.

This method relates historical narratives and events with theoretical explanations. According to Aminzande (1993: 108), the researcher must provide "theoretically explicit narratives that carefully trace and compare the sequences of events constituting a process" of interest. These narratives "allow us to capture the unfolding of social action over time in a manner sensitive to the order in which events occur" (ibidem). The method is useful because it seeks to explicitly specify the linking causes and effects of a process. With this method, I try to identify the key events, processes, actors and decisions that link the development of the party of power in Kazakhstan with the literature on authoritarian parties.

More specifically, the theoretical propositions around which the analysis revolves are taken from the literature on "new authoritarianism", in particular from the developing literature

on authoritarian institutions. While here the hypotheses about party functions are presented and connected with the historical events constituting regime-threatening challenges and triggering the elites' response, they will be treated in greater detail later in the chapter.

Some preliminary discussion is needed, though. In particular, this regards the approach to the problem, which in this case is dynamic. Studies relying on a rational choice perspective like Magaloni's (2006; 2007; 2008) tend to deal with the issue of "why a party" only in the moment of its emergence, assuming, therefore, that the reason for a party to exist stays the same over time.

A partial exception is represented by Reuter & Remington (2009), who tried to treat the issue of the formation of United Russia in dynamic perspective, by looking also at the previous experiments of party of power. However, their goal was different. Given the fragmented nature of Russian elites – at least in comparison with Kazakhstan – to individuate the presence of higher or lower incentives for the elites in supporting the party of power is crucial in order to understand the reasons for the success of United Russia.

In this case, instead, the goal is to see how the party is used as a flexible tool to maintain stability. The control instruments seen before – institutional change, media access and administrative resources in general – are used as leverages in order to change the level of pressure exercised by the party on the opposition and civil society.

Time	Challenges	Strategies	Party Functions
1991- 1997	Inter-Institutional conflict, potential instability	Create functioning parties of power	Having taken control of the Mazhilis, Otan and other pro-regime parties ensure that legislation is passed smoothly and decrease the risk of conflicts
1997-2003	Elite splits, emergence of new political formations - some of the pro-regime parties become more independent	Access for other parties is further restricted (party and electoral legislation)	Marginalization of the opposition
		Other pro-regime parties are forced to merge into Otan (attacks on personalities)	With its stellar victory in 2007, Nur Otan shows to be a super-party, sends a "message of invincibility" to opposition and potential defectors
		Restrictive civil society legislation, ersatz social movements	
2004-2012	Further involvement in international politics – bid for OSCE chairmanship	Legislation is loosened , second party is created	Nur Otan takes charge of "democracy promotion"
	Signs of internal dissidence (protests in the Western regions), fear of propagation of instability from the region and outside, especially among youth (Colour revolutions, Kyrgyzstan 2010 events, Arab Spring).	Initiatives to get closer to people (Golos Naroda)	Party as the channel for closer connection between the people and the regime.
		Institution of a youth branch, Zhas Otan	Zhas Otan becomes a mobilizing force, co-opts young "leaders", involving them in regime-approved activities

Table 5.1 Challenges to the regime, elite strategies and party functions

5.1.1 The age of inter-institutional conflicts

Despite having tried already in the early 1990s to establish a party that would be the "functional equivalent" of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Brill Olcott, 2010: 93), the Kazakhstani elites and especially the leader Nursultan Nazarbayev had not invested significantly in the project (see chapter 4).

Their commitment increased only later, in connection with a situation of instability and inter-institutional conflict, when it became crucial to establish an effective control on the legislature. This challenge had its culminating moment during the 1995 parliamentary crisis.

As seen previously (see Chapter 3), the parliament resulting from the 1994 elections had a pluralist composition and, despite the executive's efforts to influence its composition, proved in several occasions to be vocal and independent.

The initial reaction to the legislature's attempts to establish barriers to the presidential power was of the "hard" type: the President dismissed the Parliament, substituted it with a hand-picked Assembly and ruled by decree for nine months. Moreover, media and opposition movements, who had become more vocal and engaged in street protests as a result of the parliamentary crisis, were silenced, and for days the army patrolled the streets of Almaty, officially busy in dealing with criminality (Kuttykadam, 2010). Even if it was effective, this strategy had enormous costs in terms of consensus and put the President and his circle in front of the need to find a more effective and less conflict-generating way to stay in power and "manage" the political system.

The answer was found in the establishment of a party of power, which could act as a loyal, flexible and reliable tool to solve the conflicts generated by the executive-legislative relation.

The one of dominating the state legislature in the interests of the executives is actually recognized as one of the most important features of post-Soviet "parties of power", especially of United Russia (Gelman, 2006; Meleshevich, 2007).

It is worth to dwell more on the mechanisms of this control and on what makes it preferable to a more personalist style of rule.

Vladimir Gelman (2006) pointed at the "reduction of transaction costs" as one of the main advantages of well functioning parties of power. Without the introduction of United Russia, Gelman argues, the Kremlin would have been forced to engage in a costly bargaining process with separate deputies and special interest groups. This would have implied the resort to the use of force, permanent purges and individual bargaining, all methods with high political and economic costs.

A party of power would ensure a better control of the legislature also avoiding the risk of open conflict between the legislature and the executive. Always in Russia, the presence of a strong pro-government party has been interpreted as the establishment of a *sui generis* Westminster model (Chaisty, 2008)[77]. In this system, the party, controlled by a solid party-based majority, dominates the Parliament and smoothly implements the political agenda of the executive. This situation is easily reversible, as the party is tightly controlled by the executive, and this "partisan-

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[77] The main, and obvious, difference with the authentic Westminster model is that the party of power is actually devoid of political authority and programmatic energy: this comes to it from the outside, from the President and the ruling elites from which the party is dependent.

parliamentary" phase can be easily ended by the President, who can take back in his hands the law-making activity and inaugurate a "presidential" phase (Chaisty, 2008). Interestingly enough, Chaisty points out that the president resorts to his decree power only in situations of serious crisis.

Indeed it seems that the use of unilateral tools such as the decree power is more frequent when the level conflict within a political system is high.

Moving from studies on the models of delegative democracy in Latin America to analyze the cases of Russia and Argentina, Willerton and his co-authors found that the choice of governing by decree is influenced not only by institutional and socio-economic factors, but also, and most importantly, by the level of conflict within the political system: governing by decree is a reliable unilateral means by which presidents can attempt to influence events and consolidate their power (Willerton *et al*, 2007).

The example of Kazakhstan confirms that ruling by decree is an effective but also dangerous tool. In the short term it has proved to be an effective way to solve conflicts, allowing bypassing an unruly legislature. But it is also very risky. It is dangerous for the leader to get to the rupture point of open conflict: the confrontation among institutions can possibly transfer to the square, generating greater instability, and this could be further kindled by a repressive reaction by the regime.

As mentioned, moments of tension followed indeed the decision of Nazarbayev to declare the state of emergency and rule by decree: and although the media and oppositions were quickly silenced, the possible costs of another similar crisis constituted a powerful incentive for implementing a party of power.

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Indeed, the successful establishment of Otan and later of Nur Otan made sure that the Parliament transformed into a rubber stamp for the Presidential legislative initiatives: Otan, the Agrarian Party, the Civic Party and Asar took progressively control of the Mazhilis (see Appendix Three). As a consequence, the President was not forced anymore to use his own legislative power[78].
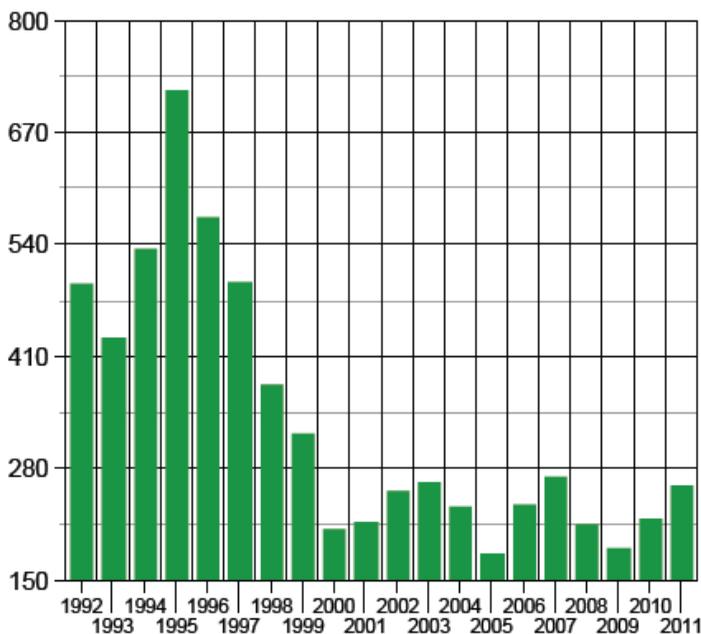
Figure 5.1 Number of Presidential Decrees per Year 1992 – 2011

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[78] In 1995 Nazarbayev had extensive decree powers, which had been accorded to him by the Kazakh SSR Parliament in order to solve another parliamentary crisis, in 1991 (Brill Olcott, 2010). According to the 1995 Constitution, the President of Kazakhstan "on the basis of and with the exercise of the Constitution and the laws, shall issue decrees and resolutions which are binding on the entire territory of the Republic" (Article 45). The entire text of the Constitution can be found at:
http://www.eicee.org/e_doc_kasachstan.html

The graphic (Figure 1) presents the number of Presidential decrees issued every year since 1992[79].

President Nazarbayev had released a large number of ukases between 1994 and 1997, with a peak in 1995, coinciding with the aforementioned parliamentary crisis and nine-month period of rule-by-decree. The number of decrees started to lower after the December 1995 elections, when pro-regime forces acquired a slightly steadier majority in the Parliament. However, it was only after 1999 that the President started to rely less on his own law-making powers. As mentioned previously, in 1999 the pro-presidential coalition which later merged to form Nur Otan formed a solid majority the Mazhilis. Despite a little fluctuation, the number of decrees remained low for the following years.

The establishment of a stronger party of power had, thus, the effect of imposing a more effective control on the Parliament and of decreasing the level of institutional instability. In this respect, the decision to establish a party of power can be interpreted as a step towards the establishment of a "soft authoritarian" regime, relying less on repression and more on subtle strategies of manipulation.

As seen before for the party, the reasons for preferring this kind of regime to a "hard" personalist one reside mainly in the high costs of repression, not only in terms of material costs of the coercive apparatus but also in terms of international isolation and risks of instability connected to succession crises.

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[79] The website of the President of Kazakhstan presents a list of the most important ukases. A comprehensive list can be found at
http://niiep.keu.kz/regulatory_framework/laws_and_decrees_of_the_president_of_kazakhstan/

5.1.2 Elite splits and the *super-party*

The Kazakhstani authorities found further incentives in the creation and the reinforcement of a strong pro-presidential party in the emergence of repeated conflicts within the elites. In the 1990s, their energies and resources were dispersed on a number of pro-regime parties, including Otan, the Civil Party and the Agrarian Party, all representing different groups within the government elite

A first event was the removal of the premier Akezhan Kazhegeldin in 1998: a former loyal ally of the President, Kazhegeldin declared his intention to compete in the 1999 Presidential elections and created his own political platform, the Republican People's Party of Kazakhstan. His personal political ambitions were soon curtailed, as his candidature for the Presidential office was never registered.

Again, the immediate response of the authorities to this new threat was of the "hard" type. Kazhegeldin was allegedly deprived of his assets, and, under the pressure of an investigation on his financial misdeeds, he was eventually forced to leave the country (Isaacs, 2011). His party managed to win one seat in the 1999 elections, but never managed to acquire more power, also due to the restrictive party and electoral legislation adopted in 2002 (see 4.2).

As Isaacs rightly notes, this was the first time that a political party which was not sponsored by the authorities had a secure and independent financial backing, and this fact led the authorities to re-think about their party-managing strategies and to increase their efforts to support a larger party of power (Isaacs, 2011). The abovementioned reforms, aimed at creating

higher barriers for other parties, were probably inspired by this event.

Another wave of crisis took place at the beginning of the 2000s, when a group of prominent young business people founded a new opposition movement, the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (*Demokraticheskiy Vybor Kazakhstana*, DVK). The movement's official aim was to claim for a better transparency and establish clearer anti-corruption rules. In particular, the group wanted to force the President to curtail his son-in-law's business activities: Rakhat Aliyev, husband to Nazarbayev's daughter Dariga, was allegedly taking undue advantage of his position of deputy head of the Committee on National Security (Brill Olcott, 2010).

The founders of DVK were mostly high-profile figures, like the head of Kazkommertsbank Mukhtar Ablyazov, the members of Parliament Bulat Abilov and Tolen Tokhtasynov, the akim of the Pavlodar Region Galymkan Zhakianov, the vice-premier Oraz Zhandosov and the former minister and businessman Mukhtar Ablyazov (Kuttykadam, 2010; Isaacs, 2011).

The real aim of this group was indeed to take a more active part in Kazakhstani politics. As noted by the expert Kharitonova, these were "young oligarchs", who had missed the chances deriving from the 1990s' privatization of assets, monopolized by the older and established Communist party elite. These young businessmen were eager to get their "piece of the pie", but had to ask for it in a public way, through the foundation of a political structure (interview, Kharitonova, 2011). To become a fully-fledged opposition movement was therefore probably not in the e plans of the movement. Another local politician, Kuttykadam, notes how they were actually fighting for the favour of

Nazarbayev, but "ended up where nobody had expected to, including DVK itself" (Kuttykadam, 2010: 144).

The DVK experience finished both for internal divisions and for the intervention of the central power. It became, though, a very serious lesson for the Kazakhstani authorities. As a result, the party of power was even more empowered, and ended up incorporating all the major pro-regime parties (interview, Kharitonova, 2011).

The decision to create a unified super-party has its roots also in another circumstance, the emergence of Asar in 2003. This was yet another pro-regime party, led by Nazarbayev's daughter Dariga. Despite being generally loyal, the party showed in several occasions its potential as an independent force. In 2004, candidates from Asar and Otan stood as adversaries in many districts, especially in the southern regions, where Asar had a larger power basis (interview, Zhanabayeva, 2012).

Moreover, it seems that, relying on the father's retirement, Dariga Nazarbayeva and her husband Rakhat Aliyev intended to use Asar as the basis for their rise to presidency. As noted by the former diplomat and political analyst Bakytbek Beshimov, "*Dariga, with her control of the media empire, considered herself as the rising star of Kazakhstani politics and proposed herself as a possible successor: in this period the media were full of articles arguing that was not impossible and actually desirable, even for an Asian country, to have a woman as a leader. In the same months, Dariga gave a few bold interviews, in which she openly and harshly criticized the bureaucracy*" (interview, Beshimov, 2011). According to Beshimov, with this behaviour Aliyev and Nazarbayeva generated a struggle among the elites, a predatory race that only partially became known to the public.

As a result, the president decided to get back in control and to take active measures in order to weaken the power of independent political players, as well as institutional reforms which would consolidate the monopoly of his party[80].

The party resulting from the merger, Nur Otan, was a *super-party*, an enormous political formation capable to monopolize the Mazhlis and the political space. The political ambitions of members of the elites, even belonging to the President's closest circle, had now to be channelled in the super-party. Moreover, the destinies of the DVK, but especially of Asar, serve as a reminder for anyone who would like to engage in an independent political project.

The very size of Nur Otan also discourages potential opponents, contributing to the party's "invincible" image. This particular aspect will be discussed later in the chapter.

The emergence of a party allowed the leadership to maintain an efficient control on the political system and to avoid the emergence of opponents. This contributed to characterize the authoritarian system of Kazakhstan as a "soft" one. This does not mean that repression is never used: investigations, economic pressures, intimidation and sometimes even violence are among the instruments of the regime. This use of hard coercion is limited, however, and control on the political sphere is mainly maintained through the party of power.

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[80] Including the adoption of Proportional Representation and the introduction of a 7% threshold. See Chapter 4 for details.

5.1.3 "Democracy promotion" and listening to "people's voices"

International recognition is one of the most common explanations for the presence of institutions like political parties in non-democratic regimes. For Kazakhstan this explanation assumes a particular value in the last five years, when the country leadership has made a remarkable effort to improve its international image.

In the words of the analyst Beshimov, "*The other reason* [for supporting a pro-presidential party] *is the imitation of western standards, for the purpose of complying with international obligations and gaining international legitimacy. In 2007 in Madrid, Nazarbayev's representative* [the Minister of Foreign Affair Marat Tazhin] *gave a bald speech promising democratic reforms, with the double purpose of promoting democratization, although their own way, and to reach international goals, including the OSCE chairmanship and regional leadership*".

Indeed, a crucial moment in this process is represented by the 2010 OSCE chairmanship. Kazakhstan had prepared carefully its candidature and worked very intensively for the previous five years, finally managing to get the support of both Western countries and Russia.

The country's candidature was accepted during the abovementioned OSCE foreign ministers' meeting on 30 November 2007 in Madrid, where the then Kazakh foreign minister Marat Tazhin officially stated the commitments taken by his country, including the adoption of a number of political

reforms before the actual beginning of the chairmanship year (Wołowska, 2010)[81].

The liberalization of the political systems was among these reforms, and was felt as particularly urgent by the OSCE, which had expressed concern especially after the 2007 parliamentary elections. Indeed, in that situation, the elites' supporting strategies had proved to be even too effective, producing a one-party parliament. And while this was a desirable effect at the domestic level, it had the disadvantage of making the monopoly condition very evident also in front of the demanding international community.

The answer was a mild liberalization. Trying to balance the necessity to comply with the Madrid commitments with maintaining control on the political field, the legislation on political parties and the electoral rule were slightly softened.

In 2008, the number of signatures required for party registration was reduced, as well as the number of people that have to be present at the founding congress (Brill Olcott, 2010: 253). Also, it was given more time to parties to prepare their documentations and it was stated that minor violations could not be used anymore as a reason to reject the whole application (Isaacs, 2011: 99).

The electoral law was also amended but, contrarily to the expectations, the 7% threshold was not lowered. Instead, a special provision was added in 2009: in the case of only one party overcoming the 7% limit, also the first runner-up is now

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[81] "Address of Ministry Marat Tajin, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, at the OSCE Ministerial Meeting," OSCE, November 29, 2007, http://www.osce.org/documents/html/pdftohtml/28529_en.pdf.html

allowed to enter the Mazhilis (Constitutional Law "On Elections" Art, 97.1.2).

These reforms also served the purpose of giving a better image of Nur Otan and of the authorities at the domestic level.

In fact, while the level of popularity of the regime remained high over time, local manifestations of dissent increased in the latest years, especially in the Western regions of the country.

Also, there were fears of instability propagating from neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, where repeated protests had brought down the regime of Kurmanbek Bakiyev.

The fear of contagion coming from "colour revolutions" was perceived as a serious threat from the authorities, and followed by a number of restrictive measures (especially relatively to youth organizations, see 5.2.5). At the same time, the elites worked on improving the popularity of the regime.

Again, they did so by re-tuning the party-supporting strategies. Although the fundamental situation of control was not endangered, the electoral and party legislation were emended to achieve a partial liberalization; also, a series of initiatives were put in place in order to give the party a better image.

First of all, the cooperation between Nur Otan and other political parties was enhanced. Representatives from all the political formations, apart from the radical opposition, are frequently gathered by Nur Otan. In these initiatives, the party of power appears in the position of "promoter of democracy". Actually, one of the goals of Nur Otan is to promote other parties, given their little experience and professionalism (interview, Rakymzhanov, 2011).

Another very important initiative, which was designed to bring the party closer to people without really losing control, was the project "*Khalyktyn dauycy - Golos Naroda*" (people's voice).

The project had a precedent, the initiative "*Otandastar*" (the listening Otan), but was never carried out on such a scale. In October 2011, especially designed boxes were placed in relevant landmarks of the most important cities of Kazakhstan in order to gather complaint and suggestions from the citizenship. In the capital city, Astana, more than 55.000 people "had the chance to express themselves and being listened to" (interview, Rakymzhanov, 2011). The merely symbolic nature of the events is clear when one looks at what was made public relatively to the content of messages: there was no real advice, criticism or complaints but just generic praise and support for the regime[82].

A last instrument in getting close to people and especially to youth, a category which could be potentially more tempted to engage in anti-regime protests, is the party youth branch, Zhas Otan. Of this it will be said more in the next section.

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[82] They regarded mostly the lack of patriotic education for young people, the love for the Fatherland, the respect for elderly people, peace and harmony; many expressed support for the program of the presidential party, aiming at reaching life improvement for each Kazakhstani citizen. It was noticed, that people should show a more proactive attitude, and participate in all the initiatives organized by the party "Nur Otan". There were many congratulations and wishes related to the twentieth anniversary of the KZ independence. The international recognition and the entry of Kazakhstan in the world elites are, for the Astana people, "first of all connected with the personality, recognized as of world profile, of the President of the Republic, Leader of the Party "Nur Otan", "Nursultan Abishevich Nazarbayev". See a speech on this topic by the Nur Otan Official Amyrkhan Rakymzhanov, held in Astana in November 2011 http://www.astana.kz/ru/node/46033.

5.2. Nur Otan's authoritarian functions

5.2.1. Political parties and regime stability

It was argued before that the party of power serves the elites by maintaining control on the political system in a "soft" and cost-effective way.

But which are the mechanisms by which the party manages to perform this function, so important for the regime's stability?

The literature on "authoritarian institutions" has advanced different hypotheses about the mechanisms by which institutions, including political parties, help maintaining authoritarian stability. They are said to enhance communication (Albrecht & Schlumberger, 2004; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006; Hermet, 1978), allow the co-optation of potential challengers (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006; Koehler, 2008), intimidate the opposition (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006; Geddes, 2003); contribute to the legitimation of authoritarian rule (Brooker, 2000; Albrecht & Schlumberger, 2004; Hermet, 1978).

The possible mechanisms can be grouped in two categories: the party could ensure that other elite members do not defect, and stay loyal to the regime (elite coordination); moreover, the party could organize and mobilize popular consensus for the regime (mass mobilization).

(i) Elite Coordination

The starting point of these hypotheses is the willingness of the authoritarian leader (the "dictator") to stay in power (Tullock 1987; Wintrobe 1998). The dictator has first of all the choice of relying on repression or trying to co-opt elite groups by

bestowing resources on them. In fact, elites play a pivotal role, as they can decide either to support the regime in place or to defect and support a potential opponent.

Elites can be co-opted through the promise of office or other spoils, or of policy concessions within the legislature (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006). While the role of legislature in authoritarian context is quite debated and has been shown to be of scarce relevance in several empirical studies (Lust-Okar, 2005, 2006; Blaydes, 2011), establishing a dominant party is seen as an effective way for the dictator to make "credible inter-temporal power-sharing deals with elite opponents" (Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010: 127). In particular, Magaloni (2008) notes that the sheer promise of spoils, office or policy concessions does not ensure stability in the long term because it creates a perverse system of incentives. The dictator is not motivated to remain faithful to his promises and not to abuse his "loyal friends" (Magaloni, 2008: 715); also, seen the lack of credibility in the dictator's commitment to them, the elites have quite a motivation to defect and trying to seize power autonomously, as soon as they have sufficient resources. Making his commitment visible, establishing a political party is a way for the dictator to make his power-sharing deals with elites more credible and, therefore, to correct this situation (Magaloni, 2006, 2008).

In these circumstances, the position and relative strength of elite groups is crucial: they should be strong enough to have some resources and to have a potential for defection, but still be in a relatively weaker position, compared to the ruler (Magaloni, 2008). The ability from both sides to "punish the other party if it decides to deviate from the joint-government arrangement" seems in fact particularly relevant in making this kind of

bargaining possible and effective (Boix & Svolik, 2008: 2 in Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010: 127).

Also, the party of power lengthens time horizons for the dictator and elites alike by acting as a "monopolist of jobs" (Magaloni, 2007: 19). To elites, the party appears as a highway for career advancements, lowering their incentives to defect both because the dictator's long-term commitment looks more credible, and because the party creates a sort of gradualism and progressiveness in the access to spoils, office and policy deals over time. This is possible only in a situation where the party has the total control of important jobs and privileges.

(ii) Mobilizing mass support

Mass consensus is as crucial as elite support for the dictator to survive without recurring to routine repression. The literature has indicated several ways a dominant party can serve this purpose. The party machine can be first of all used as a patronage system, distributing rents to loyal supporters and enacting a "punishment regime", leaving those who defect without privileges (Magaloni, 2006). An example of this were the Communist systems, which had on the one hand a total control of resources and positions and, on the other, an efficient espionage system which allowed to have information about individual loyalty (Magaloni, 2008; Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010).

Even in situations where this total control is not possible, consensus is crucial to regime stability, and the party can function as mobilizing force. In fact, consensus can be an informative signal of regime's stability: to know that the regime is widely supported assures citizens of the reliability of promises of rents and deters other elite groups from trying to organize

against the dictators (Kricheli, 2008 in Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010; Magaloni, 2008; Hermet, 1978). This explains why one-party regimes invest so much in over-winning elections, generating a large turnout and creating an image of invincibility (Geddes, 2006, 2008).

Another way to generate consensus is by promoting economic growth and having the party promoting redistribution policies. The connection between economic growth and the presence of an "enlightened dictator" has actually shown to be effective in maintaining autocratic stability, though so far it has not been clarified whether this works better in one-party regimes (Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010).

Finally, the activity itself of mass mobilization can serve for sustaining the regime. It does so by allowing the creation of a system of rewards for loyal party cadres who invest effort, resources and organizational skill in the process of mobilizing people for elections (Lazarev, 2005; Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010).

5.2.2 Nur Otan's functions: coordinating and managing elites

Establishing a dominant party has been seen as an effective way for the dictator to make "credible inter-temporal power-sharing deals with elite opponents" (Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010: 127). Making his commitment visible, establishing a political party is a way for the dictator to make his power-sharing deals with elites more credible and, therefore, to correct this situation (Magaloni, 2006, 2008).

A fundamental assumption of this theory is the position of relative strength of potentially competitive elite groups: they should be strong enough to have some resources and to have a

potential for defection, but still be in a relatively weaker position, compared to the ruler (Magaloni, 2008). The ability from both sides to "punish the other party if it decides to deviate from the joint-government arrangement" seems in fact particularly relevant in making this kind of bargaining possible and effective (Boix & Svolik, 2008: 2 in Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010: 127).

This assumption makes the application of this model problematic for Kazakhstan, where the power structure has a different balance. In this case, the relation between the centre and other elite groupings is heavily skewed in favour of the former. Moreover, this relationship is not likely to be mediated through the party. The party exists, and appears as a dominant actor in the electoral arena as well as in the legislature. But, as we have seen before, its power is limited when it comes to key decisions. The real power relations are to be looked elsewhere, in the informal sphere (family, clan, client-network relations between these centres).

The party of power and the party system as a whole still have an important regime-supporting function. We can call it, rather than of "elite coordination", a function of "elite management". The party landscape in Kazakhstan is currently characterized by the presence of several parties which are formally independent but actually support the President and his program, while they manage to advance the agenda of their leader. They are all more or less connected to the power elites: real opposition is instead marginalized and in some cases relegated to extra-institutional forms of opposition (interviews, Kosanov 2011 and Satpayev 2011; see also Isaacs 2011).

Party of Power	Pro-Regime / "Loyal Opposition" Parties	Opposition Parties
Nur Otan*	Ak Zhol*	OSDP-Azat
	People's Communist Party of Kazakhstan*	Communist Party of Kazakhstan
	Social Democratic Party "Auyl"	
	Party of Patriots	"Alga" (not registered)
	The Green Party "Rukhaniyat"	
	Democratic Party "Adilet"	

Table 5.2 Party Landscape in Kazakhstan (Sources: interview, Kosanov 2011; Isaacs 2011) *are currently Parliamentary Parties

In the 1990s and early 2000s there were even more of these parties, formed by elite members to represent and protect their interests[83]. For the asymmetric nature of the power structure, though, they did not (and do not) represent a threat for the ruling elite or for the party of power. Actually, whenever a potentially dangerous actor entered the political scene, it was eliminated, often by changing the rules of the game, as it was seen in chapters 3 and 4.

A certain degree of competition, though, is tolerated, and actually encouraged. As Satpayev notes, this gives an impression of openness and, at the same time, by competing with each other, different pressure groups, represented by parties, balance each other and prevent each other from becoming excessively powerful. Instead of having one, dangerous, rival, the President has to deal with a large group of ambitious players, who compete with each other. The President acts as an arbiter between them: now he offers assistance to one, now to another, but he remains above the political competition (interview, Satpayev 2011).

Interestingly enough, the elite groups who engage in party competition fight *for* the favour of the President, knowing that he is the only source of real power in the country.

The impression is actually that the President periodically encourages these competitions, in order to keep the system in a condition of equilibrium, with forces balancing each other. The rise of Asar and the political involvement of Dariga Nazarbayeva in 2002-2003, for instance, were in part caused by the repeated declarations of the President about his upcoming retirement,

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[83] Drawing on the literature on post Soviet parties, Isaacs calls these parties "elite parties" (Isaacs, 2011).

which gave the impression that there would be an opening for succession (interview, Beshimov, 2011).

The party system works, thus, as an *arena*, where political parties affiliated to various elite groupings fight with each other as sorts of *avatars*. Just like Nur Otan, which is only the reflection of the centre of political power in the electoral and legislative field, other parties reflect the influence and strength of other segments of the elite. And this is done not only to the benefit of international observers, or of the domestic electorate: by competing in the party arena, the elite groupings have a chance to try their chances in a controlled way, without openly challenging the leader. Actually, in this way they manage to get closer to the leader and to the system of privileges that is associated with the highest circle.

This is true even for some of the political formations that later have been labelled as "opposition", like the DVK movement: the goal of its leaders, powerful businessmen in their respective sectors, was apparently to "make some noise and get back to their positions more powerful". For their admission, they "ended up where nobody would have expected to" (Kuttykadam, 2010: 144).

This strategy of allowing a certain degree of competition while steering it in the desired direction reminds what has been called "managed pluralism" referring to the control of the political system established by Putin in the early 2000s (Balzer, 2003).

While, comparatively, the Kazakhstani system is more of a closed one, Nazarbayev, like Putin, allows a certain degree of openness and competition while focusing all the restraining efforts on the most strategic sectors and making sure that these expressions of pluralism do not get too independent.

It is a suitable strategy for a regime developing in the "soft authoritarian" direction, because it allows maintaining the effective control of the system while gaining on the side of international image as well as of internal legitimacy.

5.2.3 Career perspectives

Another interesting function assigned by theory to authoritarian parties is the one of "monopolist of jobs" (Magaloni, 2007: 19). To elites, the party would appear as a highway for career advancements, lowering their incentives to defect both because the dictator's long-term commitment looks more credible, and because the party creates a sort of gradualism and progressiveness in the access to spoils, office and policy deals over time. This is possible only in a situation where the party has the total control of important jobs and privileges.

An example of this function, particularly relevant for Kazakhstan because of the long period spent under Soviet rule, is the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. That party worked as a "social elevator" for its members, allowing for high social mobility. To be a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was a reason for pride and prestige, and in the majority of the cases, the result of a deliberate decision, sometimes cynical and tormented, taken in order to increase one's chances in making a career and achieving a better life standard (Glazov, 1988).

As far as Nur Otan is concerned, the lack of central data on membership makes the task of investigating this aspect particularly difficult. However, the impression received from fieldwork is somewhat different from what posed by theory or by the example of the CPSU. Party membership seems indeed necessary to maintain one's position in jobs paid out of the

State's budget. According to data relative to the Almaty city branch, about 30% of the party members work in the public service, and constitutes the bulk of Nur Otan membership. Also, there are party cells in the main public services, like hospitals and schools, who are in charge of "coordinating the party activities within these institutions" (interview, Almaty Nur Otan Statistics Department, 2011). Indeed, these party coordinators work as controllers and, as it will be seen later on, as mobilizing forces in times of elections.

At the same time, party membership, at least in these cases, often comes with the job itself: membership is therefore is not a distinguishing factor among employees, and is likely to be irrelevant in one's career advancements (interviews: Kharitonova, 2011; Satpayev, 2011; Sarym, 2011).

The recruitment of young people seems to follow different routes, namely personal connections within the elite or a career within government institutions, at the centre or the local level. In the words of local experts:

"Many young people indeed think that membership in NO would "open doors" and facilitate their careers. Actually, it is not the reality. Without some form of support, relatives in political elites, it is not possible for a young person to make a career. […] It is very difficult to use the party as a trampoline to start one's career" (interview, Satpayev 2011).

"The party as a social elevator? There is not such a thing. Indeed there are is a big number of talented youths around Nur Otan. On the other hand, I do not think that the party as it is, works as social elevator. At least I did not see in any case that somebody came to Nur Otan at age 18 and then, at 35 he was a Minister. I do not remember any case like this. I think that here it is more important the role of bureaucratic officers, to enter the team of this or that akim, governor or minister.

This is a common way to make a career, and actually the only social elevators. Others do not work" (interview, Sarym 2011).

This perspective is actually coherent with what said before about the subordinate position of Nur Otan with respect to the ruling elites. The party does not have sufficient control on strategic positions and entrance mechanisms in the civil service to be a "monopolist of jobs". These mechanisms, instead, are firmly in the hands of the power elites who founded the party, too.

On the other hand, to be a member of the party is often perceived as beneficial for one's career: many people consider being part of a "party of bureaucrats" an advantage and a possibility for a fast career (Isaacs, 2011: 107, quotes from interview). This is especially true for young Zhas Otan members who hope that being in the party youth branch is "*the first step*" of a brilliant career involving "*going to Astana*" (interview, Khalbekov, 2011). This perception could constitute a function of the party, as it is in itself consensus-generating. Possibly, it helps the regime by attracting young and ambitious people into the camp of pro-regime forces with the promise of brilliant perspectives, rather than leaving them joining the opposition.

The regime is currently trying to enhance this perception. The creation of channels for the recruiting of young people – including the Youth Reserve of Cadres and Zhas Otan itself – can be seen as an effort to attract talented young people into the pro-regime camp, besides being a way to increase the country's social capital. This trend has been developed over the years (see also 5.2.5), one of the earliest initiatives in this sense being the study-abroad program Bolashak (Future). The program is officially open to everyone, although it received some criticism because it requires the grantees' families to provide a financial guarantee in case the young person does not come back to

Kazakhstan after their study period[84]. The interesting aspect here is that Bolashak alumni have to spend a period working for the government administrations: while this contributes to the increase of competence of the administration, it also helps maintaining talented young people under the close eye of the centre, far from the temptation of joining the opposition.

Recently, the president has confirmed that youth social mobility is a theme of particular relevance for the President and, consequently, for Nur Otan. In a recent speech, Nazarbayev has stated that the instauration of "social elevator" for young people constitutes a high priority for the country (Nazarbayev, 2012).

At a higher level, party membership has more a quality of "loyalty card". Membership is requested to high-rank officials only to show their loyalty to the centre. In a local political analyst's words, "*A lot of akims and high-rank officials are members of Nur Otan, but this is only because they are part of president's Nazarbayev's team. If you are a member of the team, you should be a member of the party*" (interview, Satpaev 2011)[85].

It is not uncommon that a Ministry joins the party soon after he has been appointed (interview, Nurmakov 2011). Also, in one occasion a number of members of the cabinet joined *en masse*. This coincided with the President's announcement that he would become party chairman (see 4.1.3) and helps to consolidate his rule by organizing mass mobilization for the regime.

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[84] This would mean that poor families would not have access to the program.
[85] This is true only since 2007, when people who hold state positions have been allowed to be party members. See Isaacs, 2011. Officers of the army and of the police forces are not allowed to join political parties, as well as judges.

5.2.4 Electoral mobilization and internal loyalty

Nur Otan and its youth branch Zhas Otan are primary actors in electoral campaigning. This is done chiefly through the capillary diffusion of the party's branches on the territory, even in the most remote villages, and the party presence in institutions like schools and hospitals. Electoral campaigns are organized efficiently, also thanks to the impressive amount of administrative resources devoted to it. The party also enjoys, as mentioned before, a privileged access to the main mass media, especially television channels.

The main party's activity seems to collect on the President's immense popular support. Electoral campaigns mostly revolve in fact around the figure of the President and his achievements during his 20-year rule. The party defines itself as "The President's party" and its main programmatic position is the one to "implement the plans and projects of the President to the advantage of the whole Kazakhstani people"[86].

It should be added that extensive campaigning is accompanied by occasional irregularities, such as multiple voting and ballot stuffing, regularly reported by the international organizations in charge of electoral monitoring. Irregularities are more common in rural districts, where the presence of opposition activists is lower.

Efforts are repaid by impressive vote shares and turnout values, which in some cases look unrealistic, especially for the last two electoral cycles[87].

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[86] The expression "party of the majority" (*partiya bolshinstva*) is found in the party programme, page 24. http://www.ndp-nurotan.kz/new/documents/Program.pdf.

[87] There is only anecdotic knowledge about *raions* (local administrations) where Nur Otan has received more than 100% of votes.

Provinces	1999	2004	2007	2012
Akmola	38,14	58,68	81,34	77
Aktobe	36	63,06	90,48	83,61
Almaty city	26,21	41,1	62,8	69,71
Almaty Province	40,39	64,44	93,62	84,02
Astana city	35,08	53,25	82	80,1
Atyrau	26,05	71,1	94,4	84,72
East Kazakhstan	23,41	59,37	84,57	80,69
Karagandy	27,22	60,03	94,69	85,63
Kostanay	17,89	58,86	91,87	83,1
Kyzylorda	24,32	34,49	86,41	78,74
Mangystau	31,21	47,14	96,9	79,51
North Kazakhstan	15,68	81,22	91	82,7
Pavlodar	21,61	58,01	82,61	79,92
South Kazakhstan	46,92	65,68	88,09	80,1
West Kazakhstan	29,65	57,65	82	82,66
Zhambyl	36,49	68,16	87,06	79,2

Table 5.3 Nur Otan's vote shares (%) in Parliamentary elections, by province, 1999-2012

	1999	2004	2007	2012
Turnout	62,56	56,7	64,56	75,45

Table 5.4 Voter turnout (%) for Parliamentary Elections, nation-based, 1999-2012[88]

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[88] Sources: Central Electoral Commission website, Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, (official government bulletin), IDEA, http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?CountryCode=KZ

A reason for this overdoing could be a preoccupation for giving an "image of invincibility", which would deter the opposition from even thinking to compete with the party of power. This pattern is pretty common in authoritarian context. Considering the case of the Mexican PRI, Magaloni (2006: 8) has shown that "a public image of invincibility" helped maintaining stability by discouraging defections from within the ruling party, as well as limiting the hopes of the opposition. High turnout, as well as crushing voting margins are part of this strategy, which include also ritualistic ceremonies and a large use of symbols (Magaloni, 2006, 2008).

Another reason for election "over-management" is more complex and related to a possible use of the party as tool for evaluating the loyalty to the regime of low and middle-level officials, in particular of regional governors (*oblastnye akimy*). A sort of competition between the *akims* seems to be in place (interviews, Kharitonova, 2011, Sarym, 2011). Every governor puts an extraordinary effort in delivering a better implementation of the "electoral plan" requested by the centre, investing huge amounts of administrative resources and pre-empting employees to vote for the "right" party. *Akims* are directly appointed by the President and are deeply aware of their actions being constantly observed. Moreover, it seems common for competing functionaries to collect information on *akims*' mistakes (including poor electoral performance) and to use this information to report them to the centre and try to take their place (interview, Satpayev, 2011)[89]. Therefore, electoral results could be one of the criteria used by the leader in order to evaluate the performance and the loyalty of local administrators.

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[89] I am actually working on a more detailed study on these dynamics, together with a colleague from New York University.

5.2.5 Youth mobilization

Zhas Otan performs a very important role in the control and mobilization of youth also in non-electoral periods. Its local branches organize meetings, conferences and travel to other cities, and these initiatives involve a growing number of university students and young workers.

The practice is not a new one: for instance, Soviet leaders constructed a full system of children and youth organizations (from Pioneers to Komsomol), making sure that the next generation grew under the eye of the party, and educated according to the state ideology, Communism.

But what is the role of a youth organization in a soft authoritarian regime like the one in Kazakhstan? In this case there is no such thing as a defined state ideology, and, differently from the Soviet Union, there is an array of national and international non-governmental organizations which are, at least in theory, allowed to work freely.

Graeme Robertson (2007), who defined such organizations as "ersatz social movements", found that the role of these organizations in hybrid regimes is to contribute achieving elite coordination (Robertson, 2007: 190). Mass protests are particularly dangerous for regimes where the stability relies on a frail alliance between key elite players. In that context, "even small signs of weakness", like allowing street protests, can cause the defection of allies. Therefore, the regime is forced either to use the hard hand on even small protests ("coercion"), or to try and "channel" internal protest energies in regime-approved or regime-based organizations. The full control of the square gives the regime an "air of invincibility", and reinforces the trust of allies (Robertson, 2007: 169-171).

We have seen before that in Kazakhstan the elite coordination mechanism is slightly different from the one illustrated here. In Kazakhstan the system of loyalties is mostly centred on the figure of the leader, who maintains individual relations with most members of the elite.

Also the elite splits examined before (5.1) did not originate from street protests, but in the few occasions the president Nazarbayev expressed the will to retire, or showed signs of personal weakness. Moreover, at least in regard of movements which originated within the ruling elite, it was never real defections, but rather battles to obtain the favour of the leader.

Still, the regime largely invests in the control and mobilization of youth, through Zhas Otan and other organizations.

One reason for this could be the fear of propagation of instability as a result of "colour revolutions". The latter is the common denomination of a wave of popular protests taking place in Serbia (2000), Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005) and resulting in regime change.

In all these cases, youth organizations had a primary role in the protests, allegedly with the support of international NGOs. In the Post-Soviet region, in fact, "colour revolutions" were interpreted as events driven by external powers, particularly the United States, a version promoted by Russia in disagreement with most Western analysts' understandings (Jackson, 2010)[90].

Almost paradoxically, these events were instead the trigger of a reinforcement of autocracy in the region, mostly led by Russia (Finkel & Brudny, 2012; Finkel & Brudny, 2012b), and gave

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[90] Jackson mentions a number of these reports, for instance: Karatnycky, A. (2005). Ukraine's orange revolution. *Foreign Affairs* 84 (2): 35–52. Hale, H. (2006). Democracy or autocracy on the march? The coloured revolutions as normal dynamics of patronal presidentialism. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 39 (3): 305–329.

origin to a process that has been defined of "regional authoritarian learning" (Jackson, 2010).

One of the lessons learnt from these events by Russian and Central Asian leaders alike, was that state weakness was one of the reasons for the success of protests, and that a "tough stance against protestors [...] was the remedy" (Jackson, 2010: 107).

As a result, the regimes studied the techniques of mobilization allegedly used by western democracy promoters during "colour revolutions" and attempted to find mirroring counter-measures to them, by developing a "toolkit" of measures (Finkel & Brudny, 2012). These measures included restrictive policies towards foreign NGOs, often advised by Russia (Tolstrup, 2007); tighter controls on the electoral process, including limitations in media access and the adoption of restrictive electoral legislation; the establishment of an alternative system of electoral monitoring, which contributed to delegitimize Western criticism of electoral standards and to spread a different, local, understanding of democracy (Fawn, 2006).

The control of existing youth organizations, as well as the establishment of a regime-supported one, can be seen as part of this strategy to avoid contagion.

First of all, the legislation regulating civil society organizations was tightened. Although the adoption of a very restrictive law on NGO-control law was avoided when the United States registered strong objections (Kramer, 2008), the pressure on NGOs became stronger. The law on Extremism, adopted in 2005, limits de facto the freedom of association. Also, the 2005 amendments to the law on Elections introduced restrictions to the activity of international NGOs, accused of interfering in post-electoral protests finalized at changing elections results.

Also, especially designed organizations were potentiated or set up in order to achieve a better control of youth-

The Youth Congress of Kazakhstan was founded in 2002 and became even more active after 2004. This is an umbrella organization, which gathers almost all the youth NGOs in the country[91], and provides them with generous opportunities for funding, usually in exchange for not engaging in criticism towards the regime (interview, Mednikova, 2011).

Another organization is the Student Alliance, created in 2005. This gathered all the, previously independent, student self-government bodies in universities and colleges. According to the youth activist and journalist Mednikova, through the Alliance, the regime has taken the full student body under control: the organization controls the Committees for Youth Policy present in every university: often, the head of this body is in close contact with Nur Otan. This makes sure there is no "dissent" in the universities (interview, Mednikova, 2011)[92].

Zhas Otan has obviously a primary role in this aspect, too. Founded in 2008, the youth branch of the party of power has been extremely active in recruiting young people and organizing regime-approved initiatives.

Formal rules and the distribution of resources are again among the authorities' preferred leverages to control the sector. Similarly to what happens with political parties and mass media, the NGOs which are in the pro-regime camp and show their

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[91] Apparently, only ten youth non-governmental organizations have refused to enter the Congress (interview, Mednikova, 2011). The organization's website is
http://www.zhastar.kz
[92] The interviewee used the Russian expression *inakomyslie*, which literally means "think differently": this was a very common expression during Soviet times in order to indicate political dissent. Indeed she compared the current situation to what was happening in the country in Soviet times.

loyalty to the regime receive a better treatment than independent civil society organizations: they encounter fewer problems with registration, and have privileged access to state funding.

The funding system works mostly through the Social Procurement Program, regulated by a 2005 Law. With this system, the government can hire NGOs to provide social services. The scarce transparency of the rules allows a great deal of discretion from the authorities' side on the nature and orientation of the financed activities.

The implementation of this program coincided with the departure from Kazakhstan of a number of international donors (interview, Mednikova, 2011). Actually, some analysts reckon that the government's intention in permitting contracts for NGOs was to reduce the sector's reliance on foreign donors.

In any case, after 2006 a great number of organizations were left without funding and had little choice but trying to get these funds. Interestingly enough, this changed also the nature of the activities organized, the first initiatives to disappear being project about citizen education (interview, Mednikova, 2011).

This is also the result of a precise strategy: not only "undesirable" organizations are crowded out from the civil society scene, but also "unacceptable" projects and ideas, meaning everything that diverts young people's energy away from politics.

The array of activities of the Youth Congress is a bright example of this tendency: cultural activities (the "Delphic Committee"), reforestation projects ("Zhasyl El", which actually sees young people planting trees), charity and family support ("Zhas Otau") and healthcare promotion ("Future without Drugs").

Zhas Otan is not different in this respect: despite being part of a political party, its activities are mostly non-political: charity projects, debates, activities finalized at the promotion of patriotic feelings (like the construction of "The largest flag of Kazakhstan").

There is an important exception, and it is related with the necessity, for these ersatz movements, to be attractive for young people and to give them an incentive for participation (Robertson, 2007).

In Kazakhstan, the most appealing feature of these organizations is their connection with the government structure. Thanks to their privileged position, they offer young people the possibility of getting skills and competences useful on the job market or even direct access to civil service.

The Youth Congress, for instance, sponsors a "School of Government Service". The school is organized with the support of the State agency for the Civil Service and offers, apart from courses, internships in government agencies. The possibility of being hired after the internship is stated explicitly in the project description: "*Those completing an internship at the School of Government Service will be given priority when they apply for jobs in state institutions, as they already possess sector-specific skills*"[93].

The same is true also for Zhas Otan. Many young people enter the organization mostly because they wish to pursue a career in the civil service.

Even more than the Youth Congress, Zhas Otan can boast a direct link with the government structures. Through the program "*Maladyozhnyi Kadrovyi rezerv*" (Reserve of Young

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[93] http://www.zhastar.kz/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=35&Itemid=40&lang=en

Cadres), Zhas Otan selects talented young people for internships in various organizations[94].

This feature is very attractive for young people, as it is working in Zhas Otan in itself. Being part of the organizations is perceived as a way to start a bright career. In the words of the deputy director of the Almaty Zhas Otan branch: "*It is useful. I am a political scientist and came here to get some experience, work with youth, with people. And then, it will not be difficult for me to work in the civil service or in some* apparat. *I think I have gathered relevant experience. I worked three years with Nur Otan in the* raion *office, and learned a lot. For young people this is very good, it is a position that gives good perspectives*. […] *Before me, here many guys worked, and now one works in the Central Apparatus, another studies at the President's Academy, others work in good company, another is a journalists*".

Another Zhas Otan activist pointed out, "We receive many skills, we learn how to *draft various reports* […], *we learn the art of personnel management. We also have the chance to meet various people, politicians, etc. We have a chance to show our skills and then it is easier for us to find a job. As a result* [of this activity], *our CV is better"* (interview, Zhas Otan activist, 2011).

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[94] The program is run by Zhas Otan and the Association of Bolashak Alumni. http://www.rezerv.kz/ru/node/11

Chapter 6.

Nur Otan as a "post-Soviet party of power": looking for signs of Russian influence[95]

Striking similarities exist between the Russian and the Kazakhstani parties of power. Both United Russia and Nur Otan emerged as a result of a progressive consolidation of their party systems in monopolist sense, and followed similar steps in their evolution. Both rely on a vague, all encompassing ideology, and define themselves as the *leader's party*[96]. Finally, both originated within the executive branches of their governments, and are extensively supported by ruling elites, which provide them with administrative resources and privileged access to state media.

An interesting hypothesis is the one that sees Russia exerting its influence on the Kazakhstani party system evolution as a part of a process of more or less intentional and direct diffusion of non-liberal democratic values.

As a regional power, Russia has a great influence on Central Asia and had increasingly shown an interest in promoting regimes with similar values and sometimes even in hindering

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[95] This chapter largely draws on the conference paper "Was the *party of power* exported from Russia to Kazakhstan? The diffusion of authoritarian institutions' and values from Russia to Central Asia", that I presented at the Panel "I regimi alternativi alla democrazia: Cina, Russia e Iran (1)"; XXV Convegno SISP, Palermo 8-10 September 2011. An extended version of the paper is currently prepared for publication in a book edited by Dr. Roberto Di Quirico and Dr. Elena Baracani.

[96] United Russia's founding values are vague ideas of modernization, patriotism and social conservatism that are sometimes summarized by the term "Putinism". Putin's endorsement was a decisive factor in determining Unity's success (Colton & McFaul, 2000), and this support continued when United Russia took over, constituting "a major resource for the party of power" (Gelman, 2006: 8). During his presidency, Medvedev repeatedly addressed it as the "ruling party". It is possible to watch his address to United Russia in occasion of the Tenth Party Congress at http://rutube.ru/tracks/1219630.html?v=ea97dbd1514fea1e29dbe2b6042bea41

democratization processes in its neighbourhood (Kaestner, 2010). Hence, the question whether Russia has played some role in promoting or encouraging the formation of a similar party of power to be used as a tool of rule seems more than legitimate.

6.1 The Parties of Power of Russia and Kazakhstan

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the monopoly of the Communist Party, both Russia and Kazakhstan experienced what has been described as the "swing of a pendulum" (Gelman, 2006: 546). After a phase of proliferation of small parties in the 1990s, their party systems consolidated around a dominant party of power, which monopolized the legislature as well as the political scene, and marginalized oppositions.

A look to the Effective Number of Parliamentary Parties (EPI) shows that the two countries experienced similar patterns of change, although on different levels. Table 6.1 reports values of this measure for a number of post-Soviet countries since independence[97]. For Russia and Kazakhstan the EPI assumes relatively high values in the 1990s (6.19 and 3.96, respectively). In the 2000s, instead, it drops dramatically, as a result of the emergence and increasing success of United Russia (founded in 2001 as Unity) and Nur Otan (instituted, with the name of Otan, in 1999). Visualization is presented in Figure 6.1.

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[97] The index is calculated according to the formula $N = 1/\sum_{i=1}^{n} p_i^2$ where p is the proportion of seats assigned to each party as a result of an election. See Laakso, M. and R. Taagepera (1979) and Gallagher and Mitchell (2008). Post Soviet countries were considered with the exception of the three Baltic republics (more similar to Central and Easter Europe), Belarus and Turkmenistan: the latter were excluded since their parliaments include almost totally non-partisan members. Calculations were performed for Parliamentary elections in the period 1993-2012. The EPI is illustrated as a continuous line only in order to give an indication of the trend followed by the index. This does not mean that the value has assumed intermediate values between electoral cycles.

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	1993	1994	1995	1998	1999	2000	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012
Armenia			2.16		3.72			5.27				3.37				2.74
Azerbaijan			2.57			2.46				2.84				2.08		
Kazakhstan		4.67	3.96		4.37				2.66			1				1.37
Kyrgyzstan			1.34			2.15						1.55		4.9		
Moldova		2.62		3.43		1.85				2.31			2.45 (April) 3.32 (July)	3.23		
Russian Federation	6.19		5.21		5.5			3.34				1.92			2.8	
Tajikistan			2.3			2.77				1.47				1.31		
Uzbekistan		1.98		5.26			5.87				3.41	3.3		3.54		

Table 6.1 Effective Number of Parliamentary Parties in selected former Soviet Union countries – 1993 - 2012
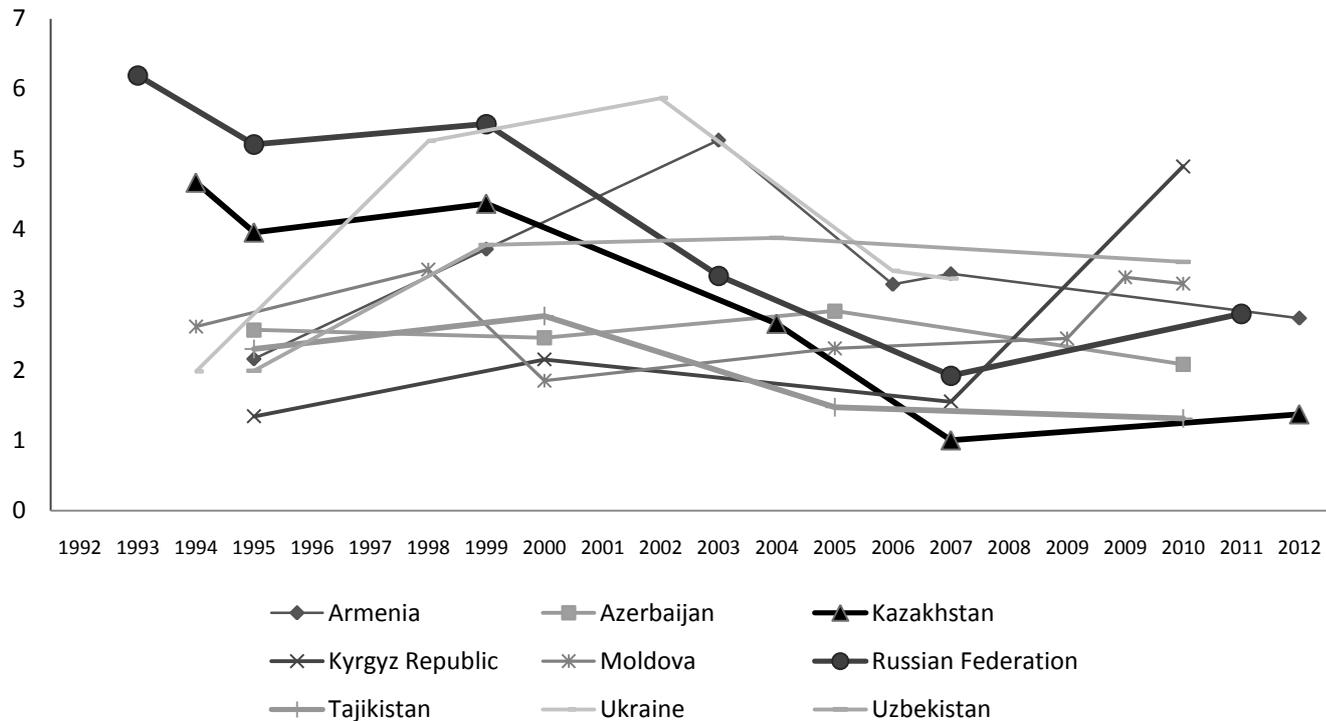
Figure 6.1 Effective Number of Parliamentary Parties in selected former Soviet Union countries – 1993 - 2012

Even if in the 1990s in Kazakhstan there was not a situation of party-system "hyper-fragmentation", as it was in Russia (Hale, 2006), there were indeed several political parties competing in elections; and, similarly to Russia, these parties were pushed to the margins of the political scene by the emergence of Nur Otan and by the progressive weakening of oppositions. In the words of another analyst, Kazakhstan "tried pluralism and abandoned it" (Brill Olcott, 2010: 87).

In both cases the role of elites in party-building and supporting has been crucial: parties of power are top-down created and make an extensive use of so-called "administrative resources" in order to mobilize citizens for electoral ends as well as to perform their role of elite coordinators. This is important if we hypothesize, as we do here, a reciprocal influence between the two processes: if it is elites who play a crucial role in establishing, maintaining and dismissing parties of power, we have to look at them and at their discourse if we want to understand whether they are indeed conditioning each other in authoritarian parties-building.

The evolution of the Kazakhstani party of power has been presented earlier (see chapter 4.3).

In Russia, the Kremlin engaged in party building already in the early 1990s. The elites established the first potential parties of power in occasion of the 1993 elections. Two parties, Russia's Choice and the Party of Russian Unity and Accord, were created but they obtained a scarce success, gaining 15.5 percent and 6.7 percent of the vote respectively and occupying 106 out of 450 seats in the State Duma. Neither party was able to control the parliamentary agenda or to impose the will of the president on the Duma. Lacking legislative success, both parties rapidly lost membership and the support of the ruling elites.

Elites' support, in fact, soon shifted to two other parties. For the Duma elections of 1995, the Kremlin backed the left-wing Bloc of Ivan Rybkin and the right-wing Our Home is Russia (Nash Dom – *Rossiya*, NDR). However, also these parties did not manage to establish a solid majority in the Duma. The former got only three seats; the latter, with 10.1 percent of the vote and 55 seats, was unable to oppose the major decisions of the Communist-dominated legislature. The fate of NDR was similar to its predecessors: it lost heavily in the next parliamentary elections. The main reasons for this scant success were individuated in the lack of commitment of President Yeltsin (Colton & McFaul, 2000) and the scarce resources and expertise invested by the elites in these first party projects (Gelman, 2006).

A different situation was the one of the major contenders in the 1999 parliamentary elections, Unity (Edinstvo) and the "would-be party of power" Fatherland–All Russia (Otechestvo – Vsya Rossiya, OVR), which represented the interests of regional governors (Colton & McFaul, 2000). Unity in particular received the support of the Kremlin and the open endorsement of Vladimir Putin (Colton & McFaul, 2000 and 2003). It received 23.3 percent of the vote, while OVR got 13.3 percent, occupying 80 and 69 seats respectively. With the further consolidation of the Russian elite around Vladimir Putin on the eve of the 2000 presidential elections, the parties established a pro-government coalition in the Duma. The centrist coalition of four factions and groups (Unity, OVR, Russia's Regions, and People's Deputy) controlled a firm majority of 235 out of 450 Duma seats. United Russia originated in December 2001 as a result of the merger between Unity, OVR, and Russia's Regions (Gelman, 2002).

United Russia was the major winner of the 2003 parliamentary elections, primarily due to the strong endorsement from the president, Vladimir Putin. Together with latent coalition politics

with minor parties and independent candidates in single-member districts this led to unexpected results: United Russia got only 37.8% in party list voting but in the State Duma received more than 2/3 of seats, and thus formed a "manufactured over-majority" (Golosov, 2005: 108-119).

Ruling elites continued to support the party of power also later, by implementing a series of reforms aimed at preserving the central position of the party of power monopoly on the Russian political scene. In 2005 the threshold to enter the parliament was increased from 5% to 7%, and the parties received strong incentives to merge rather than to form coalitions as electoral coalitions were prohibited (Hale, 2006). Registration of new parties became more difficult, requiring a higher number of members (from 10,000 to 50,000) and of regional branches (in two thirds rather than in half of the subjects of the Federation) (Gelman, 2008).

Also the abolition of popularly elected regional governors enhanced the positions of the party of power, as reduced the influence of the powerful but divided regional elites in favour of the party of power (Gelman, 2006).

United Russia obtained impressive results in the 2007 Parliamentary elections: 64.30% and 315 seats. It also dominates in the regions, being present in 83 regions, and dominating in 81. In many cases it has the two thirds of seats. The somewhat disappointing results obtained in 2011 did not undermine the dominant position of United Russia in the Duma, although its majority is now limited to a bit more than half the seats (238 on 450).

In sum, the two parties share a similar evolutionary pattern, significantly influenced by executive elites through the use of "institutional engineering" and "administrative resources",

including privileged access to state media (Gelman, 2008; Del Sordi, 2010). The timeline of this evolution is parallel: while less than successful experiments were carried on in the early 1990s, Otan and United Russia were founded respectively in 1999 and 2001, and have dominated since, incorporating other forces and extending their mobilization basis. Actually, as it will be seen later, the element of timing further complicates the discussion about the presence of a Russian influence and makes it more difficult to argue that such a process is in place.

6.2 Looking for signs of influence

The presence of a party of power is among the most important elements of the "authoritarian toolkit" characterizing the Russian regime (Silitski, 2009). The term "party of power" has been used mainly to indicate a Russian phenomenon, the one of political parties founded by or connected with the Kremlin in the 1990s and 2000s, and only later spread to other cases in the post-Soviet space.

Some of the Central Asian countries have parties of power, or at least attempted to build them: in Kyrgyzstan, the former president Bakiyev had tried to consolidate his power around the party Ak Zhol, although with scarce success (Koehler, 2008); in Uzbekistan, at some point a pro-presidential bloc of parties was built, which "modelled on Putin's pro-presidential 'Party of Power' in Russia" (Collins, 2006: 261). As seen before, the Kazakhstani party Nur Otan shares striking similarities with its Russian counterpart, United Russia.

Similarities, obviously, are not sufficient to suppose that the model of party of power has been exported from Russia to Central Asia. Domestic elements such as the structure of elites

and the institutional framework are extremely relevant in the process of party-building. On the other hand, seen its success in Russia, the 'party of power' could be an example of successful diffusion of the Russian mode of rule as well as of its founding values (Ambrosio, 2010). United Russia could have inspired, and in some cases even helped the establishment of a similar party in its neighbourhood.

6.2.1 Cooperation

A first sign that Russia could be exporting the party of power would be the presence of a close relation between United Russia and Nur Otan. Although it cannot be considered as a proof of influence, a close relation is a necessary channel for spreading techniques and ideas.

A regular relation of cooperation facilitates reciprocal observation, as well as the exchange of information and experience. Through regular meetings and joint initiatives – not to mention specifically designed training programs – party members from both sides can easily learn about each other's tactics and strategies.

A tight cooperation exists between Nur Otan (and Otan, before 2006) and United Russia. This relation is not exclusive, as both parties have established ties with other parties[98]. However, their relation is a privileged one, justified with considerations about the similar nature of the two countries, (post-Soviet and post-Communist, oil-rich, multinational and the wealthiest among the

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[98] Since the mid-2000s, Otan has expanded its international relations, establishing contacts with governing parties in Malaysia, Singapore, China, Japan, Turkey. "Pravitel'stvo", *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, No. 041, February 25, 2006; Vil'ianov A. "Politicheskie Partii", *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, No. 271, December 26, 2006. United Russia also has regular meetings with colleagues from the Chinese Communist party and representatives of the Italian Popolo della Libertà.

CIS) and of the parties themselves (both parties of the majority, supported by the leader, with a pragmatic orientation)[99].

Official relations started in 2004, with high profile visits and the signature of a Memorandum of Cooperation, later renewed in 2006 and 2009: the parties committed to cooperate in the areas of party-building, law-making and development of international relations, particularly at the regional level, and to organize regular meetings[100]. The parties have since cooperated closely on different matters, and have exchanged frequent visits[101]. Delegates from both parties participate regularly in each other's congresses[102].

Also, party-men from both formations participate in electoral observation missions[103]: they generally offer positive evaluations of the electoral procedures, often in open contrast with accounts of Western monitoring missions. This is a particularly interesting aspect, because Russia has been allegedly supporting an alternative system of electoral monitoring, aimed at de-legitimizing the system built around the OSCE and at establishing different standards, compatible with a specific conception of democracy (Fawn, 2006).

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[99] See for example: Zhumagulov B. "Umen'e s dolgom sochetaia", *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, No. 37, March 08, 2007.

[100] Makhin V. and Mikhailova M. "Memorandum Druzhbi", *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, No. 133, June 15, 2004 and Kozintseva E. "Obshie Tseli i Tsennosti", *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, No. 056, March 11, 2006.

[101] Kozintseva E. "Lideri Mezhpartiinih Al'iansov", *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, No. 018, January 21, 2006.

[102] Baitelesov Zh. "Otan na forume Edinorossov", *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, No. 328, December 1, 2005; Nagornykh I., "Navstrechu s''ezdu vypustiat e'lektrovoz", *Kommersant Daily*, No. 222, November 28, 2006.

[103] Kozintseva E. "V rezhime nabliudeniia" *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, No. 189, December 04, 2007. Pugasov M. "Dlia obmena opytom", *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, No. 151, September 27, 2007.

Nur Otan and United Russia cooperate closely also within a number of international organizations. They are known to coordinate their positions within the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), as well as the parliamentary assemblies of the OSCE and the CIS.

The cooperation on local level has been very active in the areas where the two countries share an extensive border, particularly involving the local party branches in Omsk, Uralsk and Astrakhan[104]. A close cooperation exists also between the youth branches of the parties. Nur Otan has been working with United Russia's youth organizations since 2004, actually before the foundation of Zhas Otan[105].

Some initiatives seem more likely than others to propagate United Russia's methods and techniques: United Russia has been involved in Nur Otan members' education projects, providing trainers for their seminars[106]. This happens also at the highest level: *edinorossy* (United Russia party-men) are known to teach regularly at the Nur Otan Higher School of Party Education, particularly about how to deal with electorates in the regions (interview, Kharitonova, 2011). United Russia also contributes to the education of Nur Otan party activists in the regions, especially in the border area[107].

As said before, the presence of such a close cooperation is not a sufficient condition for stating that Russia exported the party of

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[104] Pugasov M. "Omskii marshrut Otana", *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, No. 229, October 14, 2006; Korina L. "Krai Uralskii, krai edinii", *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, No. 139, June 22, 2004; Alibekova R. "Pod legkii' briz proshel kruiz", *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, No. 146, September 18, 2007 and Iliushin S. "Astrakhanskie 'Edinorossy' namereni aktivno sotrudnichat' s vedushei partii Kazakhstana", *Volga*, No. 138, September 20, 2007.
[105] Shilov A. "Doroga v Artek", *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, No. 177, August 10, 2004.
[106] Maldybaev S. "Zovet na kursy shkola rosta", *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, No. 198, September 11, 2008.
[107] "Parlament", *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, No. 061, March 18, 2006.

power to Kazakhstan. Another aspect needs to be investigated, and regards the sphere of values at the basis of party-building choices. In the next two sections it will be seen whether ideas that are well-rooted in the Russian political discourse (such as "sovereign democracy" and "managed democracy") are being diffused in its neighbourhood, and how these ideas are received and discussed in Kazakhstan.

6.2.2 The diffusion of the "Russian model"

The spread of ideas is best understood through the concept of *diffusion*. This takes the form of an indirect transmission of values and ideas, in the shape of norms other states may wish to comply in order to preserve or gain an international reputation (appropriateness) or in the form of a successful example to emulate (effectiveness) (Ambrosio, 2010).

Appropriateness is a mechanism by which "the policy decisions of one government alter the conditions under which other governments base their decisions" (Elkins and Simmons, 2005:7 in Ambrosio, 2010: 579). These choices contribute to the creation of a new environment, which will influence the other actors in their decisions relatively to the adoption of certain practices and policies. In this sense, the rise of authoritarian powers could "create conditions in which the relative appropriateness of democracy and autocracy would shift more toward the latter" (Ambrosio, 2010: 380).

Russian elites have indeed put an effort in elaborating a specific set of norms. The "Russian model" (Walker and Kelly, 2007: 2 in Ambrosio, 2010: 582) or "Putin model" (Jackson, 2010: 101) is proposing itself as an alternative to western liberal-democratic ideas. Russia has found itself leading a coalition of states contrary to the US intervention in Iraq, in 2003 and is giving in

every occasion a particularly restrictive interpretation to the concept of state sovereignty (Jackson, 2010). The Russian model was formalized through the adoption and popularization of the principle of "sovereign democracy", which was first outlined by Vladislav Surkov in 2006 in response to the events of Ukraine's Orange evolution. The concept emphasizes Russia's freedom from external influences, the centrality of a strong state, and of the Kremlin's power, and the desire of Russia to regain its position as a world power. In the adoption of this term there was an attempt to legitimize Russia's regime and its "unique and indigenous style of democracy" as chosen by the Russian nation in order to prevent a Ukraine-style revolution from happening in Moscow" (Shlapentokh, 2007 in Jackson, 2010: 107). The term remained essentially vague and in an occasion the President Medvedev has dismissed it[108]. Nevertheless, it has become widely popular in the media, in Russia and in the post-Soviet space, and it has possibly inspired political decisions and triggered justifications for the creation and maintenance of a dominant party system[109].

Effectiveness is closer to what in European integration studies is called "the power of example" (Forsberg, 2009). It refers to the mechanism through which the political and economic success of an authoritarian regime becomes apparent and stimulates a process of imitation from other countries, whose leaders hope to obtain similar results (Ambrosio, 2010). As Ambrosio notes, the models chosen are not always optimal: rather, their selection is

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[108] 'Sovereign democracy' was rejected by Medvedev, in an interview for the popular journal Ekspert (24 July 2006) as 'a far from ideal term'. Medvedev noted that 'when qualifying additions are made to the word "democracy" this leaves one with a strange after-taste. It suggests that what is actually meant is some other, non-traditional democracy.' See Jackson 2010: 116.
[109] Recknagel C. "As Russia Claims Democracy, Is It Redefining the Word?" RFE/RL, December 27, 2010
http://www.rferl.org/content/russia_defining_democracy/2260775.html

done in line with interests and biases and with a country's own values. This pairs with what Jackson calls "receptivity"[110]. Through diffusion elites adopt external norms and introduce them in their political system: this is possible only if what is being advanced or promoted "fits into indigenous norms and practices in each particular state" (Jackson, 2010: 102).

Several post-Soviet countries and especially the Central Asian states have shown great interest in implementing the package of organizations and measures - effectively named as "autocratic tools" by Silitski (2009) – which has successfully been used to maintain authoritarian stability in Russia. These include the creation of a dominant party of power and the use of administrative resources and institutional engineering in order to weaken oppositions. The learning process took place in particular after 2004, when the Putin's regime consolidated and proved efficient in counterbalancing the influence of "colour revolutions" in the post-Soviet space.

The "Russian model" and in particular the abovementioned concept of "sovereign democracy" are attractive models for the Central Asian neighbourhood. Their normative power is low, but they have an attractive non-western and anti-liberal-democratic quality. Following them may appear appropriate, especially for weaker states in a regional space ever dominated by the Russian regional power. Moreover, it could look effective, because of the good results obtained by Russia in containing oppositions and reinforcing the Kremlin's rule as a reaction to "colour revolutions" (Finkel & Brudny, 2012), particularly

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[110] She takes the original definition from an article by Ikenberry and Kuchan. See Ikenberry, J. and C. Kupchan, "Socialization and hegemonic power". *International Organization*, 44 (3) 1990, 283–315.

through the use of the "party of power"[111]. Finally, the diffusion of these values would be facilitated by geographical proximity and by the presence of a number of channels of communication, including military cooperation and a close collaboration within regional organizations (Allison, 2008; Jackson, 2010). Finally, the process is facilitated by the common use of the Russian language among elites and in the most important mass media (Jackson, 2010).

6.2.3 Russian-based values in the Kazakhstani public discourse

If found, signs of the Kazakhstani elites discussing and adopting values close to the "Russian model" could indicate a process of diffusion of these ideas and, possibly, that elites were influenced by the Russian example when establishing their party of power.

But how popular are these ideas and values? And how well are they received by local elites? In order to evaluate the degree of popularity of these concepts, a content analysis has been performed for a series of keywords, related with the Russian model, on a sample of national Kazakhstani newspapers (see Appendix Four for details).

As far as the concept of "sovereign democracy" is concerned, in Kazakhstani media the term is rarely mentioned, and always in reference to the Russian system[112]. There seems to be little discussion also about terms like "Russian model" and "Putin model"[113]. Kazakhstan seems to have received better the

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[111] Babaev M. "Kazakhstan: za chem obedeniat' "partiu vlasti" posle vyborov", *Rossiiskie vesti*, October 18, 2006.

[112] A search for the term in the archives of four main national Kazakhstani newspapers since February 2006 (when the concept was first mentioned by Vladislav Surkov) has yealded 19 results only.

[113] Searches conducted on the same sample of newspaper for the period 1999 – 2011 have resulted in 12 and 1 results respectively.

discourse on "modernization" (*modernizatsia*), which is a theme particularly important for Medvedev. However, the focus – in both countries – has been so far on economic and technological innovation and not on political developments[114].

On the other hand, a lively public and academic debate is in place relatively to the term "managed democracy" (*upravliaemaia demokratia*), which is also used to refer to the Russian mode of rule[115]. At a closer look, though, it appears that in most of the cases the term is used in reference to a specific Kazakhstani mode of rule: the term often appears in connection with expressions like "our" (*nasha*), "our own" (*sobstvennaia*), "Kazakhstani" (*po-kazakhstanski* and *Kazakhstanskaia*), "Nazarbayev's" (*po-Nazarbayevski* and *Nazarbayevskaia*). Only rarely a comparison between the two is presented, and it usually results in highlighting differences[116]. It is interesting to note that the content of the expression in Russian and Kazakhstani context is essentially the same. Probably, the recurrent terms indicating property might be a sign that Kazakhstani elites are trying to "receive" this concept and to make it fit their local values.

A sign that the countries are actually looking at each other is the attention, among Russian commentators, for the "Nazarbayev system". This model, which can be summarized in the phrase

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[114] There are several references (about 800) to the terms of "modernization" and "innovation" in my sample of Kazakhstani newspapers since 2008 (year of election of President Medvedev, who immediately used the term as flag for his own agenda). In many cases they refer to economic and technological innovation. See for example: Kuriatov V. "Aktsent na integratsiiu i modernizatsiiu", *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, No. 98, March 18, 2011.

[115] A search for the term in the same sample of Kazakhstani newspapers for the period 1999-2011 has yealded 115 articles, many of which were interviews with historians and political scientists or reports from conferences. Some were also official speeches.

[116] See for example "Medvedev ne cheta Nazarbaevu" (Medvedev is not Nazarbayev's double), *Respublika*, No 17, May 15, 2009.

"first, the economy and then politics[117]", is often praised as an "amazing combination of democratic principles and oriental traditions"[118]. It is sometimes considered as an example for Russia, for its capacity to efficiently and quickly produce reforms in controversial areas, such as pensions and agriculture[119]. Particularly appreciated is the capacity shown by Nazarbayev in "bringing order, achieving stability and economic growth"[120].

Reciprocal commentaries are not always so flattering. In some cases there have been critical positions, expressed by Kazakhstani intellectuals towards the "Russian model". In occasion of the international conference on "Democracy and Security in Central Asia", held in March 2006, the political scientist and vice-president of Nur Otan Erlan Karin openly criticized the rigidity and strictness of the Kremlin model[121]. In another occasion it was a Russian political scientist, Aleksandr Sobyanin, to criticize Nur Otan for its being isolated from the people[122]. Rather than of distance, these reciprocal comments from high-level personalities may be the sign of elites constantly observing and evaluating the political process in the neighbouring country, and possibly learning from it.

A discourse which seems deeply rooted in both countries is the one about security and fear of instability in the region[123]. Factors

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[117] Shulembaeva R. "Politaren priamie paralleli", *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, No. 124, August 10, 2007.

[118] Baitelesov Zh. "Otan na forume Edinorossov", *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, No. 328, December 1, 2005.

[119] Radzikhovskii L. (political scientist), "V favore e'voliutsii sistem", *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, No. 123, August 09, 2007 (originally published on the Rossiiskaia Gazeta).

[120] Solozobov I. "Kazakhstan kak politicheskaia mashina vremeni", *Vremia Novostei'*, No. 131, July 26, 2007.

[121] Khetsuriani S. "Ili demokratiia, ili bezopasnost?", *Pravo. E'konomika. Politika. Kul'tura*, No. 8, March 10, 2006.

[122] Sergeeva I. "Esli druzhit', chto srazu domami?", *Respublika* No17, May 15 2009.

[123] Bit M. "Vyzov Vremeni", *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda* No. 163, June 6, 2003.

of such instability are Islamic extremism, drugs trafficking and especially political instability, in the shape of coups and "colour revolutions" [124]. As mentioned, this "regional authoritarian learning" has been shown to strengthen of all five Central Asian regimes, (Jackson, 2010: 107). Also Nur Otan and United Russia are involved in the process of helping stabilization in neighbouring countries. Particularly relevant seems their role in promoting the formation of a party of power in Kyrgyzstan. In the period 2005-2010 there have been regular contacts between the presidential party Ak Zhol with United Russia and Nur Otan[125]. Despite the failure of the experiment, the two parties seem to be still interested in assisting party-building in Kyrgyzstan. Representative from Nur Otan and United Russia have participated in the founding congress of the Ar-Namys party, held in Bishkek in 2010[126].

A last factor to be considered, and which can possibly mitigate the role of a Russian influence on the Kazakhstani party building, is the influence of the so-called "Asian values" on Kazakhstani elite mentality and policy decisions. Central Asia is at the crossroads between Europe and Asia, and may be influenced by the examples and practices of China and India as well (Graevingholt *et al*., 2011). In particular, Kazakhstan has developed close economic and cultural ties with neighbouring China. At the same time, Nazarbayev has repeatedly voiced his admiration for the experience of some Asian countries,

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[124] Khetsuriani S. "Ili demokratiia, ili bezopasnost?", *Pravo. E'konomika. Politika. Kul'tura*, No. 8, March 10, 2006.

[125] See Kozintseva E., "Rol' partii' v sovremennom mire", *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, No. 121, May 15, 2009 and Shulembaeva R. "Politaren priamye paralleli" *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, No. 124, August 10, 2007.

[126] Evlashkov D., "Sledim za situatsiei'", *Rossii'skaia gazeta*, No. 216, September 24, 2010.

particularly Singapore, a country where "the presence of a strong party does not indicate the lack of democracy"[127].

Indeed, it is not unusual to find references to the example of other Asian states among the sources of inspiration for the Kazakhstani "party of power" experiment. In particular, it is mentioned the experience of South-East Asia, where the presence of a strong party, along with a strong leadership, is allegedly the reason for a fast and significant economic growth and development. The dominant parties of Singapore (People's Action Party) the ruling coalition of Malaysia (Barisan Nasional), the Indonesian party Golkar and the Japanese liberal-democratic party are often mentioned as models for Kazakhstan[128].

6.3 Conclusion: was the party of power exported from Russia to Kazakhstan?

The parties of power of Russia and Kazakhstan share a number of common features, and a strikingly similar consolidation pattern. Given the position of Russia as regional power and the strength of its non-liberal democratic discourse about "sovereign democracy", it is legitimate to ask whether those values, as well as the Russian example in party-building had a role in influencing the Kazakhstani process.

With this goal, this chapter investigated the existence of a relation of cooperation between Nur Otan and United Russia; looked at the channels of transmission of values related with

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[127] Significantly, Nazarbayev mentioned also Russia as a country with a strong party and "no lack of democracy". Bukina Zh., Prianikov V. and Kononovich E. "Piat' let s Otanom", *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, No. 051, March 13, 2004.

[128] Novikov T. "SNG: Dostizhenie Balansa", *Tribuna*: RT, No. 26, July 7, 2006; Potapov A. "Prezident ostavil svoi' sled na banknotakh i v istorii", *Novaia Gazeta*, No. 52, July 12, 2007.

party-building and at how they could be attractive for Kazakhstan; and tried to assess the reception of these ideas in the Kazakhstani public discourse.

The resulting picture is somehow ambivalent. First of all, the development and the evolution of the two political systems have happened exactly at the same time. This circumstance apparently rules out the possibility that Kazakhstan has adopted and supported an executive-based ruling party because this had proven to be successful in Russia. In both contexts ruling elites started their experiments with party building at the beginning of the 1990s, and established successful ones only at the end of the decade: United Russia was founded – as Unity – in 2001, and Otan in 1999. On the other hand, some party-supporting measures were actually taken earlier in Russia than in Kazakhstan: Proportional Representation, for instance, was adopted in 2005 in Russia and in 2007 in Kazakhstan. Also the merge of most of the pro-government forces into one large pro-regime party occurred later in Kazakhstan – in 2006, while the similar merge from which United Russia originated was in 2001. However, it is uncertain how much this move was inspired by the Russian experience[129]. In fact, the reasons for this merge and for the creation of a super-party seem to be different: while in Russia it was necessary in order to accelerate the adoption of executive-proposed laws in the parliament (Gelman, 2006), in Kazakhstan the law making process was already smooth and fast, as noted by the Russian political scientist Mikhail

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[129] A local political commentator described the merge between Otan and Asar as connected but "not copied" from the similar move that happened in Russia a few years before (when United Russia was created): the reason is that in Kazakhstan there was no reason to reinforce the leader's power. It was rather the consolidation of an already solid cooperation between the pro-government coalition and the presidential power. A strong party was needed in order to "mobilize the nation, in order to achieve the country's competitiveness" and "modernization". Novikov T. "SNG: Dostizhenie Balansa", *Tribuna*: RT, No. 26, July 7, 2006.

Lysenko[130]. Instead, the decision to incorporate the other pro-regime parties into Nur Otan was made in order to solve potentially de-stabilizing divisions within the pro-regime coalition (see Chapter 5).

In general, it seems that the attention to the developments within each other's political system is reciprocal, and that the elites and party leaderships are closely observing each other.

In 2004, Liubov' Sliska, member of United Russia's Higher Council and Duma Speaker, described a meeting between the parties as an occasion for United Russia to "learn from the experience of its slightly older" equivalent[131]. Also, the Russian media and political commentators dedicated great attention to the 2007 constitutional reform and anticipated elections in Kazakhstan[132]. In particular, the impressive electoral result has been widely commented in the Russian media, and proposed as an alternative "experience" (*opyt*) when discussing United Russia's electoral chances[133]. A Russian political scientist described Kazakhstan as a "time machine", allowing Russia to see in advance the results of certain political decisions, in this case a partial shift of power towards the parliament and the ruling party[134].

Local political analysts tend to support the view that the elites of Russia and Kazakhstan often look at each other and could be

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[130] Morzabaeva Zh. "Ot "bezbrezhnoi'" demokratii k avtoritarizmu", *Respublika*, No. 15, July 14, 2006.

[131] Bukina Zh., Prianikov V. and Kononovich E. "Piat' let s Otanom", *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, No. 051, March 13, 2004.

[132] Babaev M. "Kazakhstan: za chem obedeniat' "partiu vlasti" posle vyborov" *Rossiiskie vesti* October 18, 2006.

[133] An example is Latukhina K., "Dvukhpartii'naia vertikal'", *Vedomosti*, No. 192, October 11, 2007.

[134] Solozobov I. "Kazakhstan kak politicheskaia mashina vremeni", *Vremia Novostei'*, No. 131, July 26, 2007.

possibly inspired, but they also underline that the similarities in the party system "*came as a result of a similar evolution, not just as a result of imitating somebody's experience"* (interview, Petrov, 2011).

Although "*they are certainly observing each other, but it is hard to say whether they are borrowing techniques. In any case, the logic of the development in both countries is the same. Whether Kazakhstan borrowed something from Russia or vice-versa, it does not matter; sooner or later they would have done the same"* (interview, Nurmakov, 2011)[135].

As seen before, there is some evidence of United Russia using this connection in order to "teach" its Kazakhstani peers through trainings both at the central and the local levels. However, the extent and the effectiveness of these training programs are not clear.

The overview of the public discourse also produced ambivalent results. On the one hand, it is evident that the public opinion in both countries is constantly discussing and evaluating each others' political developments and political "models", including the so-called "Nazarbayev's system". This discussion happens on both sides, probably contributing to influence the decision-making of Russian elite as well.

A concept that seems to have been successfully exported from Russia to Kazakhstan is the one of "managed democracy" (while its almost synonymous "sovereign democracy" did not have success). It should be said that in the discourse there is always an attempt to distinguish a "Kazakhstani managed democracy" from other experiences, including the Russian one: however, this could be the sign of the elite still working on appropriating the concept and making it fit with indigenous values. Actually,

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[135] Similar opinions were expressed also by other interviewees, particularly by the members of the opposition party OSDP Azat.

according to the expert Satpayev, the elaboration of an alternative model of democracy could have been developed earlier in Kazakhstan. He notes that "*even before Surkov, Nazarbayev emphasized that the country was non-democratic in western style but that it was democratic if adopting a different way, a third way, specific and relevant to the context*" (interview, Satpayev, 2011).

Finally, it should be also added that the Russian model is not the only inspiration for the Kazakhstani leadership. In the Kazakhstani discourse there are constant references to the example of other Asian states, and in particular Singapore, among the sources of inspiration for the Kazakhstani "party of power" experiment. Also in this case, the Kazakhstani leadership seems to have appropriated the concepts. In particular, the president Nazarbayev has put the idea of "economy first" at the centre of his plans for the country.

Chapter 7
Conclusions

In this chapter, the main findings of the dissertation will be summarized and discussed.

The research questions posed at the beginning regarded: the nature and the consequences of the relation between Nur Otan and the executive elites from which it originated; and the role of the party of power in maintaining regime stability by performing a number of functions. A collateral question, stemming by the similarity and the close relations of Kazakhstan with neighbouring Russia regarded the possibility that the model of the "party of power" has been exported to the Central Asian state, together with specific "authoritarian values".

In Chapter 3, the first question was further elaborated in a discussion on the dominant nature of Nur Otan. This discussion not only allows defining better the nature of Nur Otan, but contributes to a better understanding of dominant parties, confirming that such parties can differ substantially on the dimension of independence.

While dominant in numbers and in the party system, the party of power of Kazakhstan has been found to be of little relevance when it comes to policy making, resource management and control on coercion systems.

Also its perspectives as "collective heir" seem slight. Despite a Constitutional reform, which should start the transformation of the political system into a parliamentary republic, and the President's declarations in this sense, the possibility that Nur Otan becomes the real titular of power in the near future is quite remote. The President still maintains the control of the political

system, including the party, in his own hands, and has not yet initiated the legislation reforms which would complete the transfer of power to the party. It is also unlikely that Nur Otan takes this chance on its own initiative, as its origins make it extremely dependent on the power elites around the President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

This relation of dependence is explored in detail Chapter 4, which introduces a number of resources and privileges enjoyed by the party of power, although it does not significantly contribute to their creation.

Two types of resources are found. One involves substantive resources, consisting of institutional and economic forms of support which were put forward with the explicit purpose of favouring the party.

First, there is the creation of *ad hoc* institutional constraints, and their selective application. The rules of the game are constantly adjusted and changed in order to accommodate the necessities of the party of power, create an advantage for it and erecting access barriers for the most dangerous competitors. Among the leverages used there are the rules on party legislation, the electoral rule and administrative regulations. In particular, the adoption of a 7% threshold and of Proportional Representation in 2007 had the effect of pushing to the margins all of the opposition parties and resulted in a one-party parliament. The rules were slightly relaxed between 2008 and 2009: although the control is still very tight, the authorities tried to correct the situation, which was likely to have a negative impact on the country's bid for the OSCE chairmanship. The new Mazhilis, elected in January 2012 is in fact composed by three parties. The authorities have not renounced to their control on the legislature, though: the two parties which got seats together with Nur Otan are strongly pro-regime.

A second resource at disposal of the party of power is the so-called "administrative resource", which I examined in its form of privileged access to State media.

The case of media was chosen both because of its relevance in the Kazakhstani context, and because of the possibility to measure effectively the differences between political parties, in particular by monitoring the printed press.

In the analysis it was tried first of all to show that media assets are closely controlled by the state and by a group of media entrepreneurs who are very close to the President, including the powerful group headed by his daughter Dariga Nazarbayeva. Effective control on the media content is exerted also through legislation and by filling the media space with regime-approved contents, through the system of Social Procurement (gos-zakaz). The effect of these measures on the party of power is a relevant advantage in general visibility, especially during electoral campaigns, as shown by an analysis of the press specifically conducted for this study as well as by OSCE broadcasting media monitoring.

The other category comprises less tangible resources, better understood as advantages that the party gets from its very position of power. It was shown how the success of Nur Otan is due mostly to the popularity it receives from being the "President's party", and from the general consensus enjoyed by the regime, especially in connection with its positive economic performance. Moreover, by maintaining a flexible ideological profile, especially on controversial issues like the nationalities policy, Nur Otan is able to present itself as an acceptable entity to most of the population.

The other question investigated by this thesis regards, as said, the regime-sustaining role of the party of power Nur Otan.

Departing from hypotheses proposed by the literature on "authoritarian institutions", I investigated the regime-supporting functions of Nur Otan in Chapter 5.

First of all, this was done in diachronic perspective, trying to connect the two elements of the relation between the party and the ruling elites, on the one hand, and the role of Nur Otan in maintaining regime stability on the other hand. A series of watershed moments, which I call *challenges*, were individuated. These moments, I argue, served as trigger for elites' party-related choices and, at the same time, serve as tests for the party regime-supporting functions. A theoretical insight gained here is the possibility that executive-based parties perform different functions according to changing conditions of the political environment and to different necessities of the ruling elites.

Secondly, party functions have been analyzed separately.

Looking at the elite-coordination/management function, it was found that Nur Otan and the party system in general serve the regime by regulating the competition between elites, and making sure they stay in balance. The party system works as an *arena*, where political parties affiliated to various elite groupings fight with each other as sorts of *avatars*. Just like Nur Otan, which is only the reflection of the centre of political power in the electoral and legislative field, other parties reflect the influence and strength of other segments of the elite. And this is done not only to the benefit of international observers, or of the domestic electorate: by competing in the party arena, the elite groupings have a chance to try their chances in a controlled way, without openly challenging the leader. Actually, in this way they manage to get closer to the leader and to the system of privileges that is associated with the highest circle.

Another interesting function assigned by theory to authoritarian parties is the one of "monopolist of jobs" (Magaloni, 2007: 19). While the membership in Nur Otan seems to be irrelevant in one's career advancements, the perception that the party works as a *social elevator* could be in itself consensus-generating, especially among young people. The idea that by joining Nur Otan or its youth branch Zhas Otan would be beneficial for one's career seems widespread, and could serve the regime by making sure that bright young people join the pro-government camp rather than the opposition.

The party also works as a mobilizing force in electoral campaigns. In particular, its stellar results could send a "message of invincibility" both to the oppositions and to segments of the elites who could be tempted to defect. Also, but this option is still open for further investigation: electoral results could be a test for the loyalty of local level party officials.

Finally, some attention was given to the mobilizing functions of the youth branch, Zhas Otan. Together with other youth organizations, Zhas Otan was founded in the aftermaths of the "colour revolutions", with the aim of maintaining a tighter control on youth and somehow to replicate, in reverse, the mobilization strategies used during those protests. Zhas Otan and the other pro-government organizations fill the public space with non politicized and regime-approved initiatives; endowed with large resources, they crowd out or co-opt other organizations, limiting the possibilities for opposition organizations to appear and operate.

The final chapter is devoted to the third, collateral research question, whether the party of power was exported to Kazakhstan from Russia. The commonalities shared by the two parties are indeed striking, and the influence of Russia as

regional power is a consolidated one, as well as the strength of its non-liberal democratic discourse about *sovereign democracy*.

The possibility that the model of the party of power, as well as some values related to it, were transferred was investigated by looking at the cooperation between Nur Otan and United Russia and by detecting the presence of Russian-based values like *sovereign democracy* in the Kazakhstani public discourse.

The resulting picture is somehow ambivalent. First of all, the development and the evolution of the two political systems have happened exactly at the same time. This circumstance apparently rules out the possibility that Kazakhstan has adopted and supported an executive-based ruling party because this had proven to be successful in Russia.

At the same time, there is some evidence of United Russia using this connection in order to "teach" its Kazakhstani peers through trainings both at the central and the local levels. However, the extent and the effectiveness of these training programs are not clear.

On the side of values, it emerged that the public opinion in both countries is constantly discussing and evaluating each others' political developments and political "models", including the so-called "Nazarbayev's system". But, contrarily to what initially expected, this discussion happens on both sides, probably contributing to influence the decision-making of Russian elite as well. Even when values are transferred, they are appropriated by the Kazakhstani leadership, and integrated into the local discourse.

Finally, the Russian model is not the only inspiration for the Kazakhstani leadership. In the Kazakhstani discourse there are constant references to the example of other Asian states, and in particular Singapore, among sources of inspiration.

Appendix One:
Interviews

This appendix presents a full list of the interviews utilized for this dissertation. The bulk of these interviews were conducted during my fieldwork in Kazakhstan in October and November 2011. A small number of expert interviews were conducted also in other occasions such as international conferences. Follow-up interviews with the same person are omitted. Information about current position is provided for all interviews, with the exception of a few, where details are omitted for ethical reasons. The interviews are presented in alphabetical order.

All-parties-meeting participants (2011), Representatives of all registered political parties, October 28, Astana.

Alibayev, Serikbai (2011). Chairman of the Astana branch of OSDP-Asat, October 29, Astana.

Altynbekovna, Neila (2011), Head of the Statistics Department of the Almaty City Branch of Nur Otan. October 17, Almaty.

Beshimov, Bakytbek (2011). Former Kyrgyz diplomat in Kazakhstan, Political Scientist. February, 8. Cambridge, MA.

Bokayev, Sanzhar (2011). Deputy Chairman of the Almaty City Branch of Nur Otan, October 14, Almaty.

Boni, Ugo (2011). First Secretary, Embassy of Italy, October 25, Astana.

Botagarov, Aidar (2011). Coordinator for Media Projects, OSCE Centre, October 26, Astana.

Buluktaev, Yuri (2011). Political Scientist, October 11, Almaty.

Chebotaryov, Andrei (2011). Political Analyst, October 19, Almaty.

Gudkov, Lev (2011). Director of the Levada Centre, October 6, Moscow.

Human Rights Expert (2011). Anonymous, October 22, Astana.

Kalsin, Iliador (2008). Legal expert of the Foundation Adil Soz, February 1, Almaty.

Karin, Erlan (2011). Nur Otan Secretary for Strategic Development, October 21, Astana.

Karpov, Sergey (2011). Communications Officer, UNESCO Cluster Office for Central Asia, October 13, Almaty.

Kassenova, Nargis (2011). Political Scientist, Kimep, October 19, Almaty.

Khalbekov, Arman (2011). Executive Secretary of the Almaty City Branch of Zhas Otan. October 13, Almaty.

Kharitonova, Natalya (2011). Political Scientist, Moscow State University, October 3, Moscow.

Kossanov, Arimzhan (2011). General Secretary of OSDP AZAT, October 18, Almaty.

Leonard, Peter (2011). Journalist, October 19, Almaty.

Mambetalin, Serikzhan (2011). Chairman of the Party Rukhaniyat, October 12, Almaty.

Mednikova, Irina (2011). Journalist, NGO activist, October 12, Almaty.

Nurmakov, Adil (2011). Journalist and Political Analyst, October 12, Almaty.

Nurtazina, Roza (2011). Political Scientist, Eurasian University, October 24, Astana.

Offenbacher, Andrew (2011). Political Officer, OSCE Centre, October 26, Astana.

Petrov, Nikolay (2011). Scholar in Residence, Carnegie Endowment, Moscow Centre, October 4, Moscow.

Political Activist, opposition (2011). Anonymous, October 17, Almaty.

Rakhymzhanov, Amyrkhan (2011). Director of the Astana Branch of Nur Otan, November 1, Astana.

Rakimzhanov, Askhat (2011). OSDP AZAT, October 29, Astana.

Sagimbaeva, Zhanar (2011). Senior Analyst at the European Development Bank, October 11, Almaty.

Sarym, Aidos (2011). Political Analyst and opposition activist, October 11, Almaty.

Satpayev, Dosym (2011) Political analyst, October 11, Almaty.

Zhabayev, Nurlan (2011). OSDP AZAT, October 29, Astana.

Zhas Otan activist (2011a). Anonymous, October 13, Almaty.

Zhas Otan activist (2011b). Anonymous, November 1, Astana.

Zhanabayeva, Svetlana (2012). Former Asar member, political scientist. March 31, Cambridge, UK.

Appendix Two:
Nur Otan's Organizational Structure

Overall in Kazakhstan there are 241 Nur Otan branches. The 16 regional ones are in each province (*oblast*), while 225 are in smaller administrative unions, such as *raions*, counties and cities. Under these main branches, there 6,320 party basic organizations (*pervychnye partinnye organizatsii*, PPO), which can be formed starting from a minimum of three party members. Totally, there are 920,661 members.

```
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │   Party Chairman    │
                    └─────────────────────┘         ┌──────────────┐
          ┌────────────────────────────────────┐    │   Youth      │
          │ Presidium of the Political Council │    │   Branch     │
          └────────────────────────────────────┘    │ (Zhas Otan)  │
        ┌───────────────────────────────────────┐   └──────────────┘
        │         Political Council             │
        └───────────────────────────────────────┘
      ┌───────────────────────────────────────────┐
      │            Party Congress                 │
      │ (includes representatives from all the    │
      │          oblasts branches)                │
      └───────────────────────────────────────────┘
     ┌────────────────────────────────────────────┐
     │ 16 Local branches, one for each oblast and │
     │  for the cities of national relevance      │
     │       (Almaty and Astana)                  │
     └────────────────────────────────────────────┘
     ┌────────────────────────────────────────────┐
     │          Raion level branches              │
     └────────────────────────────────────────────┘
     ┌────────────────────────────────────────────┐
     │                 PPOs                       │
     └────────────────────────────────────────────┘
```
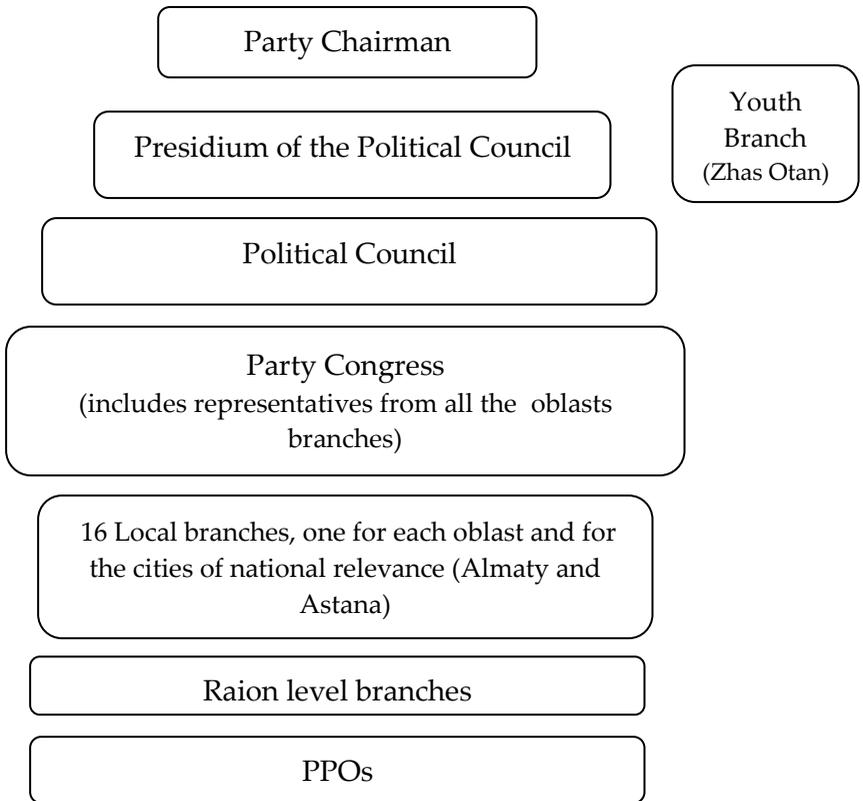
Figura A. 1 Nur Otan's Organizational Structure Source: www.ndp-nurotan.kz/

Appendix Three:
Parliamentary Elections and Parliament composition in independent Kazakhstan

In this appendix I present a series of tables showing the distribution of seats among parties, blocs or groups of independent candidates after each Kazakhstani Parliamentary election from since 1994.

In 1994, elections were held for a unicameral legislature, the Supreme Council, composed of 177 seats, 40 of which were to be filled by candidates on a governmental list (*gosspisok*). The 1995 Constitution instituted a new Parliament, formed by two chambers: the high chamber (Senate) is composed by representatives of the administrative regions (two for each oblast') as well as of Almaty and Astana. The low chamber (Mazhilis) is elected directly. Until 2007, most of the deputies were elected in Single Member Districts, while a small percentage of seats (10%) was assigned with Proportional Representation on national basis. After the May 2007 Constitutional reform, the Mazhilis passed from 77 to 108 members, of which 98 to be elected with PR, while the other ten are elected by the Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan. The Senators' number was increased from 39 to 47. Their election is indirect and renewed every three years. The President appoints 15 Senators. The 2007 reform also instituted a 7% entry threshold. In 2009 the electoral law was emended, allowing also a second party to enter the Mazhilis, even if it did not overcome the 7% threshold[136].

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[136] Seats distribution for 1994, 1995 and 1999 elections were taken from Brill Olcott (2002). For 2004, 2007 and 2012, data were taken from the website of the Central Electoral Commission of Kazakhstan.
http://election.kz/portal/page?_pageid=73,473388&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL

Affiliation	Seats
Union of People's Unity (SNEK, pro-presidential)	39
Trade Union Federation	12
People's Congress (NKK)	13
Socialist Party	14
Peasants Union	4
LAD Republican Movement	4
Other	10
Total	96

Table A.1 Distribution of Parliamentary Seats as a Result of 1994 Elections

Affiliation	Seats
People's Unity Party (PNEK, pro-presidential)	24
Democratic Party (pro-presidential)	12
Peasants Union	5
Trade Union Federation	5
Communist Party	2
Independents (other)	19
Total	67

TableA.2 Distribution of Parliamentary Seats won as a Result of 1995 Elections

Affiliation	Seats
Otan (pro-presidential)	24
Civil Party (pro-presidential)	11
Communist Party	3
Agrarian Party (pro-presidential)	3
Republican People's Party	1
People's Cooperative Party	1
Business	10
Independents (government associated)	20
Independents (other)	4
Total	77

Table A.3 Distribution of Seats won as a Result of 1999 Elections

Affiliation	Seats
Otan (pro-presidential)	42
Democratic Party Ak Zhol	1
Asar (pro-presidential)	4
Agrarian and Industrial Union of Workers Bloc (Civil Party and Agrarian Party, pro-presidential)	11
Democratic Party	1
Non-Partisans	18
Total	77

TableA. 4 Distribution of Parliamentary Seats won as a Result of 2004 Elections

Affiliation	Seats
Nur Otan	98
Total	98

Table A.5 Distribution of Parliamentary Seats won as a Result of 2007 Elections

Affiliation	Seats
Nur Otan	83
Democratic Party Ak Zhol	8
People's Communist Party of Kazakhstan	7
Quota Elected by the People's Assembly of Kazakhstan	10
Total	108

Table A.6 Distribution of Parliamentary Seats won as a Result of 2012 Elections

Appendix Four:
The party of power in the media

In order to complete the argument in Chapter 4 about the dominant position of the party of power in the media, here I present an analysis of the frequency of party mentions in the press.

I performed a descriptive analysis on a sample of national Kazakhstani newspapers and magazines, using the publications available in the INTEGRUM databases[137]. They include some of the most important and widespread printed papers in Russian language, expressing different political orientations. Unfortunately, no publications in Kazakh language were available. This lack is significant only for the latest years, though, as the diffusion of bi-lingual and Kazakh-language papers is relatively recent.

In fact, while television is tightly controlled by the State, among printed media there is more diversity and pluralism: some opposition papers openly criticize the government and others try to present a balanced view of political events. This makes the pervasive presence of the party Nur Otan even more significant.

In Table 1 there is a list of the publications used in the analysis, with some information about their frequency, circulation and the period of their availability in the INTEGRUM databases. My goal is to show the difference between the coverage given to the party of power and other Kazakhstani political parties. In Table 2 a list of political parties is presented, including Russian name and abbreviation, used in the searches.

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[137] INTEGRUM offers a wide and easily searchable selection of printed media in Russian language. See: http://www.integrumworld.com/

Publication name	Frequency	Approximate Weekly Circulation	Availability in Integrum
Kazakhstanskaya Pravda	Five times a week	100.000	1992 - 2012
Ekspress Kazakhstan	Five times a week	100.000	2001 - 2012
Vremya	Weekly until 2007, then four times a week	240.000	2000 - 2012
Megapolis	Weekly until 2010, then daily	15.000	2005 - 2012
Respublica	Weekly	30.000	2008 - 2012
Izvestia Kazakhstana	Weekly	35.000	2004 - 2012
Panorama	Weekly	20.000	1996 - 2012
Ekspert Kazakhstan	Weekly	10.000	2003 - 2012

Table A.7 Publications information. Sources: INTEGRUM, papers' official websites.

Name	Russian Name and abbreviation	Activity
Nur Otan*	Народно-Демократическая партия «Нур Отан» - НДП Нур Отан	2006 -
Otan	Республиканская партия Отан - РПП Отан	1999 – 2006
Communist Party of Kazakhstan**	Коммунистическая партия Казахстана - КПК	1998 –
People's Communist Party	Коммунистическая Народная партия Казахстана – КНПК	2004 -
Party of Patriots	Партия патриотов Казахстана - ППК	2000 -
Rukhaniyat	Партия «Руханият»	2003 -
Adilet	Демократическая партия «Адилет» - ДПК Адилет	2004 -
Azat***	Демократическая партия «Азат» - ДПК Азат	2005 - 2009
OSDP	Общенациональная социал-демократическая партия - ОСДП	2006 – 2009
OSDP-Azat:	Общенациональная социал-демократическая партия «Азат» - ОСДП Азат	2009 -
Alga****	Народная партия «Алга!»	2005 -
Asar	Республиканская партия «Асар»	2003 – 2006
Republican Party of	Республиканская Народная партия Казахстана - РНПК	1998 – 2002

Kazakhstan		
DPK Ak Zhol	Демократическая партия Казахстана «Ак жол» - ДПК Ак жол	2002 -
Nagiz Ak Zhol	Нагыз Ак жол	2005 – 2008
Agrarian Party	Аграрная партия Казахстана - АПК	1999 -
Civil Party	Гражданская партия Казахстана - ГПК	1998 -
Auyl	Казахстанская социал-демократическая партия «Ауыл» - КСДП Ауыл	2002 -
Democratic Choice	Народная Партия «Демократический Выбор Казахстана» - НП ДВК	2004 – 2005
People's Cooperative Party	Народно – кооперативная партия Казахстана - НКПК	1994 -

Table A.8 Main Kazakhstani Political Parties with full denomination and years of activity

* Otan shares part of its name with its successor Nur Otan and the party youth organization Zhas Otan, possibly generating false positive results in the search. I solved the problem considering the results for "Otan" only between 1999 and 2006, which is in the period of effective existence of the party (in 2006 it was dismissed to create Nur Otan). Doing this, also the problem of homonymy with Zhas Otan is solved, as the latter was founded only in 2008.
** The Communist Party of Kazakhstan is currently suspended. The temporary suspension should end in October 2012.
*** OSDP and Azat merged in 1999, to form OSDP Azat. Controls were necessary as Azat is also a common first name: I introduced a series of specifications in order to get only the cases where the object was the political party.
**** Despite having never received registration, Alga is an active opposition party
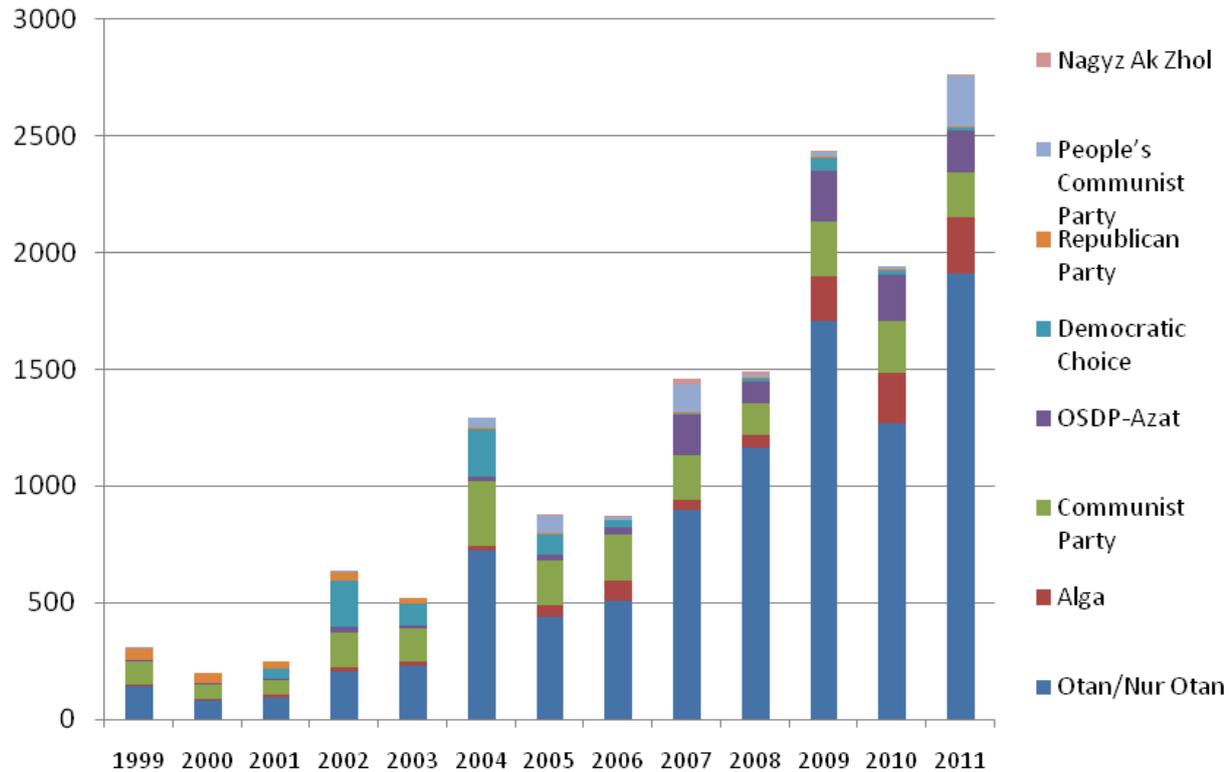
**Figure A.2 Otan/Nur Otan mentions compared with main opposition parties**
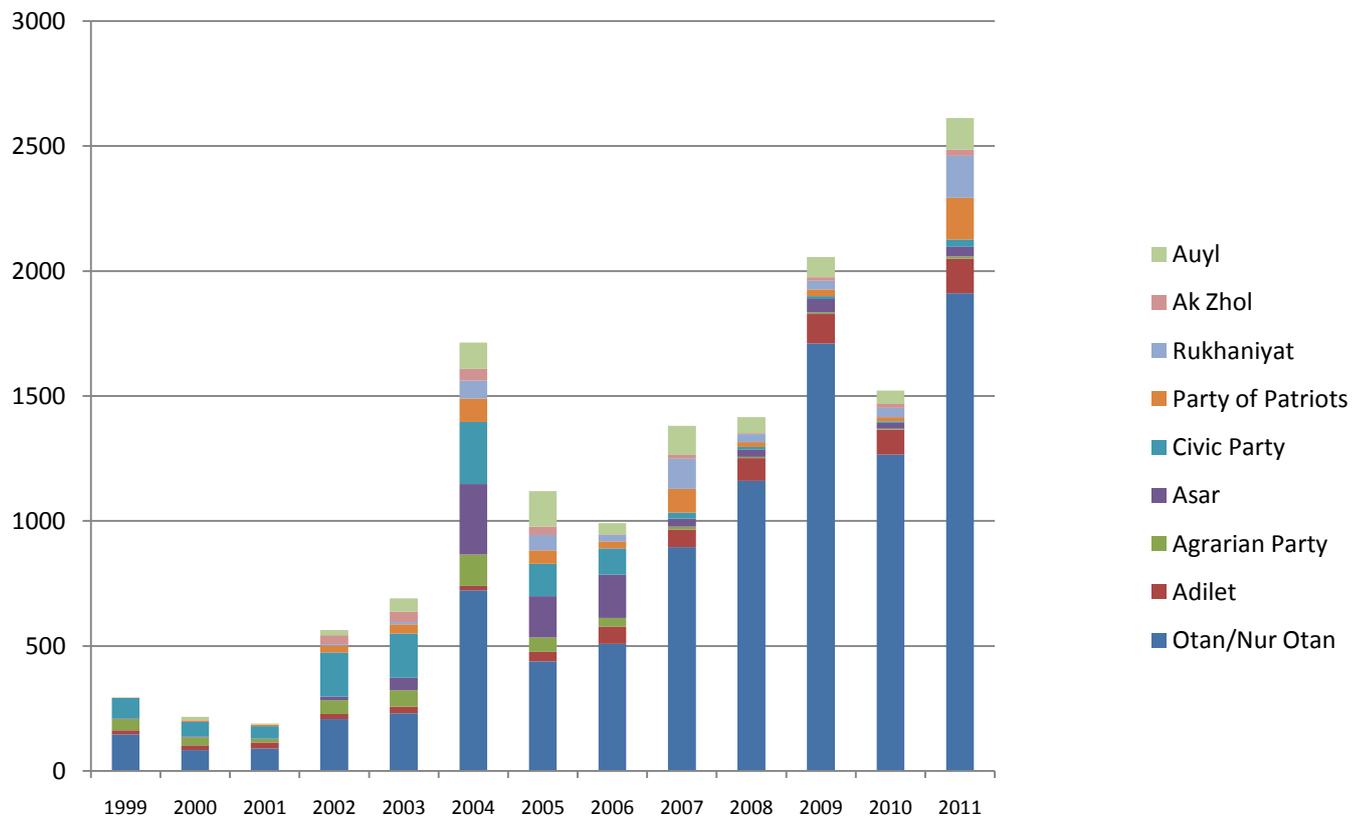
Figure A.3 Otan/Nur Otan mentions compared with other pro-regime parties

The selected timeframe is 1999 – 2011, as Otan was established in 1999. For a better visualization, I present results in two graphs: in Figure 1, the mentions of the party of power are presented in comparison with the main opposition parties, while Figure 2 shows mentions in the media of the most important parties in the pro-regime camp.

It should be noted that there are different numbers of publications available over years: 1999-2000 (two publications), 2001 (three), 2002 (four), 2003 (five), 2004 (six) and 2005-2011 (eight publications). This of course limits the validity of remarks made for the early 2000s, especially in comparative perspective with later periods.

It is still possible to make a few considerations. Generally speaking, there seems to be a relative increase of attention on political parties in correspondence of campaigns for parliamentary elections (in 2004, 2007 and in 2011 - as the elections were held on January 15, 2012). This – quite natural – trend seems to be particularly relevant in 2004. Indeed the political scene in 2004 was quite fragmented and parliamentary elections were perceived as crucial. In 2004 we also see that the coverage of Otan was more balanced in comparison to other parties, although larger. This is partly due to the presence of other parties in the pro-presidential camp (Asar, the Civil Party and the Agrarian Party), which were quite independent and had their own access to mass media. This is true especially of Asar, the party founded and chaired by Dariga Nazarbayeva, president's daughter and powerful media tycoon.

Party of power's mentions are much more frequent, in comparison to other parties. This is true especially since the formation of Nur Otan, confirming the impression that in the late

2000s the position of the party of power has progressively consolidated, not only in the political but also in the public discourse sphere. Moreover, since 2008 the media sphere includes also a number of publications owned by Nur Otan (including the Russian-language weekly *Strana i Mir*), which contribute to fill the media sphere with information about the party of power.

In general, there is a trend towards an increase of mentions for the party of power, due to growing popularity and increasing control in the media sphere. An exception is 2010, when we can observe an interruption of this trend. Nur Otan received a smaller number of mentions (as well as other pro-regime parties) while values for opposition parties remained stable.

A possible explanation for this is related with Kazakhstan's chairmanship of the OSCE in 2010. I looked comparatively at mentions of the party of power and of the President in the same sample of printed media for the period 2009-2011, looking at each quarter. Interestingly, both President Nazarbayev and the Nur Otan had a lower media profile in the summer of 2010 (see Figure 3). It is possible that the events and analyses related with OSCE Chairmanship simply outnumbered coverage of everyday activities by the ruling party and the President. For example, a conference in Astana on Tolerance and Non-discrimination was held at the end of June 2010, while an informal Ministerial meeting and a seminar took place in Almaty in July 2010[138]. However, it is also possible that authorities have lowered the profile of the party of power in order to "look better" in front of the international observers.

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[138] A full list of activities, events and news related to the Kazakhstani OSCE Chairmanship of 2010 is available at:
http://www.kazakhembus.com/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=477&cntnt01returnid=211
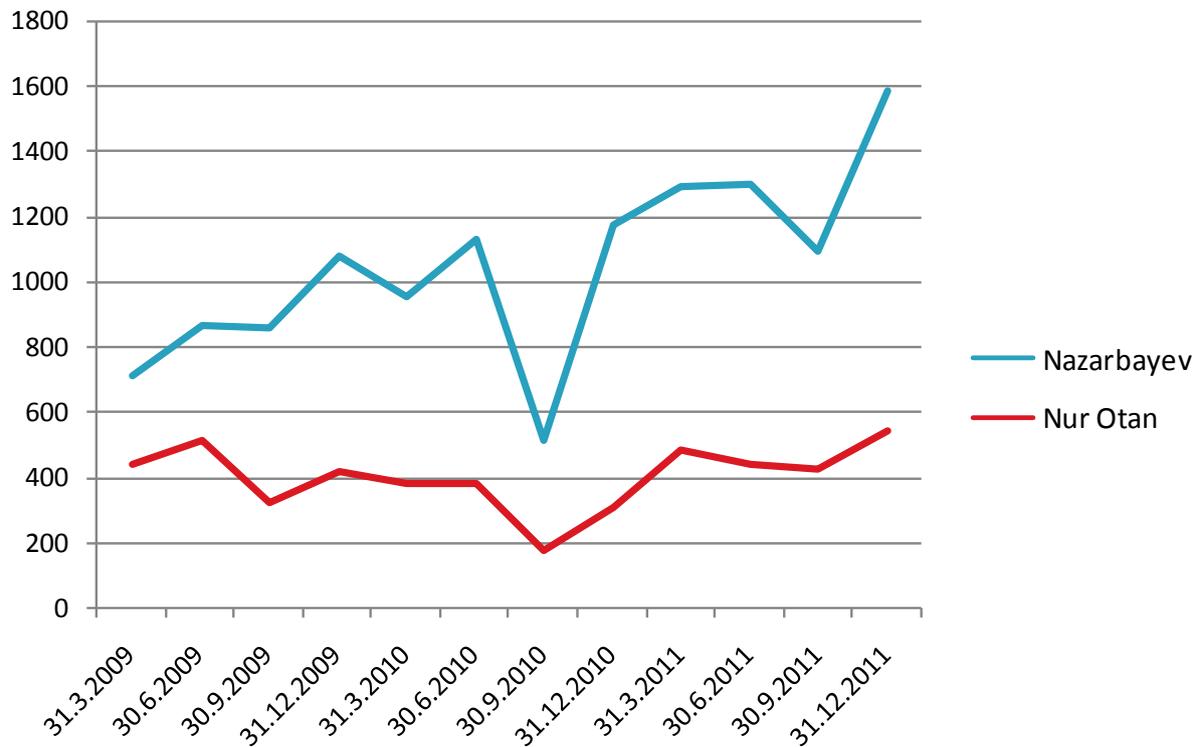
Figure A.4 Comparison "Nur Otan" and of "Nazarbayev" mentions 2009-2012 (on quarter basis)

The advantage of the party of power on other parties should become more evident during electoral campaigns. Below, I present the results of comparative searches for the last four parliamentary electoral campaigns, since the establishment of Otan. The searches included only the parties officially registered for elections, and were performed from the day elections were announced until Election Day (Central Electoral Commission, 2010). In case of repeated voting (in 1999 and in 2004), I did not extend the analysis to the second tour, because this was organized only for some seats assigned in Single Member Districts, while the definitive results for the party quota were available already after the first tour. The results show a situation progressively unbalanced in favor of the party of power. Of course, part of the advantage is due to the party's position as ruling party: mentions regard its government activities as well as electoral propaganda.

In 1999, the advantage of Otan in the printed media was already visible, though other parties, including the Communist Party (Otan's main opponent) received significant shares of mentions in the press. On the one hand, the State control on the media scene was still limited. Also, it is possible that elites were not yet ready to "invest" in the new party formation.

During the 2004 electoral campaign, the advantage of Otan became greater, reaching 38% of the total number of mentions of political parties. The other pro-regime parties (the Agrarian/Civil Party Bloc and Asar) received lower but still significant shares.

By 2007 the consolidation around the party of power both in the political and in the media spheres was complete. Nur Otan received 45% of the coverage in this sample of printed media.

For the 2012 elections the elites supported also a second party, the pro-business formation Ak Zhol. In this sample of media, though, we can see that most of the attention was on the party of power, which got a 44%, share of coverage.

1999

Legend (1999):
- Otan
- Communist Party
- Democratic Party Azamat
- Agrarian Party
- Civil Party
- Alash
- Party of the National Congress
- People's Cooperative Party
- Republican People's Party
- Republican Party of Labour

2004

Legend (2004):
- Otan
- Communist Party/DVK Bloc
- Agrarian Party/Civil Party Bloc
- Asar
- Auyl
- Democratic Party
- Ak Zhol
- Party of Patriots
- People's Communist Party
- Rukhaniyat

2007

Legend (2007):
- Nur Otan
- Ak Zhol
- Auyl
- OSDP Azat
- Party of Patriots
- People's Communist Party
- Rukhaniyat

2012

Legend (2012):
- Nur Otan
- Ak Zhol
- Auyl
- OSDP Azat
- Party of Patriots
- People's Communist Party
- Adilet

Figure A.5 News coverage during the campaign for the Mazhilis elections - 1999, 2004, 2007 and 2012

Appendix Five:
Looking for Russian-based values in the Kazakhstani public discourse

In order to look at whether and how values originating in Russia are received in Kazakhstan, a qualitative content analysis was performed on a sample of national Kazakhstani newspapers and magazines.

Qualitative content analysis is defined as "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005: 1278). In this case, it is particularly suitable to the question posited in the chapter, which is whether certain values, typical of the Russian pro-regime discourse, are widespread also in Kazakhstan.

The analysis is configured as a "conceptual analysis" (Carley, 1990). After deciding to search for expressions, rather than single words, the keywords have been selected, and a series of variations has been individuated for each of them. Mostly, they are related to the core concepts of the Russian mode of rule, but some of them test the presence of other values, connected with the Chinese, Asian and Singapore examples (Table 3). I decided to code the concepts for frequency, rather than for existence, because I am interested in seeing how popular these concepts are in the Kazakhstani public discourse, and this would have not emerged clearly from detecting the single presence of these concepts in the printed media.

The analysis has been combined with an analysis of the context where the single expressions were found, regarding the connotation assigned to the term, as well as more general

considerations. In Table only the number of resulting mentions is shown.

A detailed discussion of findings is presented in Chapter 6. There, an accurate description of the context is attempted, as well as an interpretation of the findings and of their implications for the argumentation (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

The search has been conducted on a sample of Kazakhstani printed media, using the publications available in the INTEGRUM and Eastview databases[139].

These databases include some of the most important printed papers in Russian language. While the absence of publications in Kazakh is an evident lack, it does not represent a fundamental problem: Russian is still widely spoken among the political elite – who are the ones who ultimately make the decision of adopting (or not) these values. This fact could actually be an asset: the terms do not need to be translated, and can reach the receivers directly with their original message.

Information about the majority of the publications used in the analysis is available in the Appendix Three (Table 1). A few more publications were considered in this case: the weeklies *SEZ* and *Pravo. Ekonomika. Politika. Kul'tura.*, which were available respectively for 2005 and for the period 2005-2006.

The analyses have been conducted for the period from 1999 until December 2011, with the exception of searches on "sovereign democracy", which started in 2006, when the concept was first worded.

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[139] Eastview and INTEGRUM offer a wide and easily searchable selection of printed media in Russian language, relative to Russia and the post-Soviet area. See: http://www.integrumworld.com/ and http://www.eastview.com/online.

Keyword	Query Structure*	Period of search	Number of articles mentioning the term
Sovereign democracy	"суверенная демократия"	01.01.2006 – 01.01.2012	33
Managed democracy	"управляемая демократия"	01.01.1999 – 01.01.2012	**147**
Russian model	"Российская модель"**, "Российский пример", "Российский опыт"	01.01.1999 – 01.01.2012	**185**
Putin model	"Путинская модель", "модель Путина"	01.01.1999 – 01.01.2012	1
Chinese model	"Китайская модель", "Пекинская модель", "Китайский пример" "опыт Китая"	01.01.1999 – 01.01.2012	36
Asian model, Asian values	"Азиатские ценности"	01.01.1999 – 01.01.2012	8
Singapore model	"Модель Сингапур", "опыт Сингапура", "пример Сингапура"	01.01.1999 – 01.01.2012	**53**
"Economy first"	"сначала экономика"	01.01.1999 – 01.01.2012	**95**

Table A.9 Looking for external values in the Kazakhstani public discourse: keywords

* The expression "managed democracy" was searched for also in combination with other terms: "our" (*nasha*), "our own" (*sobstvennaia*), "Kazakhstani" (*po-kazakhstanski* and *Kazakhstanskaia*), "Nazarbayev's" (*po-Nazarbayevski* and N*azarbayevskaia*). This was done after a first search, which revealed that the expression was often associated with these terms.

Appendix Six: Map of Kazakhstan

Figure A.6 Map of Kazakhstan. Source: http://www.stantours.com/pics/kz_mn_map_bw_xl.gif

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Law "On the introduction of amendments and additions to the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kazakhstan on information and communication networks'" N. 178-IV of July 10, 2009.

Law on State Social Procurement, 2005

Law "On Introducing Amendments to Some Laws of Kazakhstan for the Further Humanization of Criminal Legislation and the Strengthening of Legal Safeguards in the Criminal Process", 2011

Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan

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[140] When not stated otherwise, legislation is available, in Russian, on the portal www.zakon.kz.

Main official websites

Central Electoral Commission	election.kz
President of Kazakhstan	akorda.kz
Government of Kazakhstan	government.kz
Parliament of Kazakhstan	parlam.kz
Nur Otan	ndp-nurotan.kz