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Orchestrated Leadership Successions in Personalist Dictatorships: The 2019 Kazakh Experience

by

Abilova Dariga

Under the Direction of Michael Herb, PhD

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2022

ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to investigate the unconventional outcome of personalist succession in Kazakhstan. After an in-depth analysis of the 2019 Kazakh succession case, using process-tracing method, I present evidence that outgoing personalist dictators are not only aware of the political risks of succession, but they are possibly also learning from their peers' experiences in orchestrating peaceful exits for themselves. This study adds to our existing knowledge of personalism's risks for leadership successions and suggests new opportunities for future research.

INDEX WORDS: Kazakhstan, Succession, Personalism, Coup, Post-personalism, Political violence

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2022

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December 2022

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FSB – Federal'naya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti (Federal Security Service)

USSR – United States of Socialist Republics

CSTO – Collective Security Threat Organization

KGB – Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti (State Security Committee)

CIS – Commonwealth of the Independent States

NSC – National Security Committee, also abbreviated as “KNB” by the Kazakh authors

ACA – Anti-Corruption Agency

INTRODUCTION

I am a Kazakh¹ citizen, who was born and raised under total *Nazarbayevism*, and my whole life I had same one president and could not even imagine having another. It was only after crossing a quarter of the century when I had a chance to vote for someone other than Nursultan Nazarbayev as my president. I already had a master's degree in hand, in the field of political science, and I knew that I deserved basic political freedoms, but casting my vote in the 2019 Presidential Elections, without Nazarbayev's name on the ballot, made me feel strange. I knew that I deserved to have basic political freedoms, but decades of Nazarbayevism warped my perception of "freedoms" in Kazakhstan.

Nazarbayevism has touched every part of my life, from early education to my first job. The earliest memory of Nazarbayevism comes from 2007, when I woke up at 6 AM to loud police sirens. I looked out of the window, to find the nearby "Nur Otan" ("Sunny Fatherland") party's headquarters on fire. The building burnt all the way to its foundation, and I saw those burnt ruins every single day walking to and from school. The opposition newspaper, which my mom bought and hid in her bedroom, said that fire was started by the true patriots, but the television told me that the fire was a result of a smoking accident.

Passing graduation exams, which contain a required section on the post-soviet Kazakh history, was easy for me, because I learned dates like Nazarbayev's birthday and the

¹ There is an ongoing debate among identity scholars over the proper use of "Kazakh" vs. "Kazakhstani" in denoting one's citizenship. The debate stems from the linguistic distinction first made by the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, the organization established by Nursultan Nazarbayev in 1995, to represent all ethnic groups in the country. The issue is that Kazakh can refer to an ethnic group, and not all citizens of Kazakhstan belong to the Kazakh ethnic group. Some, for example, are ethnic Russians. So "Kazakhstani" is often used to refer to citizens of the state, regardless of ethnic origins. I specifically use "Kazakh" instead of "Kazakhstani", due to my ethnic origin. Citizens of Kazakhstan who have non-Kazakh roots may prefer to use "Kazakhstani" instead. More on this ongoing discussion is addressed by Kesici, O. (2011). The dilemma in the nation-building process: The Kazakh or Kazakhstani nation. *jemie*, 10, 31.; and by Rees, K. M., & Williams, N. W. (2017). Explaining Kazakhstani identity: supraethnic identity, ethnicity, language, and citizenship. *Nationalities papers*, 45(5), 815-839.

establishment of Astana, by heart. Between 2011 – 2015, I attended the Nazarbayev University, where invited American faculty taught me about political institutions and democratic values.

However, I still felt like I saw a world's biggest superstar when Nursultan Nazarbayev visited the campus in 2014. This was the very first time I got to see him in person, I only saw him on the TV prior to that.

In the same year of 2014, I got my first internship at the lower chamber of the Parliament and even though it was unpaid, and life in the capital was expensive, I took it without hesitation. I did not get to see Nazarbayev again, like I hoped, but I saw his daughter, Dariga Nazarbayeva. I even got to see her lavish cabinet, which was bigger and on the higher floor, when I was entrusted to bring her a special package from a thankful citizen. I am not sure what was in the package, but I remember it being in Tiffany's signature teal-blue wrapping. At the time, I was not questioning why Dariga Nazarbayeva was in the Parliament. In fact, her post as another regular deputy in the lower chamber seemed modest and made my faith in Nazarbayev's fairness even stronger.

Just like many of my generation, I admired my president. I believe I was living under the cult of his personality. He was everywhere I would go: his statues were all over the country, his faces were on streets I lived at, his billboards and buildings framed roads I drove, even his handprint was on the banknotes I used every single day to buy bread. He became an essential part of everyone's life, so when in 2019 he suddenly announced his exit, I was disoriented. I felt second-hand embarrassment for the North Koreans when they cried over Kim Jon Il's death in 2011. Nazarbayev's sudden voluntary departure, though, made me understand some of their emotions.

This work is my attempt to understand why Nursultan Nazarbayev left his post as a president. He proclaimed himself as “*Elbasy*” (“Father of the Nation”) and promised to stay with the people forever. And while there are objective explanations of his voluntary exit, which I discuss in detail in Chapter 2, the main meaning of this work is to show that it is extraordinarily hard for personalist dictators to retire from office while still alive and to control the succession. Another importance of this work is to demonstrate that strategic learning between autocrats may extend to successions, in addition to learning survival models and repression methods. In the case of Kazakhstan specifically we see an aging dictator, who spent first two decades consolidating power in his hands - only to spend last decade to plan a succession that would let him retire gloriously and build procedural conditions for his daughter to potentially succeed him. He took into consideration the examples of failed successions in neighboring autocracies in the development of his own succession plan.

This work is also a contribution to the literature on the durability of post-Soviet autocracies and to the broader literature on personalism and its inherent risks. The detailed description of the Kazakh succession was also written with future researchers in mind, who will have a reference case for comparative studies of succession and will not have to start from scratch, as this case is relatively recent.

The literature review starts with a short overview of succession options for outgoing autocrats, and then focuses on the predictions of succession paths for the Central Asian dictators. This first chapter considers the failed dynastic succession in neighboring Uzbekistan, which could have influenced the course of succession in Kazakhstan, thereby pointing at the instance of learning between dictatorships. The chapter then compares two instances of controlled leadership

successions in Russia, which were the only successful cases of successions in the post-Soviet area, to the 2019 Kazakh case.

Chapter 2 discusses the establishment of personalist dictatorship by Nazarbayev. Along with the discussion of political institutions during first decades of Nazarbayevism, the chapter also provides the visual evidence of personality cult in the country. The chapter concludes with the list of post-tenure succession risks for Nazarbayev and explains why he sought careful, pre-planned orchestration of his exit.

Chapter 3 and 4 analyze the period of deliberation of potential candidates for succession and explains why Nazarbayev decided against the dynastic succession, which is typically expected in personalist regimes. Chapter 3 describes the 2019 presidential elections and provides evidence that there was a resistance from the outgoing elites, which sets the context for the coup attempt against the successor in 2022.

Chapter 5 discuss The 2022 Bloody January, or the “*Qandy Qantar*”, the violent episode of elite conflict post-succession under post-personalism. The chapter describes how the outgoing elites hijacked peaceful mass demonstration to topple the successor and how their effort has failed. The second part of the chapter focuses on the successor’s attempts to establish his own coalition. In the concluding chapter, I situate the Kazakh case in the universe of personalist successions and explain how it adds to the existing scholarship. My final paragraphs present most recent evidence of the early signs of personalization on the successor’s side, which suggest that successors might pick personalization over institutionalization, just like their predecessors.

1 LITERATURE REVIEW AND COMPARATIVE CASES

1.1 Post-tenure options for dictators

There are several ways leadership successions could happen in authoritarian states, depending on the type and level of institutionalization. The literature shows that autocracies are resilient and have smooth power transfers, with institutionalized ones being particularly durable (Gandhi, 2008; Magaloni, 2008). Autocratic regimes survive 87% of the time after a dictator's death in office (Kendall-Taylor & Frantz, 2016). Hereditary successions still remain to be the most stable forms of successions, which is why monarchical successions have longer lifespans compared to military regimes and dictatorships (Brownlee, 2007; Yom & Gause, 2012). Hereditary successions also significantly reduce the likelihood of coups (Kurrild-Klitgaard, 2000). For example, the European Monarchs, who practiced primogeniture, faced lower risks of deposition (Kokkonen & Sundell, 2014). Since political parties and militaries are state institutions with a certain degree of organized control and maintaining mechanisms, they also tend to have smooth successions (Geddes, 1999). Party-dominated authoritarian regimes are most likely to survive sudden changes in leadership. Famous examples would be Mexico and China, where PRI and CCP, respectively, easily dominate the elections (Ambrosio, 2015).

Political institutions prolong the regimes and protect them from internal risks during turbulent times. In *“How Dictatorships Work”*, authors find that dictators who manage to seize control over security forces or build a dominant political party usually hold onto power well (Geddes et al., 2018). In addition to this, Milan Svobik also explains that political institutions in autocracies solve commitment and monitoring problems, and not only be used for co-opting the opponents (Svobik, 2012). Autocracies with institutionalized legislatures and party systems still endure even when there is an opening after the departure of the leader due to “natural causes”

(Svolik, 2012, 88). Parties or councils establish the rules of power-sharing and help to prevent misunderstandings and conflicts. Crystallization of power-sharing arrangements re-assures the elites during turbulent times such as leadership successions.

All autocratic leaders face some level of uncertainty, which they reduce by holding competitive elections for gaining insight about the opponents (Schedler, 2013). Tanaka (2018) further adds that aging autocrats bring even more uncertainty, which is why they hold competitive elections as those let them exit *institutionally* in case of loss. Dictators would also prefer constitutionalized orderly successions to avoid coups (Frantz & Stein, 2017; Meng, 2021b). Electoral autocracies have smoother successions when the outgoing autocrat proposes a specific candidate for electoral succession (Zeng, 2020).

In his 2012 book, Svolik looks at a period between 1946 – 2008, and concludes that the most common form of constitutional exit in dictatorships is “natural causes”, which includes dictators dying in the office or stepping down to poor health. However, only one-third of the leadership changes in dictatorships are constitutional, the two-thirds of successions are unconstitutional: coups, revolts, foreign interventions, and assassinations. The longer the tenure of the dictator, the more likely he is to die in office.

One of the most important institutional explanations of autocratic successions comes from Jason Brownlee, who built his theory on works of Herb and Tullock, arguing that the succession will be controlled by the elites if departing leader pre-dates his political party and if political elites are personally invested in continuing the regime. This has been more recently supported by Horak (2018) who states that the “calm succession” in Turkmenistan in 2007 was possible because the elites agreed on a preferred successor amongst themselves.

Furthering Brownlee's institutionalist argument, a 2016 study by Kendall-Taylor and Frantz found that dictators' deaths in office rarely lead to regime change:

“87 percent of the time that leaders died in office, the regime — or group in power and rules for governing — remained intact the following year. And in 76 percent of cases, it was still in power five years later” (Kendall-Taylor & Frantz, 2016).

Thus, even if a dictatorship collapses, it is usually not replaced by a democracy. Protests and coups are also rare when a dictator dies. It is all about the elites - they choose to continue and coalesce around a new successor and keep things the same instead of fighting for power.

However, the absence of a strong political party or other institutionalized succession mechanism might lead to regime collapse. Therefore, an institutionalized dictatorship endures while a personalistic dictatorship is more fragile.

Thus, we can conclude that institutionalized regimes have better chances of surviving the uncertainty of succession (Boix & Svobik, 2013). Uninstitutionalized dictatorships, then, remain to be the *most vulnerable* regimes and the dictator can either die-in-office or try to institutionalize the succession procedure via establishing a party (and turning the regime into a more stable, one-party leadership) or picking a successor (and turn the regime into a more stabilized form of hereditary succession). There is rarely a third option. Loss of leadership concluded with imprisonment, assassination or exile for 47% of dictators between 1942-2004, with personalist dictators having higher likelihood of assassination and imprisonment compared to military and party-based dictators (Escribà-Folch, 2013). Out of all departed personalist leaders, 63% were forcibly replaced through irregular means (Escribà-Folch, 2013).

Therefore, one of the ways out for personalist dictators without heirs or pre-dating parties is to transform their dictatorships into single-party regimes to organize smoother successions.

And this is, indeed, what could have been planned by Nursultan Nazarbayev, who's party, Nur-Otan, lacks any legislative agency, but could still provide a framework for succession (Isaacs, 2020). Instead, he established and maintained Nur Otan party as apolitical avenue for articulation of private interests.

Personalist regimes remain fragile even after the formal succession, as it takes some time for the successor to build his own coalition or win loyalties of the previous one. In Turkmenistan, for example, it took 15 years for the Second President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, to completely consolidate power, which then allowed him to transfer all his power to his son, Sardar Berdymukhamedov, without any institutional resistance (Peyrouse, 2022). Political loyalties in highly personalist regimes are less fluid, because they are less institutionalized, than in other forms of authoritarian regimes (Clapham, 1988). It takes time for them to consolidate into an identifiable social force behind the leader.

While monarchies and single-party regimes have some regulation over power transfers, personalized regimes usually do not, which makes them even more susceptible to succession anxiety as autocrats get older. Furthermore, aging, and ill autocrats rarely choose their successors, making domestic and external actors especially anxious. Picking a successor might backfire against the dictator, particularly when his choice of the successor is not supported by the elites or when the successor becomes too popular and tries to expedite the succession (Kendall-Taylor & Frantz, 2016). In addition, rumors about health problems increase the risk of rebellions and coups (Bueno de Mesquita & Smith, 2017). Taking everything into consideration, aging personalistic leaders in uninstitutionalized autocracies are most vulnerable to uncertainty over their succession, which is why they usually attempt to stay in office for as long as possible.

1.2 Existing Expectations on Central Asian Dictators' succession patterns

Seven decades of the Communist Party Rule in the USSR established repressive system, based on patronage politics, which survives to this day (McGlinchey, 2011). Balint Magyar (2019), post-communism expert, using Weberian notion of patrimonialism, categorizes Kazakhstan as a neo-patrimonial state. However, the majority of experts categorize Kazakhstan as a personalist regime (Isaacs, 2010; Kudaibergenova, 2020; Laruelle, 2021). Likewise, according to Geddes's autocratic regime typology, Nursultan Nazarbayev was a personalist leader, who was unconstrained by the major party or the military (Geddes et al., 2017). Nazarbayev had full institutional freedom and total control over political offices (Gandhi & Sumner, 2020).

Regardless of their grade of personalism, the successorship dilemma still did not spare aging post-Soviet dictators. Only few of them managed to turn their regimes into more stable institutionalized forms of autocracy, with ex-communist elites forming new coalitions. Some republics even managed to enter democratic transition, after a period of political violence caused by popular contestation of unfair elections hijacked by outgoing autocrats. These popular protests became known as "color revolutions", which concluded in contested elections, establishing a precedent of institutionalized successions through the elections.

The successions in other post-Soviet regimes, however, were either caused by the executive's death-in-office or concluded in popular uprisings after elections. In the following sections, I will describe the outcomes of leadership successions specifically in neighboring Central Asian states and discuss their influences on Nursultan Nazarbayev's finalized ultimate succession plan.

1.2.1 Prior Successions in Central Asian Dictatorships: Successful Dynastic Successions

When it comes to the Central Asian autocracies, there is an expectation of familial successions among the leaders with male heirs. The regimes are “settled” with minimal pressure to open. Cooperation with The US during the US-Afghan war, as well as various economic agreements have legitimized authoritarian governments in the region (Cooley, 2012; Yessenova, 2015). Moreover, as regimes continued, the need for their legitimation decreased (Dukalskis & Gerschewski, 2017). Hereditary successions under the approval of elites, like in Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, went smoothly, and did not draw any critical voices.

Central Asian leaders have also traditionally relied on their charisma to tie themselves to the acquired independence (from the Soviet Union) and state-building in the early years of it (Isaacs, 2015; Zabortseva, 2018). This state-building style, where the first president is seen as a “father/founder” of the new nation, further contributed to the normalization of dynastic succession, as there is a belief in the extraordinariness of the nation’s first independent leader.

Moreover, since Central Asian societies are also Muslim-majority societies, the preference for the leaders also reflect local gender expectations. Therefore, the outgoing dictators who had male heirs, were facing least pressures from impending successions. For example, current Azerbaijani president, Ilham Aliyev, successfully won the 2003 Presidential Elections with 77.97% of votes and succeeded his ailing father, Heydar Aliyev on the post (Radnitz, 2012). Female candidate, Lala-Shovket Hajiyeva, for example, captured only 3.20% of the votes, despite long political career in Azerbaijan, and a great support from the civil groups (cnn.com, 2003).

Similarly, Sardar Berdymukhamedov smoothly succeeded his father, Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, as third president of Turkmenistan in 2022 (Peyrouse, 2022). Furthermore,

in neighboring Tajikistan, Rustam Emomali was recently promoted to a post of speaker of the upper house of the Parliament, which places him second-on-line to presidency in case if anything happens to the current Tajik President, Emomali Rahmon, who is also his father (Putz, 2020). Earlier, Rahmon lowered the age requirement for the presidency from 35 to 30 in 2016, when his son turned 28 (Putz, 2020).

So far, 3 out of 6 post-Soviet Central Asian states already had or are moving towards the hereditary succession, but leaders in those states, fortunately for them, had male heirs. The Uzbek and the Kazakh leaders, unfortunately for them, did not. The 2003 Azerbaijani succession not only highlighted the ease of hereditary male successions in the region, but also encouraged the Turkmen and the Tajik presidents to lay legal pathways for their sons to succeed them.

1.2.2 Successions in Central Asian Dictatorships: Failed Dynastic Succession in Uzbekistan

The succession in Uzbekistan deserves a separate section as it is the closest political sibling of the Kazakh regime, and aged leaders in both faced most similar succession problems. In both cases, the dictators did not have sons, which they could groom into successors. However, both had daughters, who were speculated to succeed their fathers (Blackmon, 2021; Walker, 2014).

Islam Karimov's eldest daughter, Gulnara Karimova, entered politics in early 2000s, after obtaining degree in regional studies from Harvard University. Between 2008 – 2017, she served as a permanent representative to the UN from Uzbekistan. She also temporarily served as an ambassador to Spain in 2010. During this period, she allegedly accumulated more than \$3 billion in bribes from international companies in exchange for preferential access to the Uzbek market (Гостев, 2020).

Up until late 2013 there was an expectation among Central Asian scholars that Gulnara Karimova was seriously considered by her father as his next successor, especially after her rise in the country's diplomatic corps and joining her father in official state trips abroad (Blackmon, 2021; Boonstra & Laruelle, 2014; McGlinchey, 2016). However, in 2013, in several erratic tweets, Gulnara Karimova accused her mother of alienating her father Islam Karimov against her (Lillis, 2013). Tatiana Karimova, the first lady of Uzbekistan at the time, had a lot of influence on her husband's decisions. Next year, Gulnara Karimova was found guilty by the Tashkent Court in tax evasion and embezzlement and sentenced to 5 years of supervised house arrest. In the meantime, Tatiana Karimova and Rustem Inoyatov, the head of the National Security Services of Uzbekistan, started to craft a succession plan for the ailing Islam Karimov (Lenta.ru, 2021). Islam Karimov was getting suspicious of Rustem Inoyatov's rapid accumulation of power and rising popularity among the military officers. He demoted him in 2014, and a week before his death, transferred some Presidential powers to the Prime Minister. After Islam Karimov's death-in-office in September 2016, the Prime Minister Shavkat Mirziyoyev won the Presidential Elections in December 2016.

However, immediately after assuming office, Shavkat Mirziyoyev began de-personalization of the personnel and within following 18 months removed remaining Islam Karimov's allies and rivals, including Rustem Inoyatov (Anceschi, 2021). Moreover, under Shavkat Mirziyoyev's administration, Gulnara Karimova had her sentence extended to 15 years and was transferred to a regular prison facility from her house arrest arrangement (Sud.uz, 2020). Gulnara Karimova's most recent request to return \$680 million to state budget in exchange for release has also been denied by the new Uzbek government (Госреб, 2020).

The events that followed the Uzbek President's death might have affected Nursultan Nazarbayev's decision to avoid the similar outcome for himself and his family. Shavkat Mirziyoyev's aggressive personnel policy against Islam Karimov's allies and his daughter, Gulnara Karimova, might have influenced Nazarbayev's succession plan, in particular – his decision to exit early and *not wait until death-in-office* (Ruiz-Ramas & Morales Hernández, 2021). Moreover, an observation of Gulnara Karimova's detainment, Nursultan Nazarbayev decided to avoid the designation of his daughter Dariga Nazarbayeva as his preferred successor.

1.2.3 Orchestrated Successions in Russia:

The Kazakh case of succession, albeit outside of Central Asia, can be compared to Russian presidential successions in 2001 and 2008. According to the autocratic regimes dataset by Geddes et al (2017), both Yeltsin's (1991-1999) and Putin's (2000-2008) regimes were personalist autocracies, as was Kazakhstan during Nazarbayev's tenure (Geddes et al., 2017). Moreover, both Russia and Kazakhstan inherited same political structures after the breakup of the USSR (Hale, 2012; Magyar, 2019). Considering these similarities, the leadership successions in all three cases are comparable.

Almost immediately after the announcement, Nursultan Nazarbayev's sudden departure was compared to Boris Yeltsin's, former Russian president (1991-1999), sudden resignation during the annual presidential address in 1999. In fact, Blackmon (2021) even states that Nazarbayev's resignation speech was eerily similar to Boris Yeltsin's. Yeltsin's quiet resignation was long considered to be the only successful case of power transfer from a personalist autocrat to a hand-picked successor in the former Soviet Union area. There are few similarities between the 2019 Kazakh succession and the 1999 Russian succession: 1) the absence of mass uprisings,

or, so-called “color revolutions” contesting the elections; 2) both outgoing leaders left before their current terms were expiring; 3) both proposed a specific candidate for succession.

However, Yeltsin’s 1999 exit is not the only that might have influenced Nazarbayev’s succession plan. The successful comeback of Vladimir Putin to the executive seat in 2012, after having a meek placeholder for 2008-2012 term, might have influenced Nazarbayev to look for a similar placeholder candidate, who would not mind the return of the Nazarbayev’s family back to power after one term. Therefore, Nazarbayev might have learned from both instances of negotiated leadership successions in Russia in 1999 and 2008, which suggest that elite-learning takes place even in the post-tenure considerations. Studies show that surviving autocrats observe and learn from each other, which is why some autocrats retained their seats in the later stages of the Arab Spring (Aras & Oztig, 2021; Dorr, 2021). However, there are no studies looking at the learning mechanisms in successions. Nursultan Nazarbayev did not just learn how to avoid “color revolutions” during his active tenure, but he also observed and learned from his peers’ successions. He used these observations in crafting his own post-tenure plans and decided to exit preemptively, like Yeltsin did in 1999 and appoint a loyal successor, like Putin did in 2008.

After two prolonged conflicts in the breakaway region of Chechnya, Boris Yeltsin, the first president of the Russian Federation, was losing popular support (“The Succession Struggle in Russia,” 1999). The “shock therapy” of 1997 devalued the national currency and released control over prices, further adding to the growing anti-Yeltsin sentiment in the country (Huygen, 2011). The rapidly growing Committee of Military Mothers was pressuring for ending the Chechen War. It is during this time Boris Yeltsin noticed young Vladimir Putin, a former KGB agent with supportive network in security forces and uncompromising stance on the Chechen separatism (“The Succession Struggle in Russia,” 1999). Even more importantly, Vladimir Putin

seemed to be tolerant of the neoliberal economists which formed the core of Boris Yeltsin's coalition, which meant lower likelihood of intra-elite conflict during the transition (Loftus, 2019; Sakwa, 2000).

A week after the Chechen separatists advanced into Dagestan region, on August 16th 1999 Yeltsin appointed Vladimir Putin, then director of Federal Security Service (FSB), a new Prime Minister ("The Succession Struggle in Russia," 1999). On December 31st 1999, during the annual televised presidential address to the nation, Boris Yeltsin suddenly announced his exit and appointed Vladimir Putin as an interim until next presidential elections in June 2000 (Sakwa, 2000). Boris Yeltsin claimed that his peaceful voluntary exit is first of its kind in the modern history of the region, hinting at the violent regime breakdown in Yugoslavia. On the same day, interim president Vladimir Putin signed a law on former president, which guaranteed legal immunity and generous pension to Boris Yeltsin (Loftus, 2019). The legal immunity, which provided legal protection to Boris Yeltsin, was something that Nursultan Nazarbayev *paid attention to*. In the last years of tenure, Boris Yeltsin and his family members were accused of corruption by General – Prosecutor Yuri Shuratov (Bohlen, 1999). Vladimir Putin's willingness to sign the law on the first president which legally protected Boris Yeltsin likely impressed Nursultan Nazarbayev. He made sure to adopt a similar law in July 2000, 7 months after observing Yeltsin's unbothered retirement (Zakon.kz, n.d.-b).

While Vladimir Putin's leadership is out of scope of this paper's topic, he is also regarded as a personalist dictator, who pushed emerging elites out of politics, including those who helped him to consolidate power (Treisman, 2007). More relevant is his voluntary exit in 2008, after two executive terms. The exit was followed by the orchestrated succession, where Putin's protégé and loyalist, Dmitry Medvedev was elected as third president of Russia (Hale & Colton, 2010).

Medvedev served for one term (2008-2012), until he was asked to endorse Putin's comeback as president in 2012. Dmitry Medvedev was a temporary successor, whose main function was assistance with getting around the Constitutional restriction on two consecutive executive terms.

Dmitry Medvedev made a good candidate for a temporary successor, for two main reasons. First, he did not have his own coalition or support base: both among the Russian population and among the "*siloviks*", i.e. security officers (Wilson, 2008). Moreover, he was placed on his first political position by Vladimir Putin himself (Wilson, 2008). Second, Dmitry Medvedev was financially benefitting from a kleptocratic system built by Vladimir Putin long before the succession and would have little to no incentives to change it after (Aslund, 2019). In the four years of his only term, Dmitry Medvedev made no big personnel changes in the government and did not get to build his own coalition. Moreover, Vladimir Putin was serving as a Prime Minister, maintaining control over the government. Therefore, Dmitry Medvedev's best bet in staying close to power was to step down when Vladimir Putin expressed the desire to have presidency again in the next elections.

It seems like Nursultan Nazarbayev learned from both episodes of succession and attempted to repeat it in Kazakhstan in 2019. Like Boris Yeltsin in 1999, Nursultan Nazarbayev planned to step down before his term's expiration and like Vladimir Putin in 2008, he wanted to appoint a malleable placeholder, who would preserve the seat until Dariga Nazarbayeva, or other Nazarbayev family member decides to run for presidency. This likely influenced Nursultan Nazarbayev to appoint his long-time loyalist Karim Massimov as a head of National Security Committee (NSC) and help with the election of meek Kassym-Jomart Tokayev as next president. Tokayev, then, obediently agreed to have Dariga Nazarbayeva as the Speaker of the Senate, which placed her second-in-line to presidency should anything happen to the president.

Moreover, Nursultan Nazarbayev maintained the Chairmanship of the Security Council. The appointments of loyalists on key government and security posts suggest that they were supposed to prevent temporary placeholder from consolidating power. Zauresh Battalova from the Foundation of Development of Parliamentarism said that Nazarbayev was building a favorable environment for his daughter and the loyalists on key positions were supposed to form a new coalition for her when she eventually succeeds (ИА Тотал Казахстан, 2014).

Previously, we have established that successions in personalist regimes have higher risks for leaders. In the Kazakh case, the outgoing dictator, observing the examples of negotiated successions nearby, learned about the risks and decided to pick an agreeable loyalist, who would provide post-tenure guarantees like Vladimir Putin did for Boris Yeltsin, or would not mind holding the seat until the dictator's comeback.

To sum up, the table below contains all prior successions by autocrats in the region and suggests possible contribution to the final design of Nursultan Nazarbayev's ultimate succession plan.

Table 1: Succession Events in post-Soviet Autocracies and their impact on the 2019 Kazakh Succession case:

Time	Succession Event	Impact on Nursultan Nazarbayev's Succession Plan
Russia 1999	Boris Yeltsin voluntarily retires and recommends Vladimir Putin.	Boris Yeltsin left after economic complications of his controversial "shock therapy" program and was unpopular due War in Chechnya. Nursultan Nazarbayev started losing popularity from 2015 due to oil price drops and unpopular 2016 Land Protests. Yeltsin's example of leaving before losing all remaining support was a good warning to Nazarbayev.
Azerbaijan 2003	Ilham Aliyev successfully succeeds his father Heydar Aliyev.	Unfortunately, Nursultan Nazarbayev did not have a male heir.

Turkmenistan 2007	Saparmurat Niyazov dies in office and his family loses all access to power. Turkmenistan's dictator did have a son who was studying abroad and was presumed to be groomed for succession. However, he was not even allowed to run for elections when his father died in office.	This case might have influenced Nursultan Nazarbayev to schedule his succession before his death, to guarantee his family members some access to resources and power.
Russia 2008	Vladimir Putin exhausts term limits and recommends Dmitry Medvedev. Putin becomes a Prime-Minister.	The example of a loyal placeholder obediently agreeing to leave after first term might have influenced Nursultan Nazarbayev to pick a loyalist who would not mind serving for one term. Moreover, the appointee would have to approve the appointment of Dariga Nazarbayeva as a Speaker of Senate and make her second-in-line to presidency.
Russia 2012	Vladimir Putin comes back as President, facing no resistance from loyal Medvedev.	
Uzbekistan 2016	Islam Karimov dies in office, his daughter Gulnara Karimova gets arrested, and his loyalists lose their positions in the government.	The Uzbek case (and the 2007 Turkmen case above) might have influenced Nursultan Nazarbayev to step down before potentially dying-in-office and losing control over the appointments after his death. Moreover, he had to insulate his family members from arrests and find a way to keep Dariga Nazarbayeva, his daughter, in the government.

1.3 External constraints:

Nursultan Nazarbayev also had to consider external constraints on his succession scheme, because Central Asian autocracies depend on their relationships with more powerful regional players (Cooley, 2012). Being politically and economically supported by the Chinese or the Russian “patrons” legitimizes Central Asian autocrats by adding a layer of international credibility. The US-Afghanistan war also prolonged the democratization in the region because the US had to get all these Central Asian dictators on board for geopolitical considerations, further boosting their international credibility (Cooley, 2012). The US and the Western allies had to overlook undemocratic practices in Central Asian countries to secure access to Afghanistan. Moreover, more immediate geographic powers like Russia and China also care about the

political and economic consequences of leadership succession in Central Asia due to large number of investments in region's natural resources (Cheang, 2019). Nursultan Nazarbayev, thus, had to carefully consider concerns from his neighbors as well when thinking about his succession plans.

With high geopolitical sensitivity in the region, all key players and investors were interested in keeping existing contracts when Nursultan Nazarbayev announced his exit. There was an expectation that he will transfer his post to someone who would continue his "course" in the foreign politics. Andrey Grozin states that to eliminate potential security concerns, Nursultan Nazarbayev consulted Tokayev's candidacy with the Russian and the Chinese leaders before suggesting him as a successor (Grozin, 2019). The Russian interest in the Central Asian leaderships is perhaps too big of a topic for this dissertation, however, it is important to state its significance in the stability of autocratic regimes in Russia's sphere of influence. Nazarbayev, thus, had to pick a successor who would not pursue democratic reforms, as it would threaten neighboring autocratic regimes, which in turn, would complicate existing security and economic agreements.

Before moving onto the Kazakh case, I wanted to explain the methods that were used in laying out all succession steps, as well as identifying its main consequences. When the 2019 Kazakh succession took place – at first, it seemed like an outlier case, where an outgoing personalist dictator stepped down peacefully. This was contradicting established succession outcomes for personalist dictators. To find an explanation for this unusual outcome in personalist successions, I used qualitative process-tracing method to identify all events around the succession (Mahoney, 2010). These events included legal decrees, political appointments, security appointments, business transactions by the key figures, their public speeches and public

appearances. I then placed all these events, i.e., nodes, in an ordered time sequence, and this allowed me to connect the events to key decisions made by the outgoing dictator (Beach, 2016). Moreover, a careful analysis of all this rich contextual data allowed me to notice learning behaviors on the outgoing dictator's part, as well as to make inferences about main drivers behind his decision to leave early and to appoint a male loyalist. The chapters follow the timing of the 2019 Kazakh succession and offer inferences based on collected data.

2 PERSONALIST KAZAKHSTAN

2.1 Roots of personalism:

Most Turkic nations of Central Asia, prior to incorporation into the Soviet Union, were confederations of nomadic tribes. The Kazakhs, in particular, were a tribal society with every tribe having a separate “aqsaqal” (“the elder”), who would be the de-facto leader of the tribe’s natural habitat. Because of the filial piety and harsh living conditions in the flat windy steppe, the leaders of the tribe were not elected, but rather, regarded for their age, wisdom and experience. The tribes were not necessarily conflicting with each other, but big territory and nomadic lifestyle did not contribute to intense relations, either. In other words, there was no prior experience of elected representative institutions on which democratic institutions could emerge - in a stark contrast to the Baltic states, for example.

Historically, the Kazakh polity operated in the “management” style of the preceding Mongolian White Horde, where only the descendants of Genghis Khan could be elected as rulers. Emerging Kazakh tribes would group into bigger “zhuzes” (i.e. “hundreds”) based on their summer pastures and winter settlements along the natural geographical divisions of the river Syrdarya and the time of zhuz’s formations (Abisheva, n.d.). The approximate formation of the Kazakh zhuzes is summarized in the Figure 1 below:



Figure 1 Geography of the Kazakh Zhuzes
Edited from Abisheva (n.d.)

This internal division into zhuzes among the Kazakhs became known to the Tsarist Russia, and later, to the Soviet authorities, which used this division in their personnel policy. To understand the effect of tribalism on the post-Soviet politics and succession patterns in Kazakhstan, it is important to look back to the 1960s, where the Eldest Tribe (Uly Zhuz) started to dominate political structures. Thus, the “eldest” zhuz, to which former president and his main circle belongs to, inhabited South-Eastern part of the country, while the North-Central Kazakhstan and Western Kazakhstan were inhabited by the “central” and “smaller” zhuzes, respectively (Abisheva, n.d.). Central Zhuz Kazakhs were more urbanized and more educated due to proximity to the Russian Empire and dominated the intellectual life of the country before and during its time in the Soviet Union. However, it was the intelligentsia who got repressed the most during the Stalinist Terror. Nevertheless, the Central Zhuz continued to dominate the cultural and intellectual life of the country up until the 1960s. Among them were prominent writers in the Kazakh language, which could potentially contribute to Kazakh nationalism, which would go against the common soviet identity. The Soviet leadership started to intentionally promote the Kazakhs from the Eldest Zhuz to weaken the influence of the Central Zhuz

(Masanov, 1999). Thus, in 1964, Dinmukhamed Kunayev from the Eldest Zhuz became the First Secretary of the Communist Party in Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (KSSR). Dinmukhamed Kunayev, perhaps, contributed to the domination of Eldest Zhuz in the country because he started to promote Nursultan Nazarbayev, who was also from the same Eldest Zhuz (Masanov, 1999). This personnel policy was necessitated by the growing popularity of the candidate for the First Secretary from the Smaller Zhuz, so the incumbent leader, Kunayev, strongly pushed for his protege from the same zhuz as himself, Nursultan Nazarbayev, to be considered for his position.

While several decades of Soviet rule somewhat disrupted nepotism and tribalism, it eventually came back and was actively facilitated by Nazarbayev's Clan. Him being from "*Shapyrashty*" tribe and having fellow shapyrashtians disproportionately-overrepresented in the government raised a lot of questions, considering the fact that the tribe itself only comprises 2% of the total Kazakh population (Stan.kz, 2021). The successor Nursultan Nazarbayev would eventually pick, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, is also from the Eldest Zhuz, though from a different tribe.

The remainder of the chapter is structured in the following way: first, I describe stages of Nursultan Nazarbayev's personalism through the evidence of his elimination of the Soviet elites who brought him to power, followed by the evidence of his usurpation of the legislative institutions and a capture of the state economy through opaque privatization period. Then, I use ethnographic evidence of the sacralization of his persona that goes beyond the personality cult. Finally, I explain the post-tenure risks and why they made him orchestrate his own succession while he still had power and time to do so.

2.2 Early Nazarbayevism and the Destruction of the Legislature

Nazarbayev's ascension to power shows his personalistic tendencies, as he would use his predecessors and higher-ups' support for his career and discard them afterwards. At first, he received support from the incumbent leader of the Kazakh SSR, Dinmukhamed Kunayev, and became a Chairman of the Council of Ministers in 1984. In February 1986, at the XXVI Communist Party Congress, Nazarbayev unexpectedly criticized Kunayev's nepotism in appointments. In December 1986, The Communist Party retired Kunayev and appointed Gennady Kolbin, an ethnic Russian with no prior experience of working in Kazakhstan as the next leader of the Kazakh SSR. Gennady Kolbin's appointment caused mass protests from the Kazakh youth, which later became known as "*Jeltoqsan*" ("December"). Jeltoqsan was the first peaceful anti-government mass demonstration within the Soviet Union, which marked the start of anti-government protests in other republics (Kuanova et al., 2020). The repression of Jeltoqsan by the Soviet authorities was so cruel that the investigation was classified, and the protest was framed as an isolated case of the Kazakh nationalism (Kuanova et al., 2020).

Nursultan Nazarbayev used Jeltoqsan in his ascension to the top by first denying his involvement in it and later by claiming he "led it". He retained his government position throughout the incident and described the protesters as "extremists who managed to lure the unhealthy part of youth with provocative rumors" in 1987 (Ryskozha, 2009). In 1990, following Mikhail Gorbachev's "Perestroika" reforms, Nursultan Nazarbayev claimed that he was actually leading the Jeltoqsan Crowd, even though it was not easy for him, as he was also loyal to the Communist Party's principles (Ryskozha, 2009). In other words, Nursultan Nazarbayev was sitting on two chairs to keep the support from the Communist Party, which was losing popularity but still had power over government appointments.

In 1990, the Communist Party introduced the institution of presidency in the USSR and Nursultan Nazarbayev supported Mikhail Gorbachev's candidacy. Later, Gorbachev would say that Nazarbayev "upstaged" him, because by promoting the institution of presidency in the USSR Nazarbayev was actually pressing for the introduction of presidency in union republics as well, and wanted to become a president himself (Akkuly, 2010). On April 24, 1990 the Supreme Council of Kazakh SSR elected Nursultan Nazarbayev President of the Kazakh SSR (Interfax.ru, 1991).

Towards the end of the 1990, almost all union republics held presidential elections and elected their own presidents. Mikhail Gorbachev, seeing the impending collapse of the USSR, proposed union-wide Referendum on preserving USSR. The Referendum passed with 76% of voters' support on March 17, 1991 (TACC, n.d.). On June 12, 1991 Boris Yeltsin, a non-party candidate, won the first Presidential Elections in Russia and ended the long domination of the Communist Party. Boris Yeltsin was supposed to sign a new Union Agreement with presidents of other soviet republics according to the Referendum, however, KGB officers staged a coup to prevent him from doing so (Interfax.ru, 2021). Nursultan Nazarbayev was maintaining visible silence during this period, probably waiting to see which coalition was going to win, Yeltsin's or Gorbachev's.

On August 19, 1991 KGB put Mikhail Gorbachev under house arrest, declared a state of emergency and attempted to depose President Boris Yeltsin, but failed (Interfax.ru, 2021). In 1991, after surviving the coup attempt, the president of the Russian SSR, Boris Yeltsin and presidents of Belarus and Ukraine, signed the Belavezha Accord, which would dissolve the USSR and establish the Commonwealth of the Independent States (CIS) (Новая газета, 2021). Nursultan Nazarbayev was remaining on Mikhail Gorbachev's side and wanted to preserve the

USSR. When Gorbachev was finally losing last bits of influence and Boris Yeltsin was gaining more power, Nursultan Nazarbayev started negotiations with Yeltsin (H. Масаһов, 2017). After Boris Yeltsin finalized the legal end of USSR, Nazarbayev attempted to take credit for the establishment of the CIS, as if he was with Boris Yeltsin's team the whole time. Nazarbayev would later go as far as to claim that it was him who suggested the establishment of the CIS, which former president of Belarus refuted in 2021 (Shushkevich, 2013; Tusipkhan, 2021).

On December 1st, 1991, Nursultan Nazarbayev formally became the president of the Republic of Kazakhstan, running as a non-affiliated independent, and winning elections with 98% of support. The Supreme Council continued to exist with Serikbolsyn Abdildin as its Chairman (H. Масаһов, 2017). In addition to the surviving Communist Party, two more parties were formed: the Social Democratic Party and the Party of National Freedom "Alash". The Communist Party announced reconstruction, and Nazarbayev resigned from it but stated that parties should not be created on "artificial" basis and instead represent the "interests" of existing groups (Zhankuliyeva, 2012). By 1995, there were already 9 active political parties willing to compete in the 1995 Legislative Elections.

Generally, out of all five Central Asian autocracies, Kazakhstan started with the most fragmented Parliament. Nursultan Nazarbayev clashed with the independent Parliament in the following years for his attempts to change the Constitution. Carla Pistan states that as early as 1995 it was clear that Kazakhstan was not going to democratize with all of Nazarbayev's manipulations of the country's legislature (Pistan, 2019). In 1994, he managed to dissolve the Parliament, The Supreme Council and the Constitutional Court and ruled the entire year of 1995 by presidential decree alone and held two referendums: to extend his presidential term until 2000 and to create a bicameral legislature (Pistan, 2019). Bicameralism is usually introduced to dilute

the legislative power of the lower chamber, or to bundle the changes in the legislature with the extension of an executive term (Baturu & Elgie, 2018).

Dosym Satpayev argues that the establishment of the Senate, where 15 deputies were appointed by him, served as a guarantee of legislative support for Nursultan Nazarbayev's future policies, because he had already clashed with the fragmented Mazhilis and wanted to weaken it (Гиперборей, 2022a). The establishment of bicameral legislature, especially the introduction of senate, is more common among personalist leaders (Baturu & Elgie, 2018). Therefore, this period marks the *start of the personalization process*.

Personalist rulers intentionally undermine formal political institutions (Jackson & Rosberg, 1984). Instead, they establish a coalition of individuals who may have access to the means of coercion or material rewards. There are no rules of inter-elite interactions as coalitions are based on informal relations or personal loyalties. This prevents elites from establishing a basis for challenging the personalist leader (Geddes, 1999). Nursultan Nazarbayev's personalism is evident in his conscious weakening of the somewhat-effective legislature he inherited from the previous regime. His counterbalancing of security institutions and distribution of material incentives to his family members is another evidence of his personalist leadership.

To gain total control over the legislative branch, Nursultan Nazarbayev needed a party that would formalize and print his orders. To populate the Parliament, he needed a formal party. As early as 1998, the President Nazarbayev began changing the Constitution again after the 1995 changes on it, raising the party threshold to 7% and formed his own political party, "Otan" ("Homeland"), which absorbed 7 other parties:

"Creation of Otan RPP initiated the process of the parties and movements consolidation supporting the official political line. Starting from 1999 this party was

joined by the Kazakhstan People's Unity Party, Democratic Party of Kazakhstan, Liberal Movement of Kazakhstan, and Movement for 2030 Kazakhstan, Party of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan, People's Cooperative Party and Republican Political Labor Party.” (Zhankuliyeva, 2012).

By next legislative elections in 1999, the newly formed Parliament was dominated by his loyalists (Pistan, 2019). The 2007 Constitutional Amendments limited the executive term from 7 years to 5 years, but Nazarbayev was allowed to run for office unlimited times in a special recognition as “*Leader of the Nation*” (“Elbasy”) in 2010. The important distinction here is that Nazarbayev’s special title was not inscribed into the Constitution, only the amendments to Articles 46 and 91. Article 46 allows special exclusions and provisions in accordance with the Law in the First President and Article 91 recognizes Nazarbayev’s input into the independence of Kazakhstan (ИПС “Әділет,” n.d.-a). But inscription of the title of “Elbasy” into the country’s Constitution was not a part of the law. He received wider functions, as a super-president, but not the title of Elbasy. Perhaps, at the time, having his title inscribed into the Constitution would further demonstrate the growing cult of personality and cause unwanted comparisons to the Turkmen Dictator, Saparmurat Niyazov, who’s title of “*Turkmenbashi*” (Father of Turkmen) was legalized in 1993 (Kimmage, 2006). But Nursultan Nazarbayev, however, did not mind the expansion of his duties. This will become important during the political reforms and constitutional referendum proposed by his successor after the *Qantar* incident.

In the meantime, in the early 2000s, new parties continued to form, reaching a total of 19 registered parties by September 2002. Preemptively, a new Law on Political Parties was adopted in July 2002, where parties were required to have at least 50,000 voters, and as a result, 12 parties were resolved a year later, including the Republican Party of Kazakhstan, which was

endorsed by former Prime Minister. At The 2004 Parliamentary Elections, four Parties, with Nazarbayev's "Otan" taking 60% of the seats, formed the new Parliament. After taking majority seats in 2004 and later absorbing other smaller pro-presidential parties in 2007, Otan Party has been continuously dominating all Parliamentary elections since. The new law on the Amendments to the Constitution (May 21, 2007) officially allowed the President to have party association (which was banned before) and further expanded the lower chamber (from 77 to 107 seats) of the Parliament (*О Внесении Изменений и Дополнений в Конституцию Республики Казахстан - ИПС "Эділет,"* n.d.). Moreover, the new government is to be formed only after consultations with the President. More parties proceeded to join the pro-President party and the Party itself was ironically re-named to "Nur-Otan People's Democratic Party" from "Otan", to reflect the association with the President Nursultan Nazarbayev. Even though in the later elections, some parties were given single-digit seats, the pro-power Nur-Otan party has been consistently dominating the Parliament. Other known parties have "ethnic" and "traditional" values, such as "Auyl" and "Rukhaniyat", and do not position themselves as opposition parties. Since 2012, two other "loyal" parties, the remnant of the Kazakh Communist Party and The Democratic Party of Kazakhstan "Ak Zhol", have been also represented in the legislature, but their functions are merely decorative for sustaining the multi-party image (Golosov, 2020).

Nur-Otan will eventually become the biggest party in Kazakhstan, continuously gaining more than 80% of votes in every Parliamentary Elections and creating a new layer of political elites to insulate the President. Ideologically, the party was never described as democratic by scholars, but according to its official documents, it positions itself as a "national-democratic" party. Nur-Otan also established its own Institute of Strategic Initiatives and its own Academy of

Political Management. These institutions are supposed to prepare the personnel reserve for government service.

However, Nur Otan was by no means a “strong” party, as it lacked organizational autonomy and had limited policy-making capacity (Meng, 2021a). The party’s secretaries were appointed by Nazarbayev and its members rarely initiated laws in the Mazhilis. Parties created by founding fathers can dominate the political institutions, but rarely become separate institutions that survive their founders (Meng, 2021a).

The only institution that was not changed deliberately, was the NSC, or the KNB - the National Security Committee, which succeeded the Kazakh wing of the Soviet KGB (Rowe, 2021). According to the former leader of NSC, Nartai Dutbayev, Nursultan Nazarbayev resisted reformation of the organization, keeping its regime-protecting function instead of protecting the security of the nation (Arkin, 2022). To keep NSC in check, Nursultan Nazarbayev formed the State Security Agency, a paramilitary organization, which reports directly to the head of the state.

Nazarbayev, thus, much like other personalist dictators, was not strengthening existing security institutions and was coup-proofing by opening parallel security forces. Autocracies generally tend to have more fragmented security forces than democracies (Pilster & Böhmelt, 2012). Furthermore, the fragmentation in security forces is even higher in personalist autocracies, due to greater efforts in institutional counterbalancing (Escribà-Folch et al., 2020).

In addition to full institutional control, Nursultan Nazarbayev also passed several laws which would authorize the invasion into, and collection of, the personal data and conversation of the citizens by security forces through the network providers (ИПС “Әділет,” n.d.-c). At the same time, Nazarbayev established total privacy for his residences in the country, including full

closure of roads and bridges leading to them. For example, his mansion on the island on Ishim river in the heart of the capital has a private bridge that is closed to the public (Glushkova, 2022). His summer residencies in mountainous regions of Almaty are protected by the State Security Agency forces and also include road enclosures, even for the inhabitant of nearby villages (Exclusive.kz, 2022).

2.3 Distribution of Economic Resources

In addition to clannist personnel policy, Nazarbayev also placed his family members and his close friends on key posts in most valuable economic assets, which were state-owned at the end of the Communist regime. Later, during the privatization period, his family members and friends would privatize these state assets. This allowed almost complete financial control of the country by his regime, securing funding for his projects and interests. The family collectively accumulated around 7 billion USD by 2020. In 2022, Dinara Kulibayeva and Timur Kulibayev, Nazarbayev's second daughter and her husband, added \$2 billion to their account alone (Forbes.com, 2022). Nazarbayev Clan's wealth continued to grow, even during the Covid-19 pandemic, which caused the deepest shock to the country's economy in decades (World Bank, 2020).

The 21 distant family members and close associates of Nursultan Nazarbayev had collectively owned 19,5 billion USD in 2020, and that is not counting hidden assets (Forbes.kz, 2020). Furthermore, RFL/RL journalists identified European and American real estate purchases worth \$785 million made by Nazarbayev and his family members between 2000 – 2020 (RFE/RL, 2020). This report does not even include estimated real estate purchases in Kazakhstan.

The members of his immediate family were given monopolies and state-owned industries. For example, his eldest daughter, Dariga Nazarbayeva, became a director of the National Media Agency “Khabar” (“The news”) in 1994. From 2004, she entered big politics by becoming a deputy. In 2007, she became a head of the Nazarbayev’s Fund, a parallel agency to the National Welfare Fund “Samruk-Qazyna”, through which Nursultan Nazarbayev disburses money to various charity projects. In 2013, Dariga Nazarbayeva appeared in Forbes Kazakhstan with an estimated wealth of \$0.5 billion USD (Forbes.kz, n.d.). According to the latest investigation, Nursultan Nazarbayev had opened several parallel funds and closed some of them, but the total amount of investments from these funds surpassed several billions of USD (Vlast.kz, 2022a).

Nursultan Nazarbayev controlled the National Welfare Fund and the National Bank of Development by personally selecting directors for both. The National Welfare Fund Samruk-Kazyna, which owns shares in key extractive companies in the country, exceeded \$100 billion in assets in 2016, but it only allocates around \$8 billion annually to state budget (Satpayev & Umbetaliyeva, 2015). The information on the Samruk-Kazyna’s expenses and investments are not disclosed to the public and the Revenue Watch Institute considers its activities completely untransparent (Satpayev & Umbetaliyeva, 2015).

Nursultan Nazarbayev’s other two daughters, Dinara Kulibayeva and Aliya Nazarbayeva, have also amassed tremendous wealth. Dinara, together with her husband, Timur Kulibayev, have consistently topped Forbes’s list of richest people in Kazakhstan. Her main stream of income is through the ownership of the Halyk Bank, the national bank of Kazakhstan. She also has foreign investments and manages several charity funds. Her husband, Timur Kulibayev, made his fortune from privatizing state companies during the mass privatization in 1990s and

then reselling them to foreign companies (*Timur Kulibaev - Forbes*, n.d.). He also managed state-owned gas company “KazMunaiGaz” in 2007, chaired the management board of Samruk-Qazyna Fund between 2007 - 2011 and led the biggest business lobby “Atameken” until 2022. Between 2011 - 2022, he was also at the board of directors of GazProm, Russia’s main hydrocarbon company. Timur Kulibayev is also an honorary president of the Kazakh Boxing Association and a VP of the country’s National Olympic Committee. These sports associations receive generous state funding. Kazakhstan spends around \$130 million annually on sports, leaving countries like the UK and Canada behind. The expenses are not justifying themselves, as the country has a poor record on international competitions, which suggests graft. Both Timur Kulibayev and his wife own \$3.8 billion each. Kulibayev’s lavish spending became known after the details of Prince Andrew’s Sunninghill Park Estate country estate purchase surfaced in the media. The deal was facilitated by the British-Kazakh socialite, Goga Ashkenazi, with Timur Kulibayev paying several millions over the asking price to secure the deal (Sacks, 2010).

Aliya Nazarbayeva, the youngest daughter, has also benefited enormously under her father’s regime. She was not as politically exposed as Dariga Nazarbayeva, but she still amassed big wealth. For example, she has a beverage company “Vita” and jewelry company “Alsara”. She also produced several movies, the most famous being “The Road to Mother” and “The Legend of Tomiris”. The movies were financed by the state and she received a lump sum of 150 million KZT for producing and screenwriting (Politic.kz, 2022). She also chaired the association of environmental companies and had two companies, “Operator ROP” and “Instant Payments”, through which she monopolized vehicle utilization and digitalization of train ticket payments in the country. She also released a book, “A Source of Power” about her ethical and humanitarian

values, in 2021, in which she credits her father, Nursultan Nazarbayev, for instilling them (Marwin.kz, n.d.).

Not only members of the immediate family benefited financially. The list of beneficiaries also includes Nursultan Nazarbayev's siblings, nephews and in-laws. For example, Nazarbayev's younger brother, Bolat Nazarbayev, has also made a mind-blowing career jump from a plumber to the country's biggest entrepreneur and philanthropist. In addition to shares in the "Kazakhmys" mining company and the RBK Bank, he is also rumored owner of the border control of "Khorogos" trade site and Almaty's largest market "Altyn Orda" (Mamashuly, 2021). His tremendous wealth became known to the public during the international corruption scandal of the Malaysian PM, Najib Razak. Razak's daughter is married to Bolat Nazarbayev's step-son, Daniyar Kessikbayev. During the investigation, Razak alleged that discovered luxurious items were gifted by Bolat Nazarbayev (Choong, 2019).

Nursultan Nazarbayev's sister-in-law, Svetlana Nazarbayeva, is a registered owner of the oldest Publishing House in Kazakhstan, "Dayir". It is the main contractor for state school textbooks, according to the government procurement website. This publishing machine was established in 1932 and was the Kazakh Communist Party's main publishing organ for almost 50 years (Uchet.kz, n.d.). Dariga Nazarbayeva also owns "Europe Plus Radio" company, which has several radio stations and TV channels (ИА REGNUM, 2017). The family, then, had a monopoly in the production of most media materials in the country.

Both of Nursultan Nazarbayev's nephews, Kairat Satybaldy and Samat Abish, have secured generous political posts and big businesses. Kairat Satybaldy received 25% shares of the national telecommunication company, "KazakhTeleCom" in 2018 (ИПС "Әділет," n.d.-e). Samat Abish became head of the HR Department of the NSC in 2011. In 2014, he attained the

rank of the general mayor of national security. From 2015, he served as the first deputy chairman of NSC and in 2017 he was promoted to a general-lieutenant of national security (Zakon.kz, n.d.-a).

Nursultan Nazarbayev's mistress, or what Kazakhs call, a "toqal" ("younger wife"), Assel Kurmanbayeva is an art-manager of state-owned theater "Astana Ballet", which was built by the Nursultan Nazarbayev's Fund (Калмурат & Кайыртаулы, 2021). The Nazarbayev Fund also co-owned "Astau" company for two months in 2013 before transferring ownership to Assel Kurmanbayeva's mother. OCCRP's investigation in 2017 found that Assel Kurmanbayeva sold some Virgin Islands-registered company to Nursultan Nazarbayev's late friend, Vladimir Ni. More recently, it was revealed that another Nazarbayev-established Fund "*Demeu*" is building a big new opera theater in the expensive part of Almaty. Assel Kurmanbayeva's representatives later denied involvement with the construction of the new theater but expressed willingness to "cooperate" (Калмурат & Кайыртаулы, 2021).

Speaking of Nursultan Nazarbayev's friends, Vladimir Kim and Vladimir Ni are both ethnic Koreans and one of the richest persons in the country. Much like the brother, Bolat Nazarbayev, both friends also held shares in "Kazakhmys" - country's largest copper mining company. Vladimir Ni passed away in 2010, a couple of months before "buying" the above mentioned company in Virgin Islands and transferring millions to Assel Kurmanbayeva's account (Калмурат & Кайыртаулы, 2021).

Vladimir Kim, meanwhile, continues to be Kazakhstan's richest entrepreneur, followed by Timur Kulibayev (Nazarbayev's son-in-law) and his wife Dinara Kulibayeva (Nazarbayev's second daughter). There is another Vladimir Kim, also a friend of Nazarbayev's family, who owns shares in the country's biggest private bank, Kaspi bank. Although Kaspi bank is branded

as an independent bank, and a story of a true entrepreneurial success in Kazakhstan, the records show that the bank had Nursultan Nazarbayev's nephew, Kairat Satybaldy, as one of the co-owners in 2017 (Dawkins, 2020). Before the Kaspi bank went on international stock exchange trade, Kairat Satybaldy transferred his shares to above-mentioned Vladimir Kim and left the bank in October 2018. This could have been done to avoid associations with Nursultan Nazarbayev's family for the international investors once company entered the international market.

Nursultan Nazarbayev used ethnic balancing in managing economic elites in the country. Specifically, he prevented ethnic Kazakh oligarchs from consolidating too much capital (Peyrouse, 2012). Due to the nation's history of mass rebellions against the non-Kazakh leaders, Nazarbayev knew that a non-Kazakh person would never have ethnic legitimacy to lead the nation, therefore, he was not intimidated by oligarchs of non-Kazakh origin. The ethnicity factor would become a useful counterbalancing tool for Nursultan Nazarbayev, who would support non-Kazakh oligarchs, and thereby maintain the appearance of meritocracy in business, but also prevent Kazakh oligarchs from amassing too much capital and gain political influence.

In May 2022, Forbes Kazakhstan magazine released an annual list of richest people in Kazakhstan and both Vladimirs Kim, from KazakhMys and Kaspi bank companies, were in the top-10 (Forbes.kz, 2020). Nursultan Nazarbayev's other friends, oligarchs Bulat Utemiratorov and Aleksandr Mashkevich, were in the 2022 Forbes's List as well. Nursultan Nazarbayev, then, had friends help him with laundering money to avoid exposure of ownership on the international market, and this model was also used by his nephews. Because of his unlimited authority, he was able to distribute the country's wealth according to his own personal preferences, without any restraints, to his family members and his friends.

3.4 Elimination of Opponents

As mentioned earlier, Kazakhstan started with a fragmented parliament and since the country was undergoing a transition, there was a brief period of political activism from the existing and emerging political interests. Therefore, to eliminate all obstacles to the consolidation of power in his hands, Nursultan Nazarbayev not only tried to weaken the institutions, he also had to eliminate all opponents. Most of his opponents were his former loyalists and his own hires, i.e., the insiders, who would grow disappointed in Nazarbayevism and attempt to resist it. While in the early stages of Nazarbayevism the opponents would be fired or charged with forged crimes, the repressions started to turn crueler with time. Some of the biggest cases include “Kazakhgate”, “Rakhatgate”, the 2011 Zhanaozen massacre and politically-motivated assassinations of regime critics and journalists.

“Kazakhgate” is the earliest political scandal, an “early bird” of the nature of Nazarbayevism, which revealed its impunity. The \$78 million bribery case against James Giffen exposed that Nursultan Nazarbayev and his Prime Minister were taking bribes from Texaco-Chevron through the Mercator company in exchange for shares in Kazakhstan’s rich oil fields in the 1990s (Tevlick, 2003). Nursultan Nazarbayev, while serving as a President, hired a lawyer to represent himself at NY court. The case got eventually was dismissed in 2002, to maintain diplomatic relations and cooperation from Kazakhstan during the War on Terror (Tevlick, 2003). However, it emboldened the dictator, domestically and internationally, giving the illusion of invincibility and opening space for other crimes.

“Zhanaozen”, which is the bloodiest example of Nazarbayevism, is the 2011 violent state response to labor protests in the city of Zhanaozen. From 2008, the oil workers in the Western Kazakhstan have been sporadically protesting low wages and harsh labor conditions. The

proliferation of foreign oil companies in oil-rich fields of West Kazakhstan created a big economic division between the local workers receiving low wages and foreigners receiving far higher wages, driving living costs (Тавровский, 2011). In 2010, labor protests became more organized, gained support from a lawyer, and several leaders of the protests emerged. Between 2010 - 2011, the leaders of the protests were arrested and tortured by the local police, gaining international attention from UNHR officer and Amnesty International (Ақ Жайық, 2021). The workers continued to protest, almost every day, throughout the entire 2011 year. Sting, a famous British singer, publicly canceled his visit to Kazakhstan and asked for attention to Zhanaozen. Meanwhile, Nursultan Nazarbayev and Prime Minister at the time, Karim Massimov, remained silent on the issue, even after public appeals to meet with the workers.

On December 16, 2011, during the celebration of the Independence Day in the city, thousands of citizens came out to celebrate and to support the labor protests. The police and additional security forces started to fire at the crowd, killing 17 and injuring 86 people. The authorities claimed that the protesters exhibited violence first, although leaked videos on the internet only show people running away from the security forces and therefore, cast doubt on this claim (Настоящее Время, n.d.). The number of the victims is supposedly higher and no proper investigation for the killings have been initiated by the authorities. Zhanaozen was the main reason for the elimination of labor unions in Kazakhstan and exposed the importance of media control for the regime.

Zhanaozen also influenced Nazarbayev's repertoire of repression because it showed him that reputational costs of overt cruel repression are very high. This led to bureaucratization of dissent in the country and adoption of softer repressive tactics, like surveillance, policing and internet shutdown (Marat, 2016). Nursultan Nazarbayev also used funds from the National

Welfare Fund to establish a Center on Social Partnership, tasked with researching popular moods in remote areas for more effective policing of the population (Marat, 2016).

Nursultan Nazarbayev was ruthless to his critics and opponents, even from his own family. The “Rakhatgate” case, the outcome of which was the suicide of his son-in-law, Rakhat Aliyev, garnered worldwide attention in 2015 (Lyman, 2015). Rakhat Aliyev, who used to have extensive networks in the banking and security services, fell out of Nazarbayev’s favor in 2007 and was accused of coup attempt in the same year (Азаттык, 2020). Rakhat Aliyev was also accused of conspiring and executing murders of Nurbank bank directors in 2008, together with ex-NSC director, Alnur Musayev (Косенов, 2011). According to Alnur Musayev’s more recent interviews, Rakhat Aliyev’s murder of Nurbank directors caused a split among the family and friends in the Nursultan Nazarbayev’s inner circle. The friends eventually won, because Rakhat Aliyev’s murders and overall cruelty started to disturb Nursultan Nazarbayev, especially due to Aliyev’s influence on the NSC chairman at the time, Alnur Musayev.

In 2009, Rakhat Aliyev released “*The Godfather-in-Law*” book, which details the criminalism and human rights violations by the Nazarbayev’s regime as well as corruption and mismanagement of state resources (Aliyev, 2009). Nursultan Nazarbayev continued to ignore the “Rakhatgate” and only acknowledged the scandal in a 2015 movie dedicated to his 75th birthday. He used the case to highlight his integrity and impartiality:

“Why did people forget that I imprisoned the father of my grandchildren?

Do they think he didn’t come to me in tears with his wife (his daughter)? He did.

Do you think I did not care? Of course, I did. But when I saw that his crimes were obvious and over the top, I couldn't stop (his arrest).”(Khabar NEWS, 2015).



Figure 2: Rakhat Aliyev is first from the right on the top row.
Source: (Азаттық, 2020).

In early 2015, Rakhat Aliyev was found dead in jail in Vienna, where he was awaiting trial for murders of Nurbank directors (Reuters, 2015). The Austrian authorities claimed that he committed suicide in a solitary confinement. However, famous forensic pathologist, Bernd Brinkmann, suggested that Aliyev's death was caused by suffocation, which started rumors that the Kazakh intelligence could be behind the incident (Азаттық, 2016).

Nursultan Nazarbayev forced a lot of former ministers and politicians out of the country in the early stages of power centralization. Akezhan Kazhegeldin, for example, was charged with bribery and abuse of power and sentenced to 10 years of prison in 2001. Kazhegeldin was Nazarbayev's Prime Minister between 1994 - 1997 and in 1998, a year after his resignation, he supported the Republican Party of Kazakhstan and announced his interest in participating in The 1999 Presidential Elections. Nursultan Nazarbayev, according to the ex-director of NSC Alnur Musayev, removed Akezhan Kazhegeldin from his Prime Minister post because of growing

resentment on the latter's side over the privatization of state resources. Nazarbayev's family and friends were privatizing most valuable state companies and Kazhegeldin felt unfairly excluded (K-News, 2020). Interestingly, it would be Nazarbayev's future hand-picked successor, Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev, who would replace Akezhan Kazhegeldin as Prime Minister in 1999.

The same fate met the leaders of the "Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan" party, who announced the formation of their own opposition party in 2001. The party was formed by the entrepreneur Mukhtar Ablyazov, mayor of Pavlodar Galymzhan Zhakiyanov and Vice Premier Oraz Zhandosov. It also received support from the Secretary of Security Council Altynbek Sarsenbayev. Interestingly, it was again Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, the future hand-picked successor, who came out with televised tirade against the "intrigants among the business elites and politicians" and called Nursultan Nazarbayev to fire leaders of the new party from their government posts (Azattyq TV - АЗАТТЫҚ - АЗАТТЫҚ, 2021). Nursultan Nazarbayev took Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's warning seriously, fired both Mukhtar Ablyazov and Galymzhan Zhakiyanov and initiated cases against them (Мамашулы, 2021а). Both later left the country.

Altynbek Sarsenbayev was sent out to a foreign service in 2002. In 2004, he came back into the Kazakh politics, joined another opposition movement, and condemned the 2004 Parliamentary Elections (Мамашулы, 2021а). In 2006, he was shot dead in Almaty with his two assistants (Кайыртаулы, 2021). His death caused an uproar in the society and Nursultan Nazarbayev, feeling the pressure, delivered the results of the investigation himself. Even though the shots were executed by the team of officers from Spetsnaz and KNB, Nazarbayev insisted that he personally received the confession letter from the Head of Staff of the Senate of the Parliament, Yerzhan Utembayev (Кайыртаулы, 2021). However, in his book Rakhat Aliyev,

the late son-in-law of Nazarbayev mentioned earlier, unambiguously suggested that the assassination of Altynbek Sarsenbayev was directly requested by the regime (Aliyev, 2009).



Figure 3: Dead body of the opposition leader Altynbek Sarsenbayev and his two assistants.

Source: (Кайыртаулы, 2021).

Nursultan Nazarbayev also, according to rumors and statements from Altynbek Sarsenbayev's family, eliminated another prominent politician, Zamanbek Nurkadilov, in November 2005. Year earlier, Nurkadilov, who was a Minister of the Emergency Management Agency at the time, accused Nursultan Nazarbayev of corruption and authoritarianism (Голос Америки, 2004). In his public address to Nursultan Nazarbayev, Zamanbek Nurkadilov urged him to step down after 16 years of undemocratic governance and the endangerment of the region's security by reckless trade of precious metals, especially uranium, which could be seized by the terrorists (Голос Америки, 2004). Zamanbek Nurkadilov then announced his wish to run in the upcoming 2005 Presidential Elections. He was supposedly shot dead in his chair, while his wife was home in another room, and the authorities ruled it suicide (Торызбаев, 2020). Askhat

Sharipzhanov, an independent journalist, who recorded several interviews with both Nurkadilov and Sarsenbayev, was found dead in July 2004.

The number of politically-motivated cases in Kazakhstan caused concern from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in 2017 (PACE, 2017). The parliamentarians of 18 EU nations wrote and signed the declaration against the mass political oppression and violence in Kazakhstan. The Open Dialogue Foundation compiled a list of 40 political prisoners and victims of Nursultan Nazarbayev's regime in 2019. Some of the well-known names include human rights lawyer Evgeny Zhovtis, poets Aron Atabek and Dulat Agadil. Zhovtis and Atabek eventually were released free, however, Dulat Agadil died in imprisonment (Eurasianet.org, 2020a). These are known cases, because most political activists and scholars have left the country, fearing persecution. Six opposition journalists died in car accidents and two disappeared completely during Nursultan Nazarbayev's tenure (Баумгартнер, 2019).

Nazarbayev was cruel even to people who were perceived as his loyalists, particularly, from the security institutions. For example, he accused Alnur Musayev, the head of NSC in 1997-2001, in a coup attempt in 2008 (Токаева, 2015). Similarly, Nursultan Nazarbayev accused another head of NSC of 2001-2006, Nartai Datbayev, of disclosing state secrets (Торызбаев, 2019). Alnur Musayev left the country, Nartai Datbayev served a prison term, but was released on parole in 2020 (Informburo.kz, 2020).

Nursultan Nazarbayev was coup-proofing the NSC because during 28 years of direct control over NSC's appointments, he changed the institution's leadership 13 times. The removal of the heads of security services before they manage to "heat their seats" and accumulate any power on their own, eliminates the possibility of power-sharing in the future, which is sign of personalism. The appointments were based on personal loyalties and kinship, which is evident in

the case of Nurtai Abykayev. Nurtai Abykayev, from Shapyrashty tribe, replaced Alnur Musayev as a head of NSC, after helping Nursultan Nazarbayev with covering assassinations of Altynbek Sarsenbekov and Zamanbek Nurkadilov (O'Rourke, 2004).

By mid-2000s, Nursultan Nazarbayev dismantled major opposition movements. Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan party lost its core members by 2001, and Ak Zhol party's leadership was co-opted in exchange for seats in the Mazhilis (Kudaibergenova & Laruelle, 2022). By 2010s, Nursultan Nazarbayev's family and friends monopolized the business sector and towards the final years of his tenure, Nazarbayev had weakened coup-proofed security apparatus.

Overall, Nursultan Nazarbayev had consolidated power because he had full institutional freedom from the military and political parties, as well as unrestrained control over political offices (Gandhi & Sumner, 2020). He was a personalist leader, who had full unrestrained control over appointments, despite agreeing to legislative restrictions on the executive. For example, he randomly brought one of his loyalists, Karim Massimov, back as a Prime Minister in 2014 and just as randomly dismissed him two years later and appointed another loyalist.

The nature of Nazarbayevism was a fluid personalism, where gains could be taken away at any moment (Peyrouse, 2012). There was never a true coalition government and Nazarbayev relied on counter-balancing techniques to maintain control. For example, Nazarbayev would appoint technocrats from younger generation and retire some of his long-term people, to show that he is permanent while government officials are not (Peyrouse, 2012). This personnel balancing strategy would also prevent the inter-generational coalitions from forming and maintain the competition among the hires.

Nursultan Nazarbayev also weakened existing political institutions and shared material gains among his family and friends (Jackson & Rosberg, 1984). He also had a full submission from the security institutions, which allowed him to eliminate his most intimidating opponents, who were gaining popularity (Escribà-Folch et al., 2020; Geddes et al., 2017).

2.5 Sacralization of Nazarbayevism

Nazarbayevism took the personality cult to a completely new level, which Fauve calls a “sacralization of power” (Fauve, 2019: 167). Countless visual symbols erected and displayed all over the country suggest that Nursultan Nazarbayev wanted his status to transcend that of just a president. He wanted to achieve supernatural, sacred status, by relying on the means of charismatic and traditional legitimation (Fauve, 2019: 170).

Using Clifford Geertz’s concept of anthropomorphization of power, Fauve argues that Nursultan Nazarbayev’s imagery, especially of his handprint on the banknotes, represents the example of sacralization of a specific part of Nazarbayev’s body (Fauve, 2019; Geertz, 1983). This is similar to the medieval traditions of royal divinity, or a “healing touch” of the kings (Bloch, 1973). Every Kazakh citizen gets to experience the “touch” when handling the banknotes, which legitimizes Nursultan Nazarbayev’s charisma as a special leader. Nazarbayev’s hand is also eternalized in enlarged statues of his handprint, which any Kazakhstani can nestle their hand in.

The handprint might have also been inspired by Hamsa (“Five”), a religious symbol in the Muslim tradition, where it corresponds to the Fatima’s Hand (Sayed, 2016). The hand has also been associated with the sign of holiness and one’s closeness to God cross-culturally (Sayed, 2016). Perhaps, the choice to depict Nazarbayev’s hand in the form that resembles the

hamsa, which is familiar to the Kazakhstan's Muslim population, was made to invoke associations between Nursultan Nazarbayev and God.

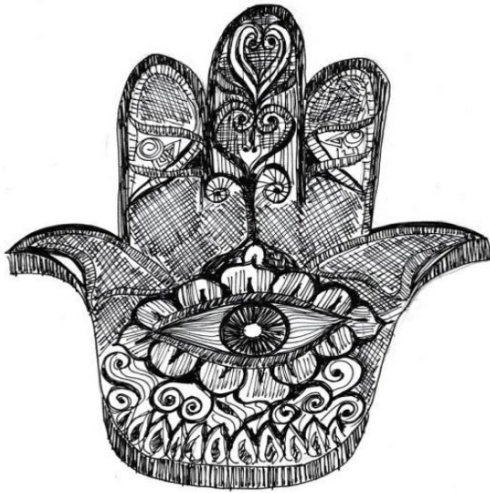


Figure 4: The Hand of Fatima (Hamsa)
Source: (Sayed, 2016)



Figure 5: Nazarbayev's Handprint on Gold at the National Baiterek Monument in the Capital

Source: <https://thewanderingscot.com>



Figure 6: 2000 KZT banknote with Nursultan Nazarbayev's handprint

Source: The National Bank of Kazakhstan (<https://nationalbank.kz/ru/news/banknoty>)

Another grand symbolism of Nazarbayevism is the opulence with which Nursultan Nazarbayev built the new capital, Astana. After moving the capital from Almaty to Akmola in 1995 through the Referendum, he renamed it “Astana” in 1997 and invited world-famous architect Kisho Kurokawa to design it. During the opening ceremony of the new capital, Nursultan Nazarbayev performed an ancient ritual, where he walked on the white carpet - like the great Khans of the Mongolian and the Turkic Steppes used to do (Wainwright, 2017). The capital hosted the Asian Games in 2013, Astana Peace Talks in 2017 and Expo in 2017 - all reflecting Nazarbayev’s desire to be recognized and asserted internationally. Having invested billions into this vanity project, Nursultan Nazarbayev did not reject the successor’s proposal to rename it “Nur-Sultan” in 2019. After “unanimous” support from the Parliament, “Astana” became “Nur-Sultan” (Yergaliyeva, 2019).

In addition to a new and shiny capital, Nursultan Nazarbayev wanted to build a National Pantheon, where he and his family members would be buried. In 2018, the National Pantheon

was legalized as the main burial site for the “distinguished political leaders and citizens of Kazakhstan” (KazTag.kz, 2020). The pantheon reinforces the sacralization of Nursultan Nazarbayev, as a similar pantheon exists in the UNESCO-protected Ancient Mosque in Turkestan, where all the Kazakh Khans (monarchs) were buried (UNESCO, n.d.).

Other visible public symbols of Nazarbayevism include statues and street name signs. There are six statues of Nursultan Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan alone, and three statues outside the country. At least 12 streets bear his name in the country, as well as three parks and squares, according to the street names via Google Maps. More than ten streets worldwide are named after him.

Supernatural beings are above earthly laws. Thus, Nursultan Nazarbayev was above the country’s zoning and environmental laws. In 2001, the city of Almaty decided to build a protected area near the road leading to Alma-Arasan, a national landscape mark. Later, the 65 hectares of that area became a “Park of the First President” and 135 hectares north of it became Nazarbayev’s personal property, where he built four highly-fenced opulent mansions for himself and his family (Кайыртаулы, 2022).

2.6 Post-tenure Risks

So far, I have established the personalist nature of Nazarbayevism, based on the evidence provided in the earlier sections. In the following sections, I will list the risks of personalism, which Nazarbayev has considered when he was planning out his succession. From the literature overview, I have also established that age and the absence positive precedents of transitions of power, make personalist leaders particularly vulnerable to successions. Nazarbayev was under these risk factors. Moreover, he had additional reasons to control his succession while alive, which I mention in the last two sections. He was growing unpopular, like Boris Yeltsin was in

late 1990s, and he was hoping to retire at his peak and focus on the preservation of his political legacy.

2.6.1 Age

It is no secret that Nursultan Nazarbayev was bending the law to extend his tenure, entering the club of longest-ruling dictators, and he was aging (Ettinger, 2020). During his last presidential race, he turned 75 two months after getting “re-elected”. He was actively looking for a reliable and trusty successor, who would assist him with smooth and safe transition into glorious retirement. Besides just reliability, he wanted someone who would not mind his effort to immortalize his political legacy, which included his Nur Otan party, the demarcation of the country’s international borders, the multi-vector foreign policy, and the creation of the new capital, Astana. He planned to organize his succession and he had to plan it while he physically could oversee it.

2.6.2 No Positive Precedent of Succession

The absence of the history of routine successions in the country also makes dictatorship more vulnerable to succession problems (Slater, 2003). One way to routinize the succession is through creating institutions which can establish procedural mechanisms for it. This is especially useful in autocracies that want to preserve the regime during the change of leadership. In China and USSR, for example, the succession was routinized through the Communist Party.

Nazarbayev wanted to establish a precedent of succession in Kazakhstan, through the existing Constitutional provisions, to legitimize it both internally and externally. The precedent would also set the tone for future successions in case his family members would run for office. To ensure the smooth succession, he needed an obedient person, who has worked with him in the government for some time and whose candidacy he could suggest through the party. The

endorsement of Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev, then, an uncharismatic and uninteresting regime loyalist with unremarkable political history, had to be secured with nomination from the Nur Otan party as well. Moreover, the designation of vice president as a next lawful succession usually leads to smoother transitions in autocracies (Meng, 2021b). Thus, by marrying succession with constitutional provisions and endorsing an un-intimidating candidate to the elites, Nursultan Nazarbayev attempted a peaceful exit for himself.

2.6.3 Retaliation for Bad Governance

Considering graft, corruption, human rights violations and failed policies, Nursultan Nazarbayev was looking for a successor who would not launch any reforms that would plunge the country into post-transitional reconciliation. Dictators are more likely to be jailed for poor short and long term economic performance (Escribà-Folch, 2013). Nursultan Nazarbayev also wanted to shield his family from public judgment, after the scandal with his former son-in-law and passing of his late grandson's due to drug overdose (Sorbelli, 2019). The sheer fact of securing legal immunity and criminalizing any criticism of himself under the law on "insulting the father of the nation" indicates fear of retaliation. And the economic situation in the country has been steadily declining in Kazakhstan since 2014, getting worse each year since then, and culminating in a mass outrage over the gruesome death of five children caused by poverty in early 2019 (Pistan, 2019).

Retaliation for poor economic performance could have been a real perceived threat by Nazarbayev. And the threat was growing (Stronski, 2019). His regime legitimized itself through economic growth, therefore, when the economy started to deteriorate from 2014, it became more challenging for Nazarbayev to legitimize his "vision" (Satubaldina, 2019). From 2014, it became more challenging for the regime to keep up the same rate of economic growth. The 2014

sanctions against Kazakhstan's biggest trading partner, Russia, and the entry into the Customs Union, led to sharp devaluation of the Kazakh Tenge in early 2015. In 2015, Nazarbayev announced a loan of \$1.5 billion USD from the Chinese State Development Bank for 20 years at 2% interest rate to build "Astana - LRT", a light railway transit system in Astana, to prepare for the tourist traffic at the upcoming Astana-EXPO in 2017. The government approved \$3 billion USD for the Astana-EXPO project (Mk-kz.kz, 2015). The same year, the chair of Astana - EXPO was charged with 6 counts of theft and corruption.

Next year, in 2016, Nazarbayev's administration announced the sale of 1.7 million hectares of the state land at an auction, where China was the main bidder, which caused the biggest protest in the country since Zhanaozen. Nursultan Nazarbayev ordered the shutdown of social networks and stated that the protests will disunite society and push the country into a crisis similar to the one in Ukraine (Informburo.kz, 2016). These mass protests led to stricter policing and bureaucratization of dissent in the country, with the establishment of the special research center on collecting popular moods in all regions (Marat, 2016). Nazarbayev also instructed local authorities to form specialized committees in most restive areas, where protesters were promised that their demands will be delegated to higher authorities in exchange of dispersing the crowd (Heuer & Hierman, 2022).

In 2017, new scandals over corruption in Astana-LRT construction broke out and the government wrapped up the project (Liter.kz, 2020b). Even to this day, unfinished railway support columns stand in the capital, reminding citizens about mass corruption and theft in the last years of Nazarbayev's tenure. A year later, in 2018, the country's beloved Olympic figure skater, Denis Ten, was robbed of his car mirrors and stabbed in the middle of Almaty (Stronski, 2019). In February 2019, five children, between 1 - 13 years, died in a fire in a small room in the

outskirts of Astana. The children were left unsupervised by their parents, who were working low-paying jobs and could not afford heated housing and left their children with a working stove to keep the place warm. This incident caused a big outrage (Stronski, 2019). Nursultan Nazarbayev dismissed his prime-minister and the cabinet the same week and a little more than a month later, he announced his own exit. It does not seem like this particular incident caused the exit, because he was already organizing it, but it necessitated it, as economic grievances were snowballing, and Nazarbayev did not want to be held responsible for them.

2.6.4 Glorious Retirement and Protection of Political Legacy

For Nursultan Nazarbayev, who was the first leader of an independent Kazakhstan, building tangible and intangible symbols of his power was highly important. Some of them he wanted to last, which is why he continued to manage his legacy in retirement and needed a successor who would not vilify three decades of his dictatorship.

Nazarbayev had several “projects” that he seems to be very proud of, and has dedicated entries of, on his website. Apart from tangible and intangible forms of political legacy, he was also actively allowing memorialization of his persona in forms of statues, street names, museums and even a new Royal Grave (Pantheon). Succession with a pathway to glorious retirement would allow him to focus on his projects without carrying any responsibility for growing economic problems.

Nazarbayev also wanted international recognition for his non-nuclear advocacy, balancing between the West and East, political stability compared to other post-Soviet states entangled in civil conflicts and of course, the association of the country’s independence with his persona. The latest he even wanted to be written into the Constitution.

Nursultan Nazarbayev needed a malleable successor who would obediently tie Kazakhstan's diplomatic achievements to Nazarbayev's skillful foreign politics, without staining his legacy with mentions of economic problems. Which is why formal succession would allow this demarcation between the international achievements and domestic mis-achievements.

3 PICKING THE SUCCESSOR

3.1 Why not Dariga Nazarbayeva (yet)?

As it has been mentioned in the literature overview, the scholarship on successions posits that hereditary successions are the most stable forms of autocratic successions. Moreover, the successful dynastic successions have already taken place in the post-soviet region. I argue that in the case of Kazakhstan, the immediate dynastic succession was ruled out, because the outgoing dictator did not have a male heir and his potential female heir, his daughter Dariga Nazarbayeva, was not popular. Nursultan Nazarbayev might have opted for a temporary successor first, who would help him to establish a precedent of smooth constitutional succession while keeping his daughter second-in-line to presidency. Thus, Dariga Nazarbayeva appears to have been considered for succession, but not immediately after her father's exit. The evidence suggests that she was supposed to eventually succeed the next president after the first precedent of constitutional succession in Kazakhstan. One of the main reasons for the delay is the 2015 scandal, which, according to Nursultan Nazarbayev's advisor, Ermuhamet Ertysbai, would make overt dynastic succession too "shameless" (ORDA News, 2022). Moreover, as mentioned in the Chapter 1, the turmoil that followed the Uzbek president's daughter, Gulnara Karimova, who also had political ambitions, after her father's death-in-office in 2016, might have affected Nursultan Nazarbayev's planning of the succession path for his daughter.

Nursultan Nazarbayev, unlike his fellow dictators in Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, does not have sons, only daughters. Kazakhstan, despite secularism, protected in its Constitution, is still a traditional society, with more than 70% of its population identifying as Muslim (Hutchins, 2019). Moreover, the country never had a female ruler, including its pre-independence period. In June 2016, Fareed Zakaria asked Nursultan Nazarbayev if Kazakhstan

could have a female president, to which Nazarbayev half-jokingly retorted: *“Why not? Women make 51% of our population and we have some very capable women. And I have three daughters, so I give women a special treatment”* (Tengrinews.kz, 2016). Perhaps the question was pre-planned, to test the waters, especially with his eldest daughter entering the Senate the same year.

On the other hand, Nursultan Nazarbayev observed the tragic downfall of the late Uzbek President’s eldest daughter, who, much like Dariga, also had political exposure and was once seriously considered to succeed her father (Blackmon, 2021; Ruiz-Ramas & Morales Hernández, 2021). Gulnara Karimova’s downfall began in 2013 and by 2015, she was under strict house arrest for fraud and embezzlement. She was hated by the Uzbek public for amassing an extraordinary wealth of \$3 billion, and becoming the richest woman in Central Asia, while the country struggled to climb out of poverty (McGlinchey, 2016; Walker, 2014). When her father, Islam Karimov, died-in-office in September 2016, she was not even allowed to his funeral. Moreover, in 2020, under the new president, her sentence was extended to 15 more years, and she was transferred from house arrest to a regular state prison (ГосТВ, 2020).

Nursultan Nazarbayev, observing the fate of Islam Karimov's politically exposed billionaire daughter, was likely growing worried for Dariga Nazarbayeva, because of her high political exposure and growing wealth. Dariga Nazarbayeva has been involved in the Kazakh politics since at least 1994, when she became a director of National Media Agency “Khabar”. She managed the country’s largest national media until 2004, when she first entered the Parliament as a member of the “Asar” party. From 2004 until 2007, she was a deputy in the Mazhilis, the lower chamber of the Parliament, representing the “Asar” party. From 2007, she has been managing two funds established by her father. From 2013, she has been featured in

Forbes Kazakhstan's list of richest persons in the nation. In 2012, Dariga Nazarbayeva got elected to the Mazhilis through her father's Nur Otan party list, and in September 2016 she was elected to the Senate.

Despite her enormous political capital, Dariga Nazarbayeva was not a popular candidate for succession. During her chairmanship at the socio-cultural committee of the Mazhilis, Dariga Nazarbayeva got into a big reputational scandal. She suggested organizing trips to facilities for children with disabilities to demonstrate the "freaks that are consequences of unplanned pregnancies" to the teenagers (Uralskweek.kz, 2013). She retained her seat in the Parliament, despite causing mass uproar from the parents of children with disabilities and civil activists for her insensitive remarks.

Between 2015 and 2016, which seemed to be the period of the most intense negotiations around succession, she served as a Deputy to the Prime Minister in the Karim Massimov's cabinet. In September 2016, Nursultan Nazarbayev appointed Karim Massimov as a Head of the National Security Committee and made Kassym-Jomart Tokayev Speaker of the Senate, while also bringing his daughter Dariga Nazarbayeva back to the Parliament. Speaker of the Senate automatically succeeds the President, which is why it can be inferred that Nazarbayev has decided against Dariga Nazarbayeva's candidacy in 2016 in favor of Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's. However, there was a role for her as she was back in the Senate.

According to the succession plan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev would first succeed Nursultan Nazarbayev as President, but Dariga Nazarbayeva would become the next Speaker of the Senate and would constitutionally succeed Tokayev in case of emergency. She also joined the Politburo of the Nur Otan party and could run as its candidate in the next elections. Her chances to succeed constitutionally would be higher after the regime had a precedent of successful constitutional

succession before her. Based on her appointments, Dariga Nazarbayeva could have been considered for succession, just not immediately. Her appointment as the next Speaker of the Senate in 2019 immediately after Kassym-Jomart Tokayev succeeded her father, suggests that she might have been expected to eventually succeed Tokayev.

3.2 Why not Karim Massimov?

When Nursultan Nazarbayev appointed Karim Massimov as a head of the National Security Committee in 2016, there were rumors that he might have considered him as a potential successor, as well. Massimov emphasized his unconditional loyalty to Nursultan Nazarbayev on numerous occasions. He is also still the longest-serving Prime Minister of Kazakhstan to-date. He also always referred to himself as an “assistant” and “apprentice” to Nazarbayev. In 2011, he publicly stated that he “was, is and will always be an assistant under any circumstances” to Nursultan Nazarbayev.

Karim Massimov had a reputation of a ruthless and effective official. Under his leadership, the NSC was authorized to collect the private data of the citizens through the network providers (Kursiv.kz, 2017). Karim Massimov, according to Nursultan Nazarbayev’s former advisor, had almost unlimited power in Kazakhstan, which might have been a problem to any potential successor (ORDA News, 2022).

Karim Massimov’s candidacy could have been rejected because of his ethnic origin. One of the biggest rebellions in the county’s history, Jeltoqsan, took place when the Soviet Authorities appointed a non-Kazakh candidate as a secretary of the Communist Party to the country. Even though Nursultan Nazarbayev called Karim Massimov a “Kazakh”, and Massimov’s father released a biography book where he claims to have Kazakh roots, the general public believes in the non-Kazakh but Uyghur origin of Karim Massimov (Massimov, 2019).

Nursultan Nazarbayev decided to pick another successor, but rewarded Karimov Massimov's longtime loyalty with one of the highest posts in the security sector.

Karim Massimov, thus, was ruled out as direct successor, but was placed in a strategic position that gave him access to the means of coercion. However, to prevent Karim Massimov from accumulating too much power as a head of security forces, Nursultan Nazarbayev also made his nephew, Samat Abish, Karim Massimov's first deputy assistant.

3.3 What about Imangali Tasmagambetov?

Imangali Tasmagambetov, according to the former longtime advisor of Nursultan Nazarbayev, Ermuhamet Ertysbai, was seriously considered for succession (ORDA News, 2022). Tasmagambetov, whose family members became billionaires during his political career, worked closely with Nursultan Nazarbayev since 1993. According to Ermuhamet Ertysbai, Imangali Tasmagambetov was Nazarbayev's "favorite, who was given good positions" (Informburo.kz, 2021). Imangali Tasmagambetov became Nursultan Nazarbayev's assistant in 1993 and then he was promoted to a Prime-Minister between 2002-2003, and then was appointed governor of Almaty (2004-2008) and Astana (2008-2014). Altynbek Sarsenbayev, famous opponent of Nursultan Nazarbayev, who was murdered in 2004, was a harsh critic of Tasmagambetov and placed responsibility for democratic backsliding directly on him (Мамашулы, 2012).

During his time as a governor of Almaty, Imangali Tasmagambetov deceived local dwellers in a small village by promising that their housing will not be demolished. However, he then called them "social outcasts" in the interview and ordered demolition. The interview caused the 2006 Shanyrak protests, which led to the arrest of the famous poet, Aron Atabek (Мамашулы, 2012). In 2007, Imangali Tasmagambetov was involved in the "Rakhatgate", where he facilitated the arrest of Rakhat Aliyev, Nursultan Nazarbayev's criminal son-in-law

(Мамашулы, 2012). Nazarbayev then dismissed Imangali Tasmagambetov from his position in Almaty and brought him closer to Akorda (The White House) for his loyalty in 2008.

When Karim Massimov came back into big politics and became a Prime Minister in 2014, Imangali Tasmagambetov was appointed as Minister of Defense (2014-2016). Karim Massimov was appointed as chairman of NSC in 2016, with Nursultan Nazarbayev's nephew, Samat Abish as his first deputy. Imangali Tasmagambetov, however, was demoted to the Ambassador to Russia in 2017. The demotion was due to Tasmagambetov's ambitions which caused "*first suspicions*" from Nursultan Nazarbayev, according to Ermuhamet Ertysbai (Informburo.kz, 2021). Thus, loyalty and personal trust were the most important factors for Nursultan Nazarbayev in picking the successor. In December 2019, Tokayev dismissed Tasmagambetov from public service due to reaching the retirement age (EADaily.com, 2019).



Figure 7: Karim Massimov, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and Imangali Tasmagambetov. All were possible candidates for succession considered by Nazarbayev.

Source: (Qasym-Jomart Toqayev [@TokayevKZ], 2019)

3.4 Why Tokayev?

Nursultan Nazarbayev was considering several candidates, and there are different takes on his plans. Nazarbayev did not have a lot of options, he could not openly appoint anyone from his own family, because he distributed most valuable businesses in the country to them and that would have not been perceived positively in a country with increasing economic inequality. Considering his desire to exit gracefully and be remembered for the positive aspects of his tenure, he needed a candidate without scandals and a good reputation. But he did not have many options because he drove all his opponents out in the early stages of centralization of power, as discussed in the second chapter. His ascent to power began by framing then leader of Kazakh

SSR Dinmukhamed Kunayev, and then eliminating all remaining opponents by either assigning them to foreign service, jailing, assassinating, or forcing them to exile. His former advisor mentioned that Nursultan Nazarbayev thought about picking Imangali Tasmagambetov, whom he brought in as his Prime Minister in 2002 (ORDA News, 2022). Since that appointment, Imangali Tasmagambetov has been getting top positions from Nazarbayev and was seen as a potential successor until 2016 (Informburo.kz, 2021). In early 2017, Imangali Tasmagambetov was suddenly appointed as Ambassador to Russia, i.e. he was “sent out” of the country, while Kassym-Jomart Tokayev was “brought in” to the government from foreign service. This aligns with the inferences on Nursultan Nazarbayev’s decision timeline in the first section of this chapter, where the major appointments were made by late 2016 – early 2017.

Imangali Tasmagambetov’s appointment to a foreign service was a signal of falling out of succession race. Nursultan Nazarbayev kept most loyal people inside the country, in various ministries and sent less reliable ones to foreign service (ORDA News, 2022). For example, he sent to diplomatic service some of his longest-serving people, such as Myrzatai Zholdasbekov (to Iran) and Nurtai Abykayev (to UK), after they became less reliable. Later, in December 2021, Nazarbayev’s former advisor would confirm that Imangali Tasmagambetov, indeed, was considered as a successor, however, there were some personal differences and possibly, a mistrust (ORDA News, 2022). Nazarbayev needed someone reliable.

By 2016 Nursultan Nazarbayev might have started considering Kassym-Jomart Tokayev’s candidacy. In his documentary (2021), Nazarbayev said that he “noticed” Tokayev back in the 1970s when the latter just joined the Communist Party after graduating from Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) (Азаттык, 2021). Kassym-Jomart Tokayev was chosen as a successor because there was no expectation that he would start a transition

(ORDA News, 2022). In electoral autocracies, the outgoing leaders are better off picking successors who seem obedient and meek, because they are safer options who would not start transition prematurely (Zeng, 2020). For example, former Ghanaian president, Jerry Rawlings, picked plain and agreeable John Mills, who promised to consult him on important matters. Similarly, in the discussion of the 2008 Russian succession we observe that Vladimir Putin's hand-picked successor, Dmitry Medvedev, willingly refused to run for re-election in 2012 when Putin decided to come back.

Nursultan Nazarbayev also needed someone who would not cause financial troubles to him and his family in retirement. Nazarbayev had approximately 6.1 billion USD stashed abroad and was planning on investing them into the country's energy sector through the partnership agreements with UAE. Askar Mamin, the Prime Minister at the time, visited the UAE in October of 2021, where he signed several investment deals with the UAE government (primeminister.kz, 2021). These deals would double-wash the laundered money and also protect it from possible foreign sanctions as they would technically be in Kazakhstan. Having a successor who would not obstruct this money laundering scheme might have been another consideration on Nursultan Nazarbayev's part.

Nazarbayev's discourse on Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's character during the election campaign showed attempts to sell the choice of the successor as meritocratic. Although Tokayev did have a long history of working in the state structure and had several publications, he did not have a popular following. In a country with somewhat traditional values, Nursultan Nazarbayev had masculine charisma and a reputation of a "problem solver" which transformed into an image of a benevolent patriarch, i.e., "Elbasy" (Father of the Nation). Kassym-Jomart Tokayev had a reputation of a skilled diplomat, who never makes any strong remarks and uses mediating

diplomatic language, in a sharp contrast to Nazarbayev's more straightforward manner of speech. Mukhtar Ablyazov, a prominent opponent-in-exile to Nazarbayev, started calling Kassym-Jomart Tokayev the "*Furniture*", to denote the latter's utility to the former as a placeholder and not a real successor to the regime (Currenttime.tv, 2022). However, Tokayev's plain persona in conjunction with long years in service and impeccable education, became a good case for a display of meritocracy to the public. Had Nazarbayev proposed to elect one of his family members - he could have faced fierce pushback, especially in the light of resurfacing reports of hidden family wealth by the Panama Papers. Nursultan Nazarbayev, however, might have underestimated Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's ambitions, as the latter moved the succession forward the moment opportunity came along.

Tokayev, despite the image of a placeholder, a "furniture", is an ambitious politician, who was willing to make sacrifices to get ahead, while also abusing his access to power to accumulate resources. The following sections first focuses on his political ambitions pre-presidency, which made him a more favorable candidate for the outgoing leader, and then concludes with the evidence of his authoritarian tendencies, which suggest that his image as a placeholder was not entirely accurate.

3.4.1 Tokayev's Political Ambitions

Tokayev's political ambition is evident in his sacrifice of his marital status before the elections. Just mere months before the elections, the reports started to surface that Tokayev is unmarried. This meant that he legally divorced his wife of more than 30 years, Nadejda Tokayeva, a Russian citizen, who he was still married to in 2013 (Kp.kz, 2022). Moreover, official press photos from government portal show that Tokayev continued to wear his wedding band until June 17th, 2019, a week after winning the 2019 Elections on June 10th. This suggests

that Tokayev was willing to go as far as to publicly distance himself from his wife to succeed according to Nazarbayev's Succession Plan. While *The Law on the President of Kazakhstan* does not prohibit marriages to foreign citizens, the willingness to legally divorce his wife of many decades to avoid any negative attention from all parts of the Kazakh society, including ultra-nationalists, reveals a lot about Tokayev's ambitions (*О Президенте Республики Казахстан - ИПС "Әділет,"* n.d.). He decided that having a Russian spouse would be perceived more negatively than being divorced, which suggests calculated image-building effort on his part.

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev is a typical "*apparatchik*" - an experienced state official of the totalitarian system. A son of moderately-famous Kazakh-Soviet writer and World War II Veteran, Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev comes from an educated family that was a part of the Almaty intelligentsia. He held various posts in foreign service since 1975, after graduating from Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), which was the main institution that prepared diplomats for the Soviet Union (Сорокина, 2019). Tokayev aligned with the new Kazakh government under Nursultan Nazarbayev's leadership after the Soviet Union's demise and transitioned from a Soviet to a Kazakh diplomat. From 1975 - 2013, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev was appointed to various foreign services, with brief periods as a Prime Minister (1999 - 2002) and a Chair of Senate (2007 - 2011) (Сорокина, 2019).

3.4.2 Tokayev's son is apolitical and not a threat to Dariga Nazarbayeva

Following the earlier discussion on the post-succession plan Nursultan Nazarbayev had for his daughter, Dariga Nazarbayeva, it is important to consider another factor that might have made Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's candidacy a safe choice, as there is no future electoral competition from Tokayev's apolitical children. Tokayev's only son, Timur Kemel, has never lived in Kazakhstan and has never been directly involved in the Kazakh politics. Timur Kemel

has benefitted financially from his father's position within the Kazakh political system, however, none of his companies are significant enough to affect the Kazakh politics. He can be placed on the same row as Aliya Nazarbayeva, for comparison, who also owns businesses due to her familial ties, however, her involvement in politics is nowhere near Dariga Nazarbayeva's.

The argument on the absence of political elites' children's interests can be supported by the reference to the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's son, who is also involved in entrepreneurship and much like Timur Kemel, lives mostly abroad and does not hold any positions in the Russian government (Interfax.ru, 2020). As such, Vladimir Putin might have been more willing to pick Dmitry Medvedev as his placeholder among his loyalists, because Medvedev was not bringing his own "clan" to power. And since Dmitry Medvedev obediently stepped down from the 2012 Russian Presidential Race to endorse Vladimir Putin again, Nazarbayev might have thought that picking a successor who's offspring does not associate with the Kazakh politics would be safer than having a successor with politically interested descendants.

There was no evidence of Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's son showing any political ambitions, which is completely different from Dariga Nazarbayeva, who has been involved in the Kazakh politics since 2004. There was no attempt to build a new dynasty on the Tokayev's side. Which is why Nazarbayev's Clan could have been convinced to have him as a temporary placeholder until they find a legal way to return into politics.

3.4.3 Financial interests

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, perhaps, did not mind Nazarbayev's money schemes as he shares the latter's love for money. While the level of his acquired wealth is nowhere near Nazarbayev's, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and his family members did accumulate foreign

properties and business companies. Kazakhstani Initiative on Asset Recovery (KAIR) reports that Tokayev's family owns properties in Geneva, Moscow and Miami (KIAR & OCCRP, 2022). His ex-wife, Nadejda Tokayeva, owns two elite apartments and five houses in the Moscow region since 2000, some of which she later sold. Interestingly, all information about Tokayev Jr.'s ownership of Moscow properties was later deleted from *Rosreestr* (The Russian Registration System). Moreover, his son, born as Timur Tokayev, changed his last name to Timur *Kemel* in 2019 - a year his father became a president. The only way to remove records from Rosreestr is through assistance from the Russian Federal Security Service, FSB (Navalny.com, 2021). Furthermore, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's son was found to be 50% shareholder of Abi Petroleum Capital LLP (Tikhonov, 2019). This company was later renamed into Salish Oil & Gas Company and then liquidated in 2020. His son was also listed as an owner of 160,000 shares of KM GOLD JSC at the Kazakh stock exchange in 2016 (Tikhonov, 2019). This company has several subsidiaries which have exclusive rights to copper and gold ore fields throughout the country. His son also owns two companies in the residential real estate business, Umit Development LLC and Fortius LLC. All of these companies were inactive as of 2021. In addition to business ventures, Tokayev's son manages a private fund, "*Kemel Tokaev Charitable Foundation*", named after Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's late father (Tikhonov, 2019). One of the donors of this fund is Gazprom, which is Russia's biggest hydrocarbon company (ACCA, 2020).

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's nephew, Kanysh Izbastin, is a chairman of KazAgroFinance JSC, another big state company (Tikhonov, 2019). Kanysh Izbastin's wife, Botagoz Karbuzova, was found to be an owner of an apartment in Miami. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's niece, Dana Medeuova, owns three construction companies in Bulgaria, which she uses to transfer her money

from her personal bank account to purchase lots and properties in Sofia (Vlast.kz, 2022c). She also supposedly has two companies in Czech Republic.

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's sister, Karlygash Izbastina owns Kazakhstan Tungsten & Molybdenum Company, which is licensed to mine minerals in the city of Karagandy, and she also owns a machinery and equipment wholesale company (Tikhonov, 2019). She is also an owner of Abi Petroleum Capital, which invested into Sat&Company that owns 50% of Kazakhstan Caspian Shelf JSC, which is licensed to geological and geophysical research, exploration and production of oil and gas in the Kazakh part of the Caspian Sea. Karlygash Izbastina was also associated with KZK Group LLP and Kemal Consortium LLC and her son, Muhamed Izbastin (Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's another nephew), is on the board of directors of the East Kazakhstan Regional Energy Company JSC (Tikhonov, 2019).

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has been using his power to put his relatives into leadership in state-owned companies. His nephew, Beket Izbastin, first worked at the Ministry of Energy and then headed PCA LLC, a state company that operates in oil and gas fields by extracting fees from foreign companies who extract the resources. As mentioned earlier by Tikhonov (2019), Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's nephew Kanysh Izbastin, in addition to working at KazAgroFinance, later became a deputy chair at Baiterek National Holding – the Kazakh government's main construction agency. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and Nursultan Nazarbayev are similar in their clanist and nepotistic management of state resources, and in this regard, Tokayev was truly the most similar successor.

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev also uses the same people as Nursultan Nazarbayev to help his family members with laundering money. For example, the above-mentioned Sat&Company is affiliated with Kenes Rakishev, who also works with Nazarbayev Clan to hide money abroad

(Сошников et al., 2022). Rakishev is one of the richest entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan, who has made his fortune during the time when his father-in-law, Imangali Tasmagambetov, served as Prime Minister (Сошников et al., 2022). Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's son has also served on the board of directors of the Mayak construction company. The company belongs to one of Timur Kulibayev's investment groups. Timur Kulibayev, as mentioned in the previous section, is Nazarbayev's son-in-law.

When the independent investigation of Kassym-Jomart Tokayev Clan's wealth was released to the Kazakh media by the Vlast.kz news magazine on February 20th, 2022, his press-secretary, Berik Uali, released a statement on the next day denying the existence of any off-shores and foreign bank accounts by his ex-wife (Матвеева, 2022). However, he was not able to deny the business activities of Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's son but reminded that "Timur Tokayev never worked in the government, he has always been an entrepreneur" (Матвеева, 2022).

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's family have accumulated an enormous wealth under the Nazarbayev's leadership. Thus, Nursultan Nazarbayev's selection could have been influenced by thinking that Kassym-Jomart Tokayev would not be interested in changing system his family benefitted from, especially comparing successors' reforms in neighboring Uzbekistan and Russia. In Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, for example, argued to have started his aggressive personnel policy and government reforms precisely due to coming from a family that did not benefit from Islam Karimov's regime (Blackmon, 2021). On the other hand, in Russia, Dmitry Medvedev and his family have financially benefitted under the Putin's system and Medvedev had little incentives to change it during his term. The investigative documentary film by Alexey Navalny's "*Он вам не Димон*" (2017), which remains Navalny's most viewed video on YouTube with more than 45 million views, detailed all assets Dmitry Medvedev have

accumulated before, during and after his work under Putin's supervision (Алексей Навальный, 2017). The selection of Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's candidacy for succession likely seemed logical, as his family have benefitted from the existing system of relationships and used same people Nursultan Nazarbayev's family did to launder money.

3.4.4 Tokayev is just as authoritarian as Nazarbayev

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has demonstrated loyalty to Nursultan Nazarbayev before and was behind the removal of several governors and ministers in early 2000s, when he was a Prime Minister. In November 2001, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev called an urgent press-conference, where he asked President Nazarbayev to remove ministers and mayors who were forming a new democratic party. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev called them "intrigants", who were "trying to enrich themselves through a fake democratic agenda" (Caravan.kz, 2001). He then said that "democracy is not a toy for kinder-surprises [chocolate egg for children that comes with a toy inside] of politics". Nursultan Nazarbayev dismissed officials mentioned by Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, which suggests that both shared a view on the undemocratic course the Kazakh political system was taking. The party was never registered, and Urnaliyev (2019) believes that this move on Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's part contributed to the disintegration of early democratic movements in Kazakhstan (Urnaliyev, 2019).

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev was a safe choice for continuing Nazarbayev's political legacy, as he has never publicly criticized the first president. In fact, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has mentioned several times that he is not going to make big ideological changes, as the "quality of governance is more important than its type" (Стативкина, 2014). In his annual presidential addresses, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev continued to make references to Nazarbayev's earlier statements, highlighting economic achievements of the country. Nursultan Nazarbayev has also

credited Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's service as a PM and tied it to the country's improving economic performance (Omelicheva et al., 2017). In general, both expressed only positive sentiments about each other's work, especially Tokayev. Even in his doctoral dissertation on Kazakhstan's international relations, he opens with Nursultan Nazarbayev's quote in the abstract and then cites his works throughout the manuscript.

Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev started with a promise to diversify Nur-Otan-packed parliament and even lowered the required threshold for political parties. He also promised to ease the legal repercussions of mass protests for the activists. However, he suggested these reforms only after the legislative elections had already taken place. As a result, not a single opposition party was able to enter the parliament in the latest parliamentary elections in January 2021 (Мамашулы, 2021b).

So why did Nursultan Nazarbayev pick Kassym-Jomart Tokayev as his successor in 2019? It seems as if Nazarbayev was primarily looking for someone who would continue his political course. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev continued Nursultan Nazarbayev's tradition of suppressing political freedoms. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, much like Nazarbayev, views any discontent with the regime as a direct threat to himself - an exact perception of the authoritarian leaders who cannot separate their leadership and the state. For example, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev used Covid-19 restrictions on social distancing to restrict public demonstrations. He also kept the tradition of jailing political opponents. For example, there were many reports of unlawful detainment and torture of The 2022 January protesters, most famous being from the Human Rights Watch (Vorobyeva, 2022). The final list of the victims of the riots has not been released to the public until September 2022, which prompted petitions of disclosure from the citizens. The most recent report from Human Rights Watch alleges that hundreds of detainees were tortured by

the security forces during the special “counter-terrorist operation” during the 2022 January Protests, but the authorities are delaying proper investigation of excessive use of force against the protesters (Vorobyeva, 2022). Some activists went missing under unknown circumstances (Fergana.ru, 2022c). The new general-prosecutor, appointed by Kassym-Jomart Tokayev on March 3rd, 2022 has only spoken about the investigation once. During his speech to the Parliament on March 14th, general-prosecutor Berik Asylov revealed that 255 people died during the 2022 January Protests, 19 of them from security forces and only 20 were innocent bystanders (Akorda.kz, 2022d). In other words, while civil groups and family of victims are asking for proper investigation and refute all claims to anti-state terrorism, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev’s regime is considering dead victims of the uprisings to be terrorists. Nursultan Nazarbayev managed the 2011 Zhanaozen protests in a similar fashion (Marat, 2016).

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, then, was a solid candidate for the succession, because he shared many similarities with his predecessor, continuously signaled his loyalty and uninterruptedly supported Nursultan Nazarbayev’s regime. The absence of big scandals, long political career and excellent education also made him appear as a “meritocratic” choice by a personalist dictator, who had a compromised nepotist personnel policy.

Table: The 2019 Succession Outcomes for the Main Contenders

Potential Candidate for Succession	Most recent appointments before the succession	Positions after the Succession (2019-2022)
Dariga Nazarbayeva	Appointed by Nazarbayev the Member of the Senate (2016-2019)	Elected the Chairman of the Senate (2019 - 2020) by Senators. This position succeeds the executive automatically in case of emergency, according to the Constitution.
Karim Massimov	Head of KNB (2016 - 2022)	Appointed by Nazarbayev the Head of the KNB (2016 - 2022)

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev	Elected the Chairman of the Senate (2013 - 2019) by Senators	Elected President after Nazarbayev and Nur Otan Party endorsements
Imangali Tasmagambetov	Appointed by Nazarbayev the Ambassador to Russia (2017-2019)	Retired by Tokayev on December 2019

4 THE MANAGED SUCCESSION

4.1 Preparations:

Once Nursultan Nazarbayev decided on Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's candidacy, it was time to move forward to the legal instrumentalization of the process. In terms of the Constitutional Law - Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, as the Speaker of the Senate was going to take over as interim anyway. But it was important to orchestrate the rest of the succession, through other political institutions while also preserving access to the mechanisms of power for the old elites and protecting their interests.

Nursultan Nazarbayev wanted to continue to hold a lot of weight, as the powers he prescribed to the Security Council he went to chair post-tenure were higher than those of the President. He might have considered modern regency, some form of diarchy, where a dictator who steps down but continues to hold power over the successor from behind the scenes.

To prepare for smooth succession, Nursultan Nazarbayev had his party to pass several laws that entitled him to legal immunity and guaranteed several lifelong titles. For example, in 2010, Nazarbayev secured a Constitutional right to address the people and the government on the matters of foreign policy and national security as eternal "Elbasy", or the "Father of the Nation". In the same year, making any insulting remarks about his persona became a punishable crime. In other words, he's been bending the Constitution to ensure a "golden parachute" scenario for his escape in the future.

Later in 2018, Nazarbayev transformed the Kazakh National Security Council from an advisory to a legitimate state body and was granted a right to chair it for the rest of his life. According to the *Current Regulation on the Security Council from February 12, 2019*, its Chairman has almost unlimited powers in decision making regarding state security. Nazarbayev

also received a title of “honorary senator” and promised to appear in the Parliament with his advice (Informburo.kz, 2019).

In addition to retaining control over the Security Council, Nazarbayev continued to have state financial support for his post-tenure ventures and for the maintenance of his separate office. For example, between 2019 - 2022, as much as 9 billion KZT was allocated from the budget to the maintenance of the Office of the First President and the Museum of the First President. Also, the state sponsored a movie about Nazarbayev directed by Oliver Stone, “*Qazaq. History of the Golden Man*”, which premiered at The 2021 Rome Festival (TACC, 2021). Unlike Stone’s remarkably memorable war movies, which won him several Oscars, the documentary about Nursultan Nazarbayev’s life was remarkably forgettable and did not yield any awards.

Nazarbayev also placed his family members and friends in key government positions. His daughter, Dariga Nazarbayeva, became Speaker of the Senate and his friend and protege, Karim Massimov, as well as his nephew, Samat Abish, continued to tightly control the National Security Committee (NSC). NSC has higher prestige, better equipment and wider functions than other state security agencies. Nursultan Nazarbayev’s grandson, Altai Kulibayev, had an exclusive license on the installation of security cameras “Sergek” (ИПС “Әділет,” n.d.-f). In other words, Nazarbayev’s Clan continued to have access to security control and surveillance. The experts were hesitant to label this succession as a “regime change” (Voices On Central Asia, 2019).

Moreover, Nazarbayev’s in-law, Berik Imashev, continued to head the Electoral Committee. This would become particularly important in The 2019 Presidential Elections, where Nazarbayev’s hand-picked successor, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, would win with 71% of the votes (Vaal & Gordeyeva, 2019). Berik Imashev refused to acknowledge unlawful restrictions of

access for the observers during the elections and claimed that the results of the elections were “fair” (Мамашулы, 2020).

4.2 The 2019 Presidential Elections:

On March 19, 2019 Nursultan Nazarbayev, in a televised address to the nation, said that he is leaving his post as President. He prepared a beautiful speech, in which he listed all achievements of his leadership and thanked the citizens for the long years of trust, but it is time for the “younger generation”. He also reassured that “your concerns will remain my concerns”.

He emphasized the constitutionality of Kassym-Jomart Tokayev taking over interim until the next elections, as a speaker of the Senate is lawfully expected to do so, according to the latest rendition of the Kazakh Constitution. He did not mention any social or economic reasons for his resignation, although merely six weeks before five little children died in a fire due to poor conditions, exposing an outrageous inequality gap (RFE/RL, 2019a).

The constitutionality of succession is useful for the outgoing political elites, as it establishes a legal way to come back into politics, especially in case of post-election democratization. The old political elites will have political capital to be competitive during the next elections and constitutionality will legalize their attempts to run (Albertus, 2019).

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev was supposed to sit until the end of the existing executive term, until 2020. However, on April 9, 2019 Kassym-Jomart Tokayev proposed early presidential elections to “remove any uncertainties”. On April 23, 2019 at the XIX Congress of “Nur Otan” Party Nursultan Nazarbayev publicly endorsed Tokayev’s candidacy for the upcoming elections and said the following:

“Let’s pick Kasym-Jomart Tokayev as new President and support him... My decision to leave was uneasy but well-thought. Decisions like this are not made

overnight. I was thinking about leaving, to be exact, for more than 3 years”. (Муқанов & Масаңов, 2019).

Nursultan Nazarbayev also shed some tears at the end of his emotional speech. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev did not hesitate to agree to run from the Nur Otan party. The Early Presidential Elections were scheduled for June 9, 2019. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev’s campaign promised “prosperity for all” and featured heavy appearances from Nursultan Nazarbayev:



Figure 8: Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's Presidential Campaign Banner. Nursultan Nazarbayev's Appearance at the June 7, 2019 Campaign Forum.
Source: (Гостев, 2019).

Two weeks before the election day, a massive banner with a slogan: “*You cannot outrun the truth*” appeared along the annual Almaty marathon track (Азаттық, 2019). The marathon usually has around 17,000 participants. The activists who hanged it, received 15 days of detention on the next day (Азаттық, 2019).

On the evening of June 10th, 2019, the National Election Committee announced Kassym-Jomart Tokayev’s Victory with 70.96% of the votes (Тукушева, 2019). The main opponent, Amirzhan Kosanov, came in second place with 16% of the votes. The elections saw 77.5% of participation from the electorate (Тукушева, 2019). The inauguration of Kassym-Jomart

Tokayev took place on June 12th, 2019, and had appearances from Nursultan Nazarbayev and his daughter Dariga Nazarbayeva (RFE/RL, 2019b).



Figure 9: The Inauguration of Kassym-Jomart Tokayev on June 12, 2019
Source: Akorda.kz

Immediately after the official announcement of the results of the elections, mass protests took place contesting them. More than 4000 citizens were arrested during the mass protests (Азаттық, 2019). The authorities restricted access to main social media networks, in order to prevent mobilization of the protesters, which was detected by the international Netblocks Agency.

The international community of experts, including OSCE, expressed doubts of the validity of the election results and reported disruptions for the independent observers (Шайков, 2019). Human Rights Watch asked for the release of the arrested. Berik Imashov, Nursultan Nazarbayev's in-law, the head of the National Election Committee, said that there was no "conflict of interests" and that the elections were fair and competitive (Шайков, 2019).

Tokayev continued to be perceived as a weak candidate, the opposition leader, Mukhtar Ablyazov labeled him “Furniture”, which resonated with the public opinion and inspired cartoons and artwork.



Figure 10: Widely shared artwork depicting Kassym-Jomart Tokayev as furniture by Iryna KovaBata

Even international experts, not just local ones, started to question Kassym-Jomart Tokayev’s autonomy as an independent executive. In December 2019, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev gave an interview to Deutsche Welle, in which he explained that contrary to popular rumor there is no “double” government in Kazakhstan. He did, however, acknowledge that he still “seeks advice” from Nursultan Nazarbayev, especially in “critical” matters.

4.3 Post-tenure Legacy Management:

After stepping down, Nazarbayev continued controlling his image through *legacy management*. In the special documentary “*Finishing touches to the portrait. The Leader*” (2021), Nursultan Nazarbayev took credit for demarcating “difficult” borders with China, Russia,

Uzbekistan and Caspian countries. Some of the biggest conflicts in Eurasia took place over territorial disputes, with the conflict in Ukraine (2014 -) being most recent. By mentioning territorial disputes between other former Soviet states, he is hinting that Kazakhstan remained conflict-free and managed to build solid relations with the Russian and the Chinese leaders because of his policies. He went even further in his interview and claimed that Vladimir Putin learned a lot about state-building from him. However, he later contradicts himself when he places blame for the Russian-Ukrainian crisis on “third parties” instead of holding up the territorial argument. He calls his opponents “cowards” and states that “traitors never have a happy ending”.

4.4 The continuation of elite struggle post-succession (2019-2021):

Even though the formal succession took place, the actual transition was not over. This is evident in the attitudes and statements made by the other contender for succession - Karim Massimov. Not only did he skip Kassym-Jomart Tokayev’s inauguration ceremony, but he also stated that he is going to write a book on Nursultan Nazarbayev, whom he considers to be the “greatest person” (Inform.kz, 2019). It seems as if Karim Massimov was still signaling his loyalty to Nursultan Nazarbayev and thereby minimizing the importance of Kassym-Jomart Tokayev’s ascension to presidency, which points at conflicting relations between Massimov and Tokayev. This also confirms the lingering influence of Nursultan Nazarbayev in the country even post-succession.

Another evidence of tension among the elites is in Dariga Nazarbayeva’s struggles with staying in the government. Dariga Nazarbayeva was suddenly dismissed by Kassym-Jomart Tokayev from her position as the Speaker of the Senate in May 2020. She was placed on that position before the succession and the position would make her interim president in case of

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's voluntary or involuntary exit. In January 2021, Dariga Nazarbayeva, re-gained a seat in the new Parliament after the 2021 legislative elections as she was nominated by the ruling party (Putz, 2021)

Dariga's dissatisfaction with the outcome of succession was also revealed by her late son in 2020. Aisultan Nazarbayev made several statements about his mother and her political ambitions in a controversial interview to Exclusive.kz from a private British rehab. In the interview, he shared that Dariga Nazarbayeva is a "gray cardinal", who facilitated the succession and forced her father to step down, hoping to get his seat. He also shared that Dariga Nazarbayeva has maintained the right network with the NSC. It would be the head of the NSC, Karim Massimov, who would later be accused of the coup during the 2022 January Protests. Although Aisultan Nazarbayev struggled with drug addiction and made erratic posts exposing members of the political and business elites in Kazakhstan, his statements should not be dismissed because they were bothering the officials enough to beg people to ignore them (Liter.kz, 2020a). Aisultan Nazarbayev passed away in London, on August 16th, 2020 from an overdose (Eurasianet.org, 2020b). Dariga Nazarbayeva acknowledged the death through a brief Facebook post (Tengrinews.kz, 2020).

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev was also unhappy with the management of state resources by the National Welfare Fund Samruk-Kazyna in the development of the country's gas industry, which would eventually lead to the start of *Qandy Qantar* (The 2022 Bloody January). The Fund, which was intended to function as Norway's national welfare fund and invest petrodollars into various projects, has been controlled by the members of Nazarbayev's Family. But not very efficiently. Nazarbayev's nephew, Akhmetzhan Esimov, failed to modernize fuel plants with the funds disbursed from Samruk-Kazyna before (Vlast.kz, 2021). Kassym-Jomart Tokayev

explicitly pointed out the possibility of a gas crisis and ordered that both Samruk-Kazyna Welfare Fund and KazTransGas Company (managed by Dariga Nazarbayeva's partner, Kairat Boranbayev) need to modernize and increase the gas industry (Akorda.kz, n.d.). Akhmetzhan Esimov, however, have laundered designated money from Samruk-Kazyna through the ATF-Bank, which then was sold to Jysan Bank (owned by his son-in-law, Galymzhan Yessenov). After the deal with banks was finalized, Akhmetzhan Esimov promptly left his post in Samruk-Kazyna and was "thanked" by Nursultan Nazarbayev for his service. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev did not comment Akhmetzhan Esimov's departure from Samruk-Kazyna. Jysan Bank is owned by "First Heartland Securities", which also has shares in Nazarbayev University and Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (Forbes.kz, 2019). The investment company was rumored to belong to Nazarbayev's family.

In addition to infrequent appearances by Nursultan Nazarbayev after the succession, it is worth mentioning that he continued to use state-owned secured jets and attended international events as a representative of the Kazakh leadership. Between 2018 – 2022, Nazarbayev's Fund received 79,4 billion KZT from the "KazakhMys" state company alone (Мазоренко, 2022). A week before the succession, Nursultan Nazarbayev announced the construction of the largest mosque in Central Asia, which is estimated to cost more than \$220 million (*Нурсултанский Соловей*, n.d.). In December 2021, both Nazarbayev and Tokayev flew to Saint Petersburg at Vladimir Putin's invitation. They flew separately, Nursultan Nazarbayev in a more expensive A330. The fact that world leaders continued to invite Nursultan Nazarbayev to active events suggests that he was perceived as a de-facto leader of Kazakhstan in the eyes of the international community. This affected Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's domestic legitimacy, not even mentioning the international, and challenged the enforcement of his political will. At the same time,

worsening economic conditions were reflecting poorly on his governance. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev was brought to the main table, but he was given the most uncomfortable chair.

Also in late 2021, Dariga Nazarbayeva met with the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, and escorted him to the Museum of the First President of Kazakhstan (Zakon.kz, 2021). Kassym-Jomart Tokayev did have a separate meeting with the Uzbek President, however, he was not invited to tour the Museum. Dariga Nazarbayeva continued to have political exposure and her career as a Speaker of the Senate. Karim Massimov continued to head the National Security Committee. Nursultan Nazarbayev was presiding over the Security Council and lead Nur Otan party and had the Law on the First President. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev only had the title of the president.

5 THE KING IS DEAD! LONG LIVE THE KING!

5.1 The Bloody January “Qandy Qantar”

It took slightly more than 40 months for the successor to finalize the transition of power, from the moment of inauguration to the complete removal of the predecessor’s influence. This

chapter focuses on the Qantar incident, which was the attempt of the Nazarbayev's clan to depose Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and explain why the attempt failed. This incident also demonstrates that Nazarbayev could organize his succession, but he was not able to protect his successor from former elites. The incomplete succession will keep the successor vulnerable to internal shocks unless he removes all competitors and reduces political opportunities for coup-plotters. This vulnerability is higher in less-institutionalized autocracies, which Kazakhstan became under three decades under Nursultan Nazarbayev's personalist leadership.

This chapter describes the January 2022 Protests (later became known as *Qantar*) in Kazakhstan, with brief discussions of main theories behind the protests. The section on Qantar's utility for Kassym-Jomart Tokayev explains how the coup plotters failed to hijack the popular uprising and lost their access to power. The following sections focus on post-Qantar personnel changes in the government, as well as signals of shifting loyalties from the elites, which further prove the completion of power transfer to Tokayev.

On the evening of January 2nd, 2022, the news about protests in Kazakhstan started gaining worldwide attention, topping search feeds on Reddit and Twitter. The protests affected international stocks markets causing attention from the business news outlets. As protests continued, more experts started to express concerns over the unrest in Kazakhstan, due to the country's geographic proximity to Afghanistan, a topic that was fresh for many in the American audience (The New York Times, 2022).

Popular protests in Kazakhstan's Westernmost region, Mangystau, have been going on since December 16th, 2021 and they were mostly peaceful (Sorbelli, 2019). The 2022 Countrywide January Protests, known as "Qantar", started over liquified petroleum gas price hike. This type of gas is used by 90% mobile vehicles and 70% of households in Kazakhstan. x

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev government formed a special commission on January 2nd, which promptly met with the protesters in Mangystau on the next day and promised to freeze the fuel prices on January 4th (Qasym-Jomart Toqayev [@TokayevKZ], 2022). However, by January 2nd, the protest had already gained a momentum and spread country-wide into all major urban centers. On the night of January 4th - 5th, the protests in Almaty, the biggest and the richest urban center in the country, turned violent. While Kazakhstan did have mass protests, none of them turned this violent in the country's three decades of independence (Sorbelli, 2019).

Since protests turned violent in Almaty, BellingCat investigators compiled the list of private jets that left from Almaty, some possibly carrying Nazarbayev's family members out of the country (Aidarbekova, 2022). On January 5th, The Almaty International Airport got hijacked by an unknown group of people, and all scheduled flights got canceled. Eyewitness accounts claim that the hijackers were well-organized and coordinated (Kharchenko, 2022). Several city landmarks were looted, broken in and set on fire, including the City Hall, The National Security Committee's HQ and the Administration of the First President.

On January 5, 2022 Kassym-Jomart Tokayev issued a public statement where he declared that he takes over Nursultan Nazarbayev's Chairmanship in The Security Council (Akorda.kz, 2022b). Then he declared that he appealed to Article 4 of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) due to foreign threats to the security of Kazakhstan. CSTO, which was passive in other conflicts of its member states, approved Tokayev's request in mere hours. This was the very first deployment of CSTO forces since the organization's establishment in 1992. Interestingly, the Russian troops of CSTO arrived 9 hours after Tokayev's declaration, already fully equipped and armored, although the flight alone from Moscow to Almaty takes at least 4-5 hours. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's announced invitation of CSTO troops around 8 PM local time

on January 5th, 2022 (24.kz, 2022a). First group of Russian CSTO troops landed in Kazakhstan between 5-6 AM on January 6th, 2022 (TACC, 2022a). The speed of the deployment of the troops might suggest that the escalation of violence was planned, and the successor knew that his request would be fulfilled. While the Kazakh security services were quelling the protests in Almaty, propped up by the international (mostly Russian) CSTO troops, President Tokayev continued tweeting about the protests and claiming that around 20,000 foreign terrorists were operating in Almaty. The next day, the Chinese leader Xi Jinping declared support for Tokayev and warned that the Chinese leadership will not allow any of the “color revolutions” in Kazakhstan (Hu Xijin 胡锡进 [@HuXijin_GT], 2022). Russia’s military support for the incumbent have also caused concerns, as the US Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken warned that “*once Russians are in your house, it is sometimes very difficult to get them to leave*” (BBC News, 2022).

There could have been a split in the security institutions as several news reported that the Kazakh Army officers and soldiers are refusing to fire at protesters (Давыгорова, 2022). Kassym-Jomart Tokayev claimed he instructed police not to shoot protesters at the beginning of the protests, as they started peacefully. The authorities were able to contain protests in Zhanaozen, where they initially began, by using their usual channeling methods and involving local elites to assuage the protesters (Heuer & Hierman, 2022). However, the attempts to use both coercive and non-coercive methods in Almaty were not working, as protests started to turn violent on the night of January 4th, which suggests that the security elites in that city were recalcitrant to quell the protest.

From January 2nd, 2022 - January 15th, 2022 the country was under a state of emergency, as protests started to appear in all major cities, but nowhere near the scale of chaos

that was in Almaty. It is still unknown which groups were behind violence in Almaty (where they got particularly violent) and other big cities during Qantar, but the existing opposition movements are not congregated to form a single power that could organize country-wide protests of this scale.

On January 8th, Nursultan Nazarbayev's press-secretary, Aidos Ukybai, tweeted the following: "*Elbasy is in Kazakhstan ... and asks everyone to support the President*" (Aidos Ukibay [@aidos_ukibay], 2022). On January 18th, Nursultan Nazarbayev released a short video statement, where he refuted rumors of elite conflict during Qantar and stated that he has retired. Immediately, on the next day, the petition was created to remove the Law on the First President by someone who used the name "Alibekov Asylkhan Kenesovich", but no one could verify the identity of this person. Later, on the same day on January 19th, the Senate removed Nazarbayev's lifelong membership in the National Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan and Security Council (EADaily.com, 2019). The events suggest that Nursultan Nazarbayev waited a week with his public support for Kassym-Jomart Tokayev because he wanted to see the outcome of Qantar first.

5.2 What (who) caused Qantar?

Qantar started peacefully but got hijacked by the elements who saw an opportunity to use the expression of public discontent against Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's government. Tokayev, however, was able to weaponize Qantar to complete the transition of power. The demonstrations started peacefully and were based on economic grievances. There are two main explanations of the actual Qantar incident, after which demonstrations turned into violent riots. First theory is that of "foreign terrorism" and the second is that of "elite conflict". Eventually, these two

merged into one umbrella theory, according to which the losers of succession recruited foreign terrorists to stage a coup.

However, before moving to the explanations for Qantar, it is important to acknowledge that initial demonstrations were motivated by economic grievances. Most of the protests in Kazakhstan in recent years have been based on predominantly economic reasons, according to the most recent analysis of protests in Kazakhstan from Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs (2022) (RFE/RL, 2022a).

The 2022 January Protests initially started because of a sharp hike in fuel prices. The roots of economic grievances are very deep. Two months before the protest, in November 2021, more than 150,000 citizens signed the petition to eliminate fees for vehicle recycling collection (Lada.kz, 2021). The leader of the “No to Recycling Fee!” (#НетУтильсбору), Sanzhar Bokayev announced that this popular petition and its many supporters will form a political party (Алимханова, 2021). The monopoly over vehicle recycling has been taken by Aliya Nazarbayeva’s company, “Operator ROP”. That company was licensed under the Environmental Law by the Prime Minister Karim Massimov in 2007 (ИПС “Әділет,” n.d.-d). In late December, a week before the protest, the Minister of Environment of Kazakhstan, Serikali Brekeshev, said that the recycling fees are comparable to those in neighboring countries and will not decrease. Aliya Nazarbayeva was also a Head of the Association of Environmental Organizations of Kazakhstan at the moment - one of the biggest “green” interest groups in the country. In other words, the protestors started to include the hashtag that attacks former president’s daughter’s business interests directly.

The economic problems and nepotism were feeding each other, and the fuel price hike became the straw that broke the camel’s back. 30 years of ineffective governance and

widespread corruption created two “lost generations” in a resource-dependent country.

According to experts, 1 in 6 children lives in poverty in Kazakhstan (Сатпаев, 2021). Moreover, the quality of, and access to education are uneven. The fact that protests were most violent in Almaty region, where economic inequality rates are the highest in the country, suggests that the protests were caused by socio-economic grievances (Kudaibergenova & Laruelle, 2022).

The Covid-19 Pandemic has also shrunked the country’s economy, increasing unemployment (World Bank, 2020). As of 2021, the size of the labor force in Kazakhstan was 9.2 million people, according to the World Bank (World Bank, 2021). Currently, 453,000 Kazakhstanis are registered unemployed, which means that only 70% of the people eligible to work are employed (KazTag.kz, 2022g). The country is also looking at more than 250,000 new people entering the labor market by 2025 (Сатпаев, 2021). Mass youth unemployment and poverty at the backdrop of obscene wealth of the ruling clan, much like in predatory sultanistic regimes in the Middle East, would have eventually manifested in the “Kazakh” Spring.

Social unrest was inevitable in Kazakhstan, where the gap between economic elites and the big mass of ordinary citizens has been growing for decades (Sanghera & Satybaldieva, 2021). Besides constant moralization of oil wealth and prosperity promises, both Nazarbayev and Tokayev failed to deliver real economic results (Kudaibergenova & Laruelle, 2022). The looters and violent protesters seemed to be young Kazakh males from the rural outskirts of Almaty.

Another evidence of the economic grievances is the plunder of private properties during the most chaotic hours in Almaty. The marauders caused more than \$230 million in damages (Tengrinews.kz, 2022c). The videos of people raiding and marauding stores in Almaty went viral and challenged the official version from the authorities who claimed invasion by externally trained terrorists. The first mention of the “external threat” was on January 4th by Kassym-

Jomart Tokayev on his Twitter, where he posted a paragraph asking people not to follow the destructive forces that are trying to destabilize the country. He promised to separately resolve social and economic problems in the same tweet, thereby acknowledging the economic grievances behind the start of the protests.

5.2.1 Initial Foreign Terrorists Theory:

The official theory, presented by President Tokayev, was framed to resonate with the Kazakh society. The Kazakh regime has been propagating the belief that Kazakhstan is a peaceful country, where people of different nationalities and religious affiliations live in harmony and the internal conflict is non-existent. All incidents and political volatilities have always been externalized, and this is especially evident in the regime's response to color revolutions in neighboring countries. Thus, when Qantar turned violent, the regime's chronic reaction was to externalize the violence.

On January 5th, the Kazakh Syrian extremist group, the Soldiers of the Caliphate, released a video urging Kazakhstanis to turn the protest into a jihad, but did not admit direct participation in Qantar (Kudaibergenova & Laruelle, 2022). Moreover, The Kazakh authorities claimed that two policemen were beheaded, to further the foreign terrorists narrative and justify the counter-terrorist operation Kassym-Jomart Tokayev announced on his Twitter on January 6, 2022.

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's infamous "20,000 terrorists" tweet (now deleted) will then become the official justification for his shoot-to-kill order on January 7, 2022. The official order was to launch the counter-terrorist operation, to capture those foreign terrorists. The protesters, in response to "shoot-to-kill" order, came out on the Almaty streets with new slogans: "Urma!

Atpa!” (“Don’t beat! Don’t Shoot!”) and “Qarapayim Halyk Terrorist Emes!” (“We are not terrorists!”).

Human Rights Watch immediately condemned the controversial shoot-to-kill order (Human Rights Watch, 2022). After Kassym-Jomart Tokayev’s order, reports of excessive use of force by the police and deployed security forces started to emerge. The fair and open coverage of the incident was not available to the citizens, as the Internet was shut down, under the excuse of preventing communication channels between the terrorists.

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, however, continued to use Twitter as the main tool to control the official narrative, posting in English, Kazakh and Russian, while the Internet and independent news channels stayed shut down during the entire period of emergency. The use of VPN in Kazakhstan skyrocketed to 3405% in the month of January (Drfl.kz, 2022).



Figure 11: A screenshot of Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's controversial tweet which claimed foreign terrorist attack.

Source: a screenshot taken by me from @TokayevKZ twitter

The Interim Minister of Internal Affairs, Yerlan Turgumbayev, emphasized the “20,000 terrorists” narrative on January 9th, 2022 (Inform.kz, 2022b). Kassym-Jomart Tokayev continued to hold onto to the official narrative on “external terrorism” months after the unrest. His Secretary, Erlan Karin, also continued to reiterate the presence of foreign elements behind the violence during Qantar but was quick to eliminate any semblance to “color revolutions” in

other former Soviet Republics. To keep up the theory, on April 3rd, the authorities announced that they captured a “foreign agent” during the special counter-terroristic operation, who was paid by “foreign countries” to assassinate President Tokayev. The National Security Committee even released the video of the operation, where the suspect was caught with a gun, narcotics and a big sum of US dollars (Tengrinews.kz, 2022d).

When the public started asking questions about the “20,000 terrorists” who started the violence during Qantar, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev claimed on January 10th that “the bodies of the foreign terrorists” were stolen from morgues”, which is why authorities cannot name all the terrorists (Telegraf.news, 2022). On January 20th, the Almaty Police Department stated that mass graves, allegedly containing stolen bodies of the terrorists, were found on the outskirts of the city (Зинкин, 2022). The desire to support the official narrative about the “external impingement on our unified and peaceful country” has also been demonstrated during the arrest of the random Kyrgyz violinist for the Qantar events (Pannier, 2022). The Kyrgyz Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a diplomatic note to the Kazakh side, and the violinist was freed, but the whole spectacle shows that the authorities are set on keeping up their official theory to justify Tokayev’s “shoot-to-kill” order.

Another evidence of the absurdity of the “foreign terrorists” theory is the shutdown of Internet and social media networks during the unrest. According to Kalkamanova (2020), who studied mass protests in Kazakhstan between 2015-2019, social media has been the main mobilization tool among the Kazakh activists (Kalkamanova, 2020). The Internet shutdown by the authorities was aimed at the protesting civilians, as organized criminal groups could use communication devices that do not require Internet.

On June 1st, 2022 the US-sponsored media agency, Azattyq, in collaboration with local journalists, released a list of the victims of Qandy Qantar (Bloody January). The list is available on a separate website, with additional information about each victim's circumstances of death (Радио Азаттык, 2022b). The authors of the list were only able to identify 188 out of reported 238 victims. The list does not distinguish between terrorists and citizens. The authorities did not react to the list and still refuse to reveal the names of the victims. The father of 4-year Aikorkem, the youngest victim of Qantar, publicly criticized the investigation of the Qantar. He had to leave the country a couple of days after, after being visited by the authorities regarding his speech. There is no transparency over Qantar investigations, and many families had to endure the exhuming of their lost members, which is traumatic for the Muslims.

According to General Prosecutor, Yeldos Kylymzhanov, 464 people were investigated for "terrorism" as of June 2022 (Радио Азаттык, 2022a). On March 14th, 2022 General Prosecutor admitted that no charges of terrorism could be applied to 19 foreign citizens captured during Qantar (УММАТ, 2022). They are charged with robbery and rioting. On June 5th, 2022 Kassym-Jomart Tokayev finally admitted that the information about "20,000 terrorists" was given to him by former leaders of the security forces (Радио Азаттык, 2022g). **Thus, there is no clear evidence of any foreign participation in public violence or terrorism during Qantar.** There were also no slogans or flags associated with any radical organizations in the protest crowds (Kudaibergenova & Laruelle, 2022).

The speedy reaction of authorities to the viral video from Zhasulan Duisembin, a Kazakhstani citizen, who is currently fighting in the Ukrainian Army, suggests that the authorities feel threatened by any public challenge of the "shoot-to-kill" order. The necessity of that order was justified by the presence of dangerous foreign terrorists, so authorities are

blocking competing theories which could justify the order, especially on the social media. In the video Duisembin said that he is going to come back to Kazakhstan after Ukraine's victory and is going to hunt down the CSTO security forces who shot the civilians during Qantar (Azattyq TV - АЗАТТЫҚ - АЗАТТЫҚ, 2022). The next day after Duisembin's video went viral, the Kazakh authorities issued an arrest warrant in his name for "serving in foreign military". A week later, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev reminded the public that CSTO did not make a single shot during Qantar (24 Media, 2022).

Nonetheless, the authorities cannot provide any evidence of the participation of any foreign criminals in Qantar. At the same time, they cannot back away from the foreign terrorism narrative, as it would delegitimize Tokayev's controversial "shoot-to-kill" order. The official retraction of the "foreign terrorists" theory would also highlight competing theories of Qantar, which would reveal the elite dissonance and regime's vulnerability.

5.2.2 The Elite Conflict Theory:

The prevailing theory of the cause of the Bloody January, however, is that of the elite conflict. According to this theory, the peaceful protest was hijacked by political circles who were not loyal to the new president (Kudaibergenova & Laruelle, 2022). In particular, the groups that were loyal to Nursultan Nazarbayev and Karim Massimov, might have been conflicting with the emerging coalition that was supporting Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. Getting rid of Tokayev via coup during the mass uprising in the country would have solved coordination problems among the anti-Tokayev groups. The coups that succeed during the mass rebellions are seen as more legitimate because coup-plotters become regarded as executives of the popular will (Casper & Tyson, 2014).

This theory was supported by Nazarbayev's former advisor, Ermuhamet Ertysbai, who claimed that Samat Abish and Karim Massimov, who were at the highest position in the National Security Committee, were planning a coup and financed special training camps in the Almaty region for invited foreign terrorists from neighboring Central Asian countries (Fergana.ru, 2022a). There is no evidence of such camps, at least, none was ever presented by the authorities.

The theory, however, is supported by the fact that the NSC failed to prevent the escalation of violence and protect the Almaty International Airport. The protection of the country's borders and effective counterterrorism intelligence are NSC's main duties, according to the Article on the Law #2710. The organized seizure of the country's busiest airport by protesters and looting of the police and gun shops lends support to the theory of elite breakdown. The airport's press office revealed that just before approximately 45 people seized the airport, the military who were at the airport left in an unknown direction (Настоящее Время, 2022). Inaction on NSC's part towards the violent protesters suggests that the agency refused to defend the city. This argument is further supported by the fact that Kazakhstan had more than 1,000 protests since 2020, and NSC with the security forces have never failed to contain them before (RFE/RL, 2022a). Thus, at least some of the security divisions refused to disperse the crowd or some of the officers did not order to do so.

Furthermore, there was a group of individuals who tried to hide their identities, separate from the protesters who gathered sporadically in a public place. There were people who were driving in cars without plates, broke surveillance cameras and worked in coordination, possibly following someone's orders (Kudaibergenova & Laruelle, 2022).

First the elite conflict theory was pushed by independent news websites, which claimed the link between religious extremists and Samat Abish. General Osman-Rustambek Bekzhigitov

openly stated that the violent protesters were well-organized and perhaps, financed by unhappy oligarchs (Zakon.kz, 2022a). The proponents of this theory do not directly blame Nursultan Nazarbayev, but rather, shift the blame on “bad apples” in his family, who were left unsatisfied with the results of the succession and wanted to depose Kassym-Jomart Tokayev (Телеканал Хабар 24, 2022a). This is evident in Ermuhamet Ertysbai’s sentiments, where he claims that Nursultan Nazarbayev was a victim of his own ambitious family members.

Aizhan Umarova, a well-known advocate and member of the National Council of Public Trust, claimed that the coup was planned for two years and the methods of execution resemble Soviet-level training for special operations (Туллубекова, 2022). Perhaps, this elite conflict theory was approved and pushed forward into the media space by both Nazarbayev and Tokayev’s sides, as it shifts responsibility for the Qantar away from Nursultan Nazarbayev to his nephews, Kairat Satybaldy and Samat Abish, as well as Karim Massimov, all of which received military training and worked in KNB.

Another evidence for the elite conflict theory is the conviction of Arman “Dikiy” Zhumagaliyev (“Wild Arman”) - a local crime lord, who was captured on video addressing protesters during Qantar in Almaty (Lenta.ru, 2022). He was accused of kidnapping 24 people and inciting riots on January 7th (Lenta.ru, 2022). In the video that was used to verify Wild Arman’s participation in Qantar, he is addressing protesters in the hotel lobby about the “bandits” outside with “cold weapons” (Экспресс К, 2022). He is then suggesting to the crowd to separate from those bandits and argues for the direct and peaceful dialogue with authorities. In another leaked video, however, he is seen pointing a gun to somebody’s head (Ktk.kz, 2022). He resisted the arrest and had 4 deadly weapons on him (Исаев, 2022). Wild Arman, a former professional boxer, became familiar to the Nazarbayev’s family members in 2010s, by cleansing

the informal world from other criminal authorities, thereby becoming informal police for the regime (Grigoryantz, 2022).

The speed with which Wild Arman was demonized by the media agencies suggests that all sides of the conflict rushed to find an outcast. It was easier to sell Wild Arman as a main perpetrator of violence during Qantar due to his criminal past and the absence of any familial ties to both Nursultan Nazarbayev and Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. The biggest media agencies which leaked videos of his participation in Qantar belong to people close to the Nazarbayev family.

Based on all leaked videos, Wild Arman and his followers were seen at several sites in Almaty during the most violent night: at the “Ballroom” restaurant, at the parking of “Esentai Tower” business center and at the “Kazakhstan” hotel. The video where Wild Arman is asking protesters to avoid violence was shared on the website that belongs to Alexander Mashkevich, an oligarch and a close friend of Nursultan Nazarbayev. The video of Wild Arman with a gun was posted on the website of the news channel that belongs to Dariga Nazarbayeva. In late February 2022, the news channels started to tie Wild Arman to Kairat Satybaldy.

Kairat Satybaldy is Nazarbayev’s nephew, who worked in NSC in mid-2000s. He also served in the Kazakh Army and worked together with Karim Massimov in “Kazakhstan Railways” company. Satybaldy was arrested on March 13, 2022 at the request of the anti-corruption committee. However, the photos of his capture were leaked on the internet, and journalists noticed that Satybaldy was arrested by special forces “Arystan” of NSC (KazTag.kz, 2022e). This is the special forces unit formed for capturing particularly dangerous suspects. The anti-corruption agency claimed that Satybaldy was detained primarily in suspicion for abuse of power and embezzlement in the “KazakhTeleCom” company, however, he is also being investigated for involvement in crimes against the security of the state (KazTag.kz, 2022e).

Kairat Satybaldy is Samat Abish's older brother, their father is Nursultan Nazarbayev's full brother. Both Satybaldy and Abish have connections to Karim Massimov through work in NSC. Kairat Satybaldy has a longer connection to Massimov through "Kazakhstan Railways" and "KazakhTelecom" companies (worked together between 2004-2005) and his time as "Nur Otan" party secretary under Karim Massimov's cabinet (2014-2015) (Zakon.kz, n.d.-c). Kairat Satybaldy also worked in NSC between 1991- 2005. Karim Massimov was appointed as head of NSC in 2016 by Nursultan Nazarbayev. Samat Abish served in NSC since 2000 and was serving as one of the deputy assistants to NSC's head and was promoted to first deputy assistant in 2016, just when Karim Massimov came to head the organization (Zakon.kz, n.d.-a). Thus, both nephews are trained security officers, with long connections to Karim Massimov, who is currently the main suspect of the coup attempt.

In June 2022, popular telegram channel "Nursultan Nightingale" released information that authorities are deliberating the arrest of Samat Abish due to Wild Arman's confessions (@nursolovej, n.d.). However, according to journalist Mahambet Abzhan, Abish left the country in January 2022 (@abzhannews, n.d.). He was dismissed from his post in NSC on January 17th, a day before Nursultan Nazarbayev released a public statement denying any elite conflict.

In July 2022, NSC confirmed that Samat Abish testified in the Massimov's case (Радио Азаттык, 2022j). Dosym Satpayev suggests that Kassym-Jomart Tokayev is eliminating the "outer" circle of Nursultan Nazarbayev and is not touching innermost circle, especially his daughters and Samat Abish (Троценко, 2022). Abish supposedly is a personal favorite of Nazarbayev. The same telegram channel "Nursultan Nightingale" reported in July 2022 that Kassym-Jomart Tokayev is hesitating to go after Nursultan Nazarbayev's family because he does

not want to set a precedent of harsh punishment against the former leader as he is concerned over his own fate in the post-tenure.

The possibility of the coup attempt from the Satybaldy-Abish duo was first suggested by the same telegram channel “Nursultan’s Nightingale” back in June 2021. According to the channel, Abish and Satybaldy, both zealous Muslims, developed their own “Jamaat” with other like-minded entrepreneurs in major cities (Жыаков, 2022a). The goal of their Jamaat was “peaceful takeover” of the country’s leadership (Жыаков, 2022a). Kairat Satybaldy also tried to register a traditionalist religious party in 2019 (Kudaibergenova & Laruelle, 2022). However, this information was criticized for unnecessary demonization of Nursultan Nazarbayev’s nephews.

Based on the available evidence, it is hard to establish the connections between Nursultan Nazarbayev’s family members to suggest their cooperation with Karim Massimov and involvement in Qantar. Both nephews obviously have familial ties to their cousin, Dariga Nazarbayeva. But the closeness of Dariga Nazarbayeva to Karim Massimov is not well-established. Supposedly, Dariga Nazarbayeva was not very happy about Karim Massimov’s hold on the country’s biggest security institution, NSC, because she used to be much closer to the previous head of NSC, Nartai Dutbayev (ORDA News, 2022). She also does not have any big business connections to her nephews. Therefore, the extent of her direct involvement in Qantar is unknown. Besides losing the seat in the Parliament, she did not face any financial losses.

5.2.3 The Finalized Version: Hybrid Terrorist Coup:

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, perhaps realizing that his accusation of Karim Massimov of coup attempt and firings of several Nursultan Nazarbayev’s clan members lends more support to the rival elite conflict theory, started to softly change his rhetoric. He connected political elites

with big businesses in creating oligopoly, which led to economic inequality and caused protests in the first place. He then started to blame internal security forces for failing to prevent Qantar rather than accusing protesting citizens of terrorism. This is first evident in his January 11th address, where he explicitly stated that “NSC *could not and did not want*” to assess and prevent all threats to national security (Akorda.kz, 2022a).

Although Kassym-Jomart Tokayev remained vague on the specific names of the assailants, the very first group he met with after the incident were the representatives of the country’s business community, notably without entrepreneurs from Nursultan Nazarbayev’s family, on January 22, 2022. At the meeting, he reminded that “a lot of people became rich with the help of the previous regime” and he urged the businesses to pay taxes by stating: “*I warn you: Plato is my friend but the truth is dearer. We know everyone by name*” (Қазақстан Президентінің Баспасөз қызметі, 2022). This meeting marks the beginning of the change in rhetoric of Qantar by Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. Seeing that the Kazakhstanis initially went out on peaceful protests because of the declining living standards, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev weaponized Qantar against the economic elites, many of which were still tied to the previous regime. The meeting itself was given as an opportunity to the oligarchs and big businessmen to accept the reality that the succession was completed.

His next meeting, on January 29th, was with the state media channel, where he further supported the official finalized interpretation of Qantar (Телеканал Хабар 24, 2022с). He continued to blame external terrorists for the violence but started to add that the terrorists were hired by some officials to execute the coup, without disclosing their names. Overall, he started to move away from initial externalization of threat and started to admit that the violence was staged by someone *within the regime*. In the interview, he also reiterated the respect for Nursultan

Nazarbayev's administration, but he hinted at imminent modernization of society. Thus, he was victimizing himself, as he is this reformer whose attempts to bring changes were not accepted by the old elites and they tried to get rid of him. He also said that he knew the consequences of his shoot-to-kill order, but he had to act because security forces "did not have a unified plan of action" and were "confused" (Телеканал Хабар 24, 2022с).

On March 16th Address to the Parliament, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev voiced the final theory, according to which the losers of succession recruited foreign terrorists to hijack peaceful protest. Since then, he has been calling Qantar a "coup" that was organized by "interested people". In the latest interview to the international media regarding the incident, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev explicitly said:

"The goal of any coup - is seizure of power by a different group. I was offered to by some comrades to get on the plane and leave Kazakhstan. I, of course, never planned to do so, and I was going to stay here until the end... What happened in Almaty - was a coup. We recognize it as a well-directed action."(24 Media, 2022)

On May 20th, famous Kazakh screenwriter, Smagul Yelubai, revealed that Karim Massimov was just a messenger to Kassym-Jomart Tokayev from Nazarbayev's family (Сұрауы бар / Sūrauy bar, 2022). Smagul Yelubai said that during his meeting with Kassym-Jomart Tokayev in March 2022, the latter told him that Karim Massimov came into his office during Qantar and told him that the Nazarbayev family was unsatisfied with his governance. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev asked for 24 hours to deliberate and within those hours he took over Nazarbayev's position as Chairman of the Security Council and decided to invite CSTO forces into the country (Сұрауы бар / Sūrauy bar, 2022).

The independent journalist Mahambet Abzhan supported Yelubai's story and shared even more details of the meeting between Karim Massimov and Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. Apparently, Karim Massimov came into Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's office on the night of January 5th, around 7 PM and told him that family was asking him to leave the post of the president (@abzhannews, n.d.). Nursultan Nazarbayev, according to the insiders, was in "uplifted" mood between January 3-6th and stayed in regular communication with Karim Massimov. Both Mahambet Abzhan and "Nursultan Nightingale" Telegram Channel further state that Karim Massimov also "informed" Kassym-Jomart Tokayev about the 20,000 foreign mercenaries in the country and recommended him to leave the country (@abzhannews, n.d.; @nursolovej, n.d.). Kassym-Jomart Tokayev told Karim Massimov that he needs some time to deliberate about leaving the post but eventually decided to stay because some of the ministers supported him (@nursolovej, n.d.).

After Karim Massimov was dismissed, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev called an urgent meeting of the Security Council at midnight. One hour later, at 1:00 AM on January 6th, major media outlets started to announce that Karim Massimov was fired (Ratel.kz, 2022). On January 8th, reports that Massimov is arrested for treason started to appear in the news (Svoboda.org, 2022). On January 9th, Massimov's deputy assistant, colonel Azamat Ibrayev, was found dead outside his office in Nur-Sultan (Vlast.kz, 2022b).

It is during this time when Yerlan Karin, Murat Nurtleu and Yerlan Koshanov coalesced around Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and advised him to frame Qantar as a "foreign terrorist" attack on the country instead of the coup, to fulfill the requirement for the intervention of CSTO forces. These three will go onto taking the highest positions post-Qantar and will emerge as Tokayev's team going forward.

5.3 Qantar's Utility for Kassym-Jomart Tokayev:

The muddy status of Nursultan Nazarbayev was frustrating for the Kazakhstanis, who grew used to a sole dictator after three decades of his uninterrupted leadership. The model of a one “strongman” leader continues even from the Soviet Period, where one leader would replace another and there was a clear demarcation between their tenures. When Nursultan Nazarbayev announced his exit, he also used ambiguous language of “continuing to serve” and “staying close” (Leonard, 2022). Tokayev did not make any significant political changes and vowed to “continue the course” in his inauguration speech. Disgruntled Kazakhstanis and the opposition continued to view Nursultan Nazarbayev as the de-facto leader of the country and consider Kassym-Jomart Tokayev as a puppet of Nursultan Nazarbayev's Clan. Tokayev, then, had to eliminate confusion among the international and domestic actors. He could only do that by finalizing the succession. Qantar, despite tragic human costs, also became an opportunity to define the beginning of the new regime. The loyalties among the divided elites became visible to Nursultan Tokayev. Nursultan Nazarbayev could have also been interested in ending this confusing period of diarchy, as people continued to count him as de-facto leader of the country and held him responsible for growing economic problems.

The protest, then, served two main purposes for Kassym-Jomart Tokayev: first, this protest allowed the successor to finalize the succession by negotiating the terms of it with the predecessor's circle. The completion of succession was important, because Kassym-Jomart Tokayev remained vulnerable to a coup from within as long as old elites continued to have access to resources and means of coercion. Second, Qantar showed that Kazakhstanis still perceived Nursultan Nazarbayev as a de-facto leader, responsible for persisting economic problems. The public cannot have muddy demarcation lines between the dictators, as it needs to

place responsibility for issues on one specific person. The protesters burned the Administration of the First President and toppled his famous statue in the city of Taldykorgan. The crowd also chanted “Shal, ket!” (“Old man, leave!”) which has been a chant specifically about Nazarbayev. Seeing that the protesters were mainly against Nazarbayev, and not him, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev used the protests to emerge as a *separate* political force. He was no longer the “furniture”.

Russia became intensely involved in Qantar at Kassym-Jomart Tokayev’s request. The country committed as many as 2,000 troops from 31 Division, 98 Division and 45 Division through CSTO support. The 98th and 45th participated in The 2014 Russo-Ukrainian Conflict (Рыбин, 2022). Russia’s involvement raised concerns of occupation, especially from US Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, who questioned the necessity of the Russian involvement because Kazakhstan has “enough capacity” to keep order. Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia and Belarus all sent one division through CSTO support to Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. Chinese Foreign Affairs Minister, Wang Yi, said that China will not tolerate any “foreign” attempts to destabilize the region and expressed willingness to offer security support to Tokayev (Reuters, 2022). Chinese authorities condemned the protest, not the leadership, because it feared that such big unrest could manifest in political changes. If succeeded, the protests could have “inspired its own liberal intellectual elites to try something similar”, suggested Professor Li Minjiang (Reuters, 2022). Tokayev, nonetheless, received international support from the biggest players in the region, and that signaled to the domestic public that he is now recognized as the de-facto leader of the country and not just a placeholder.

In addition, Qantar, which became a tragedy for the Kazakhstanis, allowed Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to eliminate nascent seeds of the opposition, by accusing activists in organizing

protests and inviting instability. This is most evident in the arrest of Zhanbolat Mamai, a young emerging political activist, who was accused of “staging riots” and “spreading fakes” on February 23rd, 2022 (Радио Азаттык, 2022с). He was initially arrested for insulting police officers. Amnesty International, HRW and the US mission in Kazakhstan have declared his case as “politically motivated” (Данилин, 2022).

Qantar also revealed Kassym-Jomart Tokayev’s vulnerability to internal shocks. Recognizing that mass protests of this scale could be seized by the opposing groups, Tokayev restricted laws on mass gatherings. First, he expanded functions of the executive and the security forces during the protests that are of “social nature”. This law also increases punishment for civilians for not obeying security forces under the state of emergency. Second, he increased punishment for sponsoring terrorism. It is up to the security forces to decide what falls under “terrorism”. Thus, any social protest can be declared as an act of terrorism and turned into an emergency, which would then lift any accountability from security forces in repressing it.

But why did Qantar fail? Why did Karim Massimov and anti-Tokayev elites fail to depose Kassym-Jomart Tokayev? Ironically, the lower the level of personalism, the lower the chances of regime-changing coups. New successors, like Tokayev, need time to inherit the loyalties of all elites, which delays the process of full-on personalization of power for them. In such instances, the elites are more likely to stage a bloodless reshuffling coup instead of a bloody regime-toppling coup (Chin et al., 2022). In other words, Karim Massimov might have not been interested in assassinating Kassym-Jomart Tokayev because Kassym-Jomart Tokayev did not consolidate power like Nazarbayev yet, and he was not seen as a big figure that would take a lot of coordinated effort to get rid of. This miscalculation on Karim Massimov’s part might have saved Kassym-Jomart Tokayev during Qantar. However, as Kassym-Jomart Tokayev continues

to consolidate more power, it will get costlier for the remaining elites to remove him, which reduced the chances of another coup but raises the likelihood of assassination (Chin et al., 2022).



Figure 12: Fallen Statue of Nursultan Nazarbayev in the city of Taldykorgan
Source: (KazTag.kz, 2022b)

5.4 Post-Qantar:

The immediate string of dismissals during and after Qantar lend more support to the elite conflict theory and suggest the completion of transition. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev was able to remove his main competitors of succession - Dariga Nazarbayeva and Karim Massimov. He also fired several people close to Nursultan Nazarbayev, even including the latter's distant relatives and friends. This section focuses on the initial steps on Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's part immediately after Qantar, which show how he got rid of his main contenders and then how he eliminated the Nazarbayev family from the government and the economy.

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev started with cleaning out the National Security Committee by dismissing Karim Massimov on January 5th and then accusing him of treason on January 13th (Zakon.kz, 2022b). Karim Massimov served two terms as a Prime Minister through the direct appointment by Nazarbayev and has been placed to lead NSC together with Nursultan Nazarbayev's nephew, Samat Abish. Karim Massimov has been regarded as Nazarbayev's person, since at least 2003, when he first became his assistant. Karim Massimov also served as PM between 2007 - 2012, and received praise from Nazarbayev for the work during the 2007-2009 financial crisis (Forbes.kz, 2014). His case is classified, as of July 2022, all of his assistants have also been arrested and famous lawyer Abzal Quspan opined that Karim Massimov is looking at life sentence (Ulysmidia.kz, 2022). Karim Massimov's cousin, Nurlan Massimov, the head of the Police of Pavlodar Province, was fired on January 15, 2022 and arrested in July 2022. In March 2022, new NSC officials released photos of Karim Massimov's mansion in Almaty and the "findings" in it, which include luxury watches and \$17,2 million of banknote bundles (Ulysmidia.kz, 2022).



Figure 13: The photos of Karim Massimov's assets, including seven cases filled with undeclared money, seized by KNB

Source: (Ulysmidia.kz, 2022).

Along with Karim Massimov, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev also dismissed the head of “The Special Forces - A”, Anuar Sadykulov, on January 6th, 2022 (Fergana.ru, 2022b). This unit is a specialized NSC sub-unit that is directly responsible for the security of Almaty. On January 13th, 2022 Sadykulov was arrested by NSC, although the reason for arrest was not disclosed (Fergana.ru, 2022b). General-mayor Jaqsylyq Halyquly, ex-head of Aqmola Police Department, was found dead in his jail cell on August 6, 2022, after being detained for bribery in Qantar investigations (Time.kz, 2022). At least three high-rank officers, who worked with Karim Massimov, and received their ranks under Nursultan Nazarbayev, lost their lives in the aftermath of Qantar.

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev appointed Yermek Sagimbayev, the Head of President Security Services as new Chair of the NSC on January 12, 2022. Sagimbayev proved himself during Qantar by securing the physical safety of Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. Tokayev later announced a deep reformation of NSC on May 17th, 2022 (gov.egov.kz, 2022). In July 2022, he decentralized the organization, establishing six separate regional NSC departments and personally appointing directors for all of them (Informburo.kz, 2022b).

After removing Karim Massimov, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, though not explicitly, had deputies in the Parliament to suggest removing Dariga Nazarbayeva from the Senate (KazTag.kz, 2022c). On January 12th, 2022 Dariga Nazarbayeva missed the first post-Qantar session of the Parliament (Interfax.ru, 2022). On January 30th, Nur Otan party updated its politburo, and Dariga Nazarbayeva was removed from its list. In February 2022, she announced her exit from the Senate (Кунафин, 2022). To sum up, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev eliminated both Karim Massimov and Dariga Nazarbayeva, who were also considered as potential candidates for succession. After removing his direct competitors, he moved on to the remaining members of the Nazarbayev Clan.

5.4.1 Getting rid of the Nazarbayev Clan (January - June, 2022):

As mentioned earlier, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev succeeded Nursultan Nazarbayev as Chair of the Security Council on January 5th, 2022. Same week, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev removed Prime Minister Askar Mamin and Chair of the Mazhilis Nurlan Nigmatulin, veteran politicians with long careers, who failed to contain protests before they turned massy. Nurlan Nigmatulin's son was also dismissed from leadership position in state oil company, "QazMunaiGaz-Agro", which served security institutions, including NSC, with fuel (Радио АЗАТТЫК, 2022e). Moreover, the Anti-corruption agency, under Tokayev's control, arrested

cryptocurrency mining company which belonged to Nurlan Nigmatullin and his brother (Kapital.kz, 2022). Askar Mamin, in addition to losing his PM post, was also removed from the State Committee on Foreign Investments by Kassym-Jomart Tokayev in July 2022 (Радио Азаттык, 2022i).

On January 20th, the Mazhilis proposed to remove provisions from the Law on the First President, according to Nursultan Nazarbayev's lifelong chairmanship in the Security Council and the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan. Moreover, the government no longer needs Nazarbayev's approval on the matters of foreign and domestic policy (Tengrinews.kz, 2022b). The only function Nazarbayev retained was the ability to address the Parliament and the government about the "issues of high concern". The Senate swiftly adopted the proposal from the Mazhilis and sent it to Kassym-Jomart Tokayev for signature. Tokayev signed the law on February 7th, 2022. Immediately after, the deputies started to suggest that the "Law on the First President" itself should be removed from the Constitutional Law completely. Tokayev abstained from openly supporting this initiative but suggested holding a referendum instead (Akorda.kz, 2022e). The referendum on Constitutional Amendments passed with 77% approval on June 5, 2022.

One of the biggest signs of power is its ability to mobilize main social forces (Migdal, 1988). On May 30th, 2022 Nursultan Nazarbayev suddenly reappeared in media space and gave an interview, where he publicly supported the referendum, proposed by Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, even though if passed, the new law would exclude his special status from the Constitution (Халдарова, 2022). Moreover, in the same interview, he said that his relatives, who broke laws, should be punished. He also revealed that he "*retained some power at first*" but only to "*ensure smooth political transition in the light of probable contradictions in the society and*

among the elites” and in accordance with the Constitution, he handed his post to the Speaker of the Senate (Tokayev), who “later legitimately won the Presidential Elections” (Халдарова, 2022). In other words, he recognized the turbulence of succession and he wanted to personally guarantee that succession takes place through the institutions, in this case, the Constitution.

Nursultan Nazarbayev also shifted blame on Karim Massimov for the discontent over the management of the Nazarbayev University, which the latter helped to establish and served in the board of directors (Радио Азаттык, 2022f). This sudden blame shift aligns with the demonization of Karim Massimov by the Tokayev’s government and signals that Nursultan Nazarbayev is no longer able to protect his former loyalists. But Kassym-Jomart Tokayev did not stop on removing Karim Massimov, he continued to limit the access to resources and power for the rest of the Nazarbayev Clan.

On January 11th, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev ordered an investigation of the activity of the “Operator ROP” company, which held a monopoly over vehicle utilization fees (Коростелова, 2022a). The company was associated with Aliya Nazarbayeva. She left the director’s seat at the Association of Environmental Organizations at the end of January 2022 (Коростелова, 2022a).

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev also removed Nursultan Nazarbayev’s wife, Sara Nazarbayeva, from the National Committee on Women’s Affairs and Family Policy under the President’s Administration (Akorda.kz, 2022f). She was involved in family and demographic policy in the country since 1992 and participated in the writing of The 2002 Law on Children in Kazakhstan (ИПС “Әділет,” n.d.-b). She created several demographic initiatives and established a special fund “Bobek”, through which she financed construction of villages for orphans and other children-focused projects. The removal from the state committee on the issues she was involved

in for so many years looks like a statement about her incompetence and irrelevance in social issued from Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's new administration.

Other members of the Nazarbayev Clan started to lose their posts, as well. Nursultan Nazarbayev's nephew, Kairat Satybaldy and his wife, Gulnara Satybaldy, were arrested in March 2022 by the Anti-Corruption Committee (Время, 2022). The charges include racketeering, bribery and corruption. Kairat Satybaldy announced that he will return his shares in the national telecommunication agency, KazakhTeleCom, which suggests that the former beneficiaries are offering their assets and trying to negotiate with the new regime. As of September 2022, the Satybaldys are still under arrest and their case is classified (Время, 2022).

Kairat Sharipbayev, Dariga Nazarbayeva's rumored husband and Nursultan Nazarbayev's in-law, quit his position in QazaqSas company on January 14th, 2022 (RFE/RL, 2022b). Dimash Dosanov, who is Aliya Nazarbayeva's husband, has also lost his position in KazTransOil around the same time (RFE/RL, 2022b). QazaqGas and KazTransOil are two biggest state-owned energy companies. In May 2022, QazaqGas announced the loss of \$2,2 billion to illegal financial operations under Kairat Sharipbayev's management (Радио Азаттық, 2022h). The representative of the Cargo Management, a company that is affiliated with Kairat Sharipbayev, was arrested for bribery.

Timur Kulibayev, husband to Dinara Nazarbayeva, left the post of director at "Atameken" - the largest association of entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan (Inform.kz, 2022c). He left on January 17th, and thus did not attend the first big meeting with the business community on January 22nd organized by Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. Timur Kulibayev then left the "Adal" party, which he established in 2020, and the party was absorbed by Nur Otan. He managed to

stay relatively unaffected by the post-Qantar purge until June 2022, when he had to sell his gas company back to the state for symbolic 1 KZT (Azattyq-ruhy.kz, 2022).

Anipa Nazarbayeva's transport company, Group Of The Companies Tda, had its license revoked after state officials detected false declaration of goods. She is Nursultan Nazarbayev's sister (Радио Азаттык, 2022d). Bolat Nazarbayev, the younger brother, also received attention for his illegal takeover of Almaty's biggest bazaar, Altyn Orda and Almaty Steklo glass plant. He also received an extortion charge from the former director of the manganese extraction facility (Жуасов, 2022b). Yerlan Koshanov, Tokayev-appointed Speaker of Mazhilis, said that there will be "no untouchables for the law" regarding the investigation of Altyn Orda. Bolat Nazarbayev's son, Yerbol Nazarbayev, was also fired from his position in the Anti-Corruption Agency in May 2022. Shortly after Qantar and related lawsuits, Bolat Nazarbayev was reported to be in a hospital having serious health issues. Some experts suggest that the news were released by the Nazarbayev Clan to paint Tokayev as a heartless unempathetic ruler who is punishing the family for the coup attempt (Гиперборей, 2022b).

Nursultan Nazarbayev-adjacent non-relatives have also been removed from their high positions. For example, Baurzhan Baibek, who is a son of Nursultan Nazarbayev's classmate, and a fellow tribesman, also lost his position as a secretary of Nur Otan party (KazTag.kz, 2022f). Kenes Rakishev, who was close to Baibek, and to whom Nursultan Nazarbayev sold defaulted BTR Bank in 2014 is also undergoing investigation as a part of Baibek's graft case. Following Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's tirade against oligopoly on January 11th, the head of the Kazakhstan Bank of Development (KBD), Abai Sarkulov was fired on January 25th, 2022 (Liter.kz, 2022). Sarkulov was Nursultan Nazarbayev-appointed director of his fund "Demeu" and was overall close to the family. Moreover, it is under Sarkulov's chairmanship at the KBD,

when Timur Kulibayev's, Nursultan Nazarbayev's son-in-law, had state funds disbursed to his companies through contractor tenders.

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev removed Nazarbayev's in-law, Berik Imashev, from the National Election Committee and appointed senator Nurlan Abdirov as the new chair on January 25th, 2022 (Akorda.kz, 2022c). Aizhan Nazarbayeva, a distant cousin to Nursultan Nazarbayev, was fired from her post of first deputy assistant to governor of the Karasai region of Almaty on June 27th, 2022 (@abzhannews, n.d.). As of late June 2022, she was the last remaining Nazarbayev family member on the government post.

Overall, the purge of the Nazarbayev Clan can be visually represented in a family tree below in Figure 14, where family members who lost their government positions and businesses are encircled in orange and those who got arrested are encircled in red.

Russian politicians. The recent “cooling” of the relationship between Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and Vladimir Putin might suggest that the former is refusing to support the latter in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict because Putin continues to maintain relations with Nursultan Nazarbayev.

Nazarbayev’s most recent trip to Vladimir Putin on June 11th, 2022, five days after he voted on the Kassym-Jomart Tokayev’s referendum, which excludes his special status from the Kazakh Constitution, was perceived as a sign of brewing conflict between the two (Elbasy.kz, 2022). Dosym Satpayev speculates that Nursultan Nazarbayev is growing unhappy with Tokayev’s actions towards his family members and their businesses and went to ask Putin for additional security guarantees (BILD на русском, 2022). Kassym-Jomart Tokayev visited Vladimir Putin on June 17th, 2022 at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum and publicly stated that Kazakhstan will not recognize breakaway republics in the Eastern Ukraine. This is a huge difference to Tokayev’s previous comments on the Russian politics in Ukraine, because he refused to call the 2014 Crimea’s Annexation “an annexation” in 2019 (DW на русском, 2019).

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev also emphasized that it was CSTO, not Russia, who assisted Kazakhstan during Qantar and that Kazakhstan will observe all international sanctions imposed on Russia (24 Media, 2022). After Tokayev’s speeches, Ramzan Kadyrov, the president of Chechnya, released a video on his Telegram channel, rebuking Kazakhstan’s reluctance to help Russia in its invasion in Ukraine. Kadyrov has links to the Kazakh oligarch Kenes Rakishev, who is close to Nursultan Nazarbayev’s family and is a son-in-law of Imangali Tasmagambetov (Медиазона Центральная Азия, 2022). Tasmagambetov, as was already mentioned in the second chapter, was Nursultan Nazarbayev’s top choice at some point as a potential successor before he was sent to retirement by Tokayev in 2019.

Another sign of a growing distance between Nursultan Nazarbayev and Kassym-Jomart Tokayev is the fact that the latter was visibly absent at the grand opening of the biggest mosque in Central Asia hosted and sponsored by the former on August 12, 2022 (Радио Азаттык, 2022k). Moreover, Samat Abish was present at the event, despite losing his post in NSC after Qantar incident (Радио Азаттык, 2022k). Furthermore, Nazarbayev's press-secretary called Nazarbayev the "Elbasy" in the press-release, which raised eyebrows since this title was taken out from the Constitution by the recent referendum. It seems like Nursultan Nazarbayev is refusing to leave the public space completely, despite claiming to be "out of politics and on retirement". He also seems comfortable bringing Samat Abish out to big cultural event, despite the latter's service as assistant to Karim Massimov.

5.5 "New" Kazakhstan and its New Elites:

Autocratic leaders change existing elites or attempt to establish new elites during the times of internal crisis or when they feel insecure in their position (Ishiyama & Kim, 2020). Kassym-Jomart Tokayev not only got rid of old elites, but created a circle of new ones, led by Yerlan Karin and Murat Nurtleu. Murat Nurtleu, another diplomat, like Tokayev himself, became his assistant in 2019 (Akorda.kz, 2019). During Qantar, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev appointed Murat Nurtleu as First Deputy to the Chairman of NSC on January 5th, 2022 (Inform.kz, 2022a). After the crisis was over, Nurtleu became Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's Head of Administration (Inform.kz, 2022d).

Yerlan Karin, a published writer and a terrorism scholar, was first official to give interview during Qantar on a state channel (Телеканал Хабар 24, 2022b). During the interview, he called Qantar "*a hybrid terrorist attack*", organized by forces which wanted to destroy Kazakhstan's statehood and sovereignty. He was instrumental in adding "terrorist" into the

official interpretation of Qantar events, and he explained it by high preparedness and mass character of the attackers. He also out-grouped the initiators of Qantar by suggesting that the coup was against all Kazakhstanis, because “*all Kazakhstanis ARE the state*” (Телеканал Хабар 24, 2022b). Karin did acknowledge that the protests started peacefully and that he was able to negotiate the decrease in fuel prices, thereby implying that the protests would end if not the terrorists and attackers who hijacked the protest.

Yerlan Karin is becoming one of the main narrators and key figures of Kassym-Jomart Tokayev’s regime. On June 15th, 2022 Tokayev established a new position of a State Councilor and appointed Yerlan Karin (Tengrinews.kz, 2022e). The new position allows Yerlan Karin to represent Tokayev on demand, communicate with political parties on his behalf, and recommend new policies. Yerlan Karin is de-facto a new Vice President. Yerlan Karin was also behind creating a new parallel institution - *The National Kurultai*, a quasi-parliament, which will be suggesting new policies and new ideas (Tengrinews.kz, 2022e).

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev also promoted Ruslan Zhaksylykov from the Commander-in-Chief of Internal Troops to the new Minister of Defense on January 19th, 2022 (Tengrinews.kz, 2022a). Previous Minister of Defense, Murat Bektanov, was also dismissed for not showing initiative and leadership during Qantar. A month later, on February 19th 2022, Murat Bektanov was detained for involvement in organizing Qantar (Al-Jazeera, 2022).

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev also changed the Minister of Interior, which took control over the investigation of mass leave of service by the police and KNB officers in Almaty on the night when protests turned violent (24.kz, 2022b). The mass leave of workplace then allowed the protestors and attackers to enter police stations and arm themselves. The Minister of Interior then

fired the Head of Almaty Police, Serik Kudebayev, together with his entire department (KazTag.kz, 2022d). Kudebayev is currently under investigation.

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev is decorating the new government with a new slogan. During the Nawruz Celebrations in March 2022, Tokayev said that he is going to build a “Second Republic”, or a “New Kazakhstan”. According to Yerlan Karin’s direct post on Telegram, President Tokayev’s “New Kazakhstan” - is first and foremost the “*final transition from hyper-presidential system of governance to a presidential republic with a strong parliament*” (@erlankarin, n.d.).

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev rushed with new reforms through the 2019 Referendum, by saying that the citizens have “matured” for them. However, his reforms are subtle and do not provide more political freedoms. Some scholars fear that he is rolling back the 2017 legal reforms by Nazarbayev, which strengthened the legislature, because Tokayev wants to turn the Mazhilis into a “printing machine” for his policies (Екатерина Шульман, 2022).

5.5 Symbolic Evidence of Transition:

The start of the new regime is evident in Kassym-Jomart Tokayev’s rhetoric and demonstrations of status items. For example, Tokayev started to highlight the differences between his and previous leaderships. For example, Nursultan Nazarbayev framed his unlimited executive terms through the language of passive acceptance of the people’s will. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, in his first public interview on January 29th, explicitly stated that he “will not stay for more than two constitutional terms” (Телеканал Хабар 24, 2022с). Another stark difference to Nursultan Nazarbayev’s habit of collecting awards, is Tokayev’s press secretary emphasizing that Tokayev refuses to accept any national or international award while in service.

The fact that Nursultan Nazarbayev's toppled statue was not restored, is another sign that Tokayev's administration is not concerned with keeping public symbols of Nazarbayevism. Moreover, on the very next day after Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's visit to neighboring Kyrgyzstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev's statue was removed by the Kyrgyz authorities from the memorial complex "Ruh Ordo" (Куватова, 2022). There seem to be shared understanding between the Kazakh and other regional elites that Nursultan Nazarbayev is no longer the main player and there are no consequences of removing his statues.

Another significant visual evidence of the end of Nazarbayevism – is the renaming of the capital from "Nur-Sultan" back to "Astana" on September 14th, 2022 (Al Jazeera, 2022). The capital was built by Nursultan Nazarbayev and was long considered to be one of the most important parts of his political legacy.

In terms of public activities, there are other indicators that Kassym-Jomart Tokayev took over the role of the leader, as he started to stage events in which he did not participate in before. For example, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev visited the central mosque in Nur-Sultan on February 13th, 40 days after Qantar incident, to mourn the victims (Ильина, 2022a). He blamed the "terrorists" for the violence and expressed his condolences. The sheer symbolism of being hosted by the Mufti and showcasing the compassion for the victims, while Nursultan Nazarbayev made no statements post-Qantar is important. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev is showing that he is also a moral leader and is regarded as such by the religious authorities.



Figure 16: Kassym - Jomart Tokayev mourning victims of Qandy Qantar on February 13th, 2022

Source: Akorda.kz

Additional evidence of Kassym-Jomart Tokayev taking over is him finally flying on a board of custom \$300 million A330, which was exclusively used by Nursultan Nazarbayev, even after resignation (Burdin, 2022). Tokayev used smaller and cheaper A321 between 2019 – 2022. Moreover, in the first international trip of 2022, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev drove to the meeting with Recep Erdogan in a Mercedes-Benz S600 V12 W221 Pullman Guard elongated bulletproof version, which was previously used by Nazarbayev (@chinovnik_qaz, n.d.).



Figure 15: Kassym-Jomart Tokayev boarding Airbus 330 for the first time since succession. The plane was only used by Nursultan Nazarbayev before.

Source: Akorda.kz

Another evidence of the completion of the transit - is reactivation of former opponents in the country's political sphere without a fear of repression. For example, famous writer Olzhas Suleimenov announced the revival of the "People's Congress of Kazakhstan" party (Inform.kz, 2022e). Another veteran opposition leader, Bulat Abilov, launched the new "Bizdin Tandau" party (Курмангазинова, 2022). Both figures had to either close or stop their political activism during the previous Nazarbayev regime. Just the sheer fact of them openly announcing and registering their parties may indicate the beginning of the end of Nazarbayevism in Kazakhstan.

5.6 New Loyalties from the Old Elites:

During autocratic successions, the elites are encouraged to display attitudinal and behavioral loyalty in order to communicate cohesion and uniformity to the public that might be expecting political changes (Schedler & Hoffmann, 2016). Since elite relations are opaque, the

successor can create opportunities for the elites to visibly signal their loyalties. They can do so by publicly supporting the successor's reforms or initiatives.

Soon after Qantar concluded with Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's survival in leadership, other parties started to coalesce around "Nur Otan" party. For example, "Adal" party, created by Nursultan Nazarbayev's son-in-law, Timur Kulibayev, joined Nur Otan at the end of January 2022 (Ризабекова, 2022). Kassym-Jomart Tokayev then renamed "Nur-Otan" to "Amanat". The choice of the new name is symbolic, as it removes the "Nur", which is a reference to Nursultan Nazarbayev's first name. New name, "Amanat", stands for the "covenant of ancestors" or "mandate to future generations". By suggesting this new name, Tokayev essentially said that the party is a vestige of the past that needs rebranding. He then announced his exit from the party, which he covered by the rhetoric of separation of government branches, but it could have been a desire to distance himself and his regime from Nursultan Nazarbayev's political legacy. This aligns with Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's statement of the start of the new regime under the "New Kazakhstan" brand. The existing members of the party supported Tokayev's initiative to rename the party (amanatpartiasy.kz, 2022).

Some of Nursultan Nazarbayev's loyalists publicly shifted their loyalties to Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. Imangali Tasmagambetov, who was one of the Nazarbayev's persons and was considered for succession at some point, came out with public support for Kassym-Jomart Tokayev on January 10th, 2022 (Informburo.kz, 2022a). Tasmagambetov's son-in-law, through which both Nazarbayev and Tokayev's family members laundered money as discussed in Chapter 3, Kenes Rakishev, publicly donated 1 Billion KZT to the Qazaqstan Halqyna Fund. Moreover, Tokayev was invited to assess the work of the Central Asian Institute of Ecological

Research, which was established by Rakishev's wife and Tasmagambetov's daughter, Asel Tasmagambetova (Akorda.kz, 2022g).

The national companies have also started to dump the members of the Nazarbayev Clan to signal their loyalty to Tokayev's regime. For example, "Kazakhstan Railways" National Company canceled a contract with Aliya Nazarbaeva's "Instant Payments" company, which established a monopoly on the electronic ticket sales in the country (Горбоконеко, 2022). She was receiving between 300-500 million KZT annually from the ticket sales, based on the fees and the volume of sales. Kazakhstan's Development Bank, after receiving a new appointment in its leadership, also dumped tenders with Timur Kulibayev and Kairat Boranbayev's companies (Ахметуллин, 2022).

The general demonstration of shifting loyalties within the country can be traced by the donations to the Tokayev's initiative, the new social fund "Qazaqstan Halqyna" ("For the People of Kazakhstan"). The fund was established on January 11th, 2022 by Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, to assist the victims of Qantar-2022. The announcement of the fund was contrasted with Nursultan Nazarbayev's inefficient and corrupted National Welfare Fund, Samruk-Kazyna. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev threatened the closure of the latter in a month if it fails to improve its accountability (ТАСС, 2022b). Tokayev encouraged donations to Qazaqstan Halqyna and donations poured even from the members of Nazarbayev's family, to signal their compliance (Qazaqstan Halkyna Fund, 2022):

Table 2: Donations to the New Fund from the members of Old Elites and biggest companies in the country

New fund “Qazaqstan Halqyna” (to the People of Kazakhstan) est. by Kassym-Jomart Tokayev

<u>Beneficiaries of old regime:</u>	<u>Donations to Tokayev's fund:</u>
<p>Nazarbayev and his Family Members</p>	<p>Nursultan Nazarbayev’s Private Fund – 500 million KZT Nursultan Nazarbayev's "Demeu" fund - 1.2billion KZT First President’s (Nazarbayev) Library’s administration – 888,811 KZT First President’s (Nazarbayev) office – 3.6 million KZT Nursultan Nazarbayev’s Private Fund – 500 million KZT Bolat Nazarbayev’s “Saliqaly Urpaq” Fund – 1 billion KZT Sara Nazarbayeva – 1 billion KZT Kairat Satybaldy - 1 billion KZT Kairat Boranbayev – 350 million KZT “Halyk” Charity Fund donated 12 billion KZT (managed by Timur and Dinara Kulibayev)</p>
<p>Nazarbayev's Business Friends</p>	<p>Tsai Yakov and Daniyar Abulgazin – 500 million KZT both, connected to Timur Kulibayev’s businesses Bulat Utemuratov - 10 billion KZT Yerlan Nigmatullin – 200 million KZT</p>
<p>Others (selected)</p>	<p>Mabetex Gr – 500 million KZT Lancaster Group – 500 million KZT Bank Center Credit – 500 million KZT Kaspi Bank - 10 billion KZT Karazhanbasmunai (subsidiary of KazMunaiGaz) - Kazzinc and its subsidiary Altyntau – 11 billion KZT KAZ Minerals and its subsidiaries donated 17.4 billion KZT</p>

6 CONCLUSION: NAZARBAEYEVISM 2.0?

Based on the existing scholarship on succession patterns in autocratic regimes aging dictators usually die-in-office, are imprisoned or flee the country (Kendall-Taylor & Frantz, 2016). They are more likely to be imprisoned for poor economic performances (Escribà-Folch, 2013). The dictators can attempt to minimize succession risks by either picking a successor or institutionalizing the very process of succession itself. The Kazakh dictator Nursultan Nazarbayev, who ruled the country between 1991 – 2019 as its first president since independence, was headed towards his 80s without any institutionalized mechanisms of succession or a designated male heir. His autocratic rule has contributed to a corrupt ineffective economic system, based on hydrocarbon rents, which benefitted his family members and close circle of friends, leading to inequality and economic grievances from the poorer masses.

Recognizing the risks and learning from succession outcomes in neighboring regimes, Nursultan Nazarbayev attempted to pre-emptively schedule his own succession by picking temporary placeholder and thus hoping to establish a precedent of successful constitutional-procedural succession. The choice of the successor, who is a loyal male politician, also indicates that Nursultan Nazarbayev understood the unpreparedness of the Kazakh audience for a female successor. This understanding came from the observation of a smooth hereditary male succession in neighboring Azerbaijan and an imprisonment of rumored female successor, Gulnara Karimova, in the neighboring Uzbekistan.

Based on appointments in the preparation for succession, it seems as if Nursultan Nazarbayev was hoping to secure his safety in retirement and possibly create conditions for his daughter to succeed in the next round of succession. He chose a male loyalist as a successor in exchange for legal immunity and high-level security position in retirement, but he had his

daughter, Dariga Nazarbayeva appointed in a position that made her second-in-line to presidency at the time of his exit. This post-succession arrangement worked, until the power balance between the Nazarbayev's family members and the new successor was disturbed during the violent mass protests in January 2022.

This succession case reveals that pre-emptively organized successions remain vulnerable to internal shocks, such as economic protests, and these shocks can open an opportunity to the losers of succession to contest for power. Moreover, the handpicked successor may turn against the predecessor, and use the internal shocks to finalize the succession by putting blame for economic troubles on the old regime that is refusing to leave. What we ultimately learn from the Kazakh case is that personalist dictatorships are vulnerable to leadership successions and the attempts to pre-schedule them may not always reduce risks for the outdoing dictator.

Is Kazakhstan an outlier in the pool of organized leadership successions in personalistic regimes? The answer is both yes and no. Yes, because Nursultan Nazarbayev has started the process of organizing his succession several years ahead in hopes of preserving his political name. However, the structure of the regime he has left behind was not conducive to the kind of succession outcome he was hoping for. Post-succession violence that erupted during Qantar events and the erasure of Nazarbayev's name from the capital and the Constitution that followed, suggest that "Nazarbayev's Kazakhstan" ceased to exist the moment the new successor started process of personalization.

Failed coup attempts increase the repression from the surviving incumbent (Lachapelle, 2020). While it is too early to speak of personalization of power by Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, he is, nonetheless, relying on the same autocratic "Nazarbayevist" methods of repression. The biggest evidence would be in his "shoot-to-kill" order during Qantar, much like Nazarbayev's

brutal repression of Zhanaozen. Eleven years after Zhanaozen, the list of victims has not been released and no proper investigation was held. Six months after Qantar, Tokayev's administration still has not released several political activists and did not disclose the entire list of the victims. The final list of Qantar victims was released more than 8 months after the incident, on August 15, 2022 (Копостелова, 2022b). There seem to be no significant reforms under Tokayev's leadership so far. This confirms that autocracies are replaced by autocracies, the likelihood of regime change after leadership successions is small.

There are other, less bloody, instances of repressive behavior in Tokayev's so-called "New Kazakhstan". For example, several political activists were arrested in the aftermath of Qantar (Vorobyeva, 2022). There were also reports of threatening students at state universities with "fails" if they would not come to the concert dedicated to Tokayev (Ильина, 2022b). The exact same strategy to make it look like youth supports the regime was done by Nazarbayev after he won his last presidential elections in 2015 (Azattyq, 2015). More recently, the students are supposedly being forced to vote for the proposed changes to the Constitution at the upcoming referendum at the threat of failing courses. The observers reported much lower participation at the 2022 Referendum than officials claim and several instances of ballot manipulations were also observed (Azattyq, 2022).

The 2022 Referendum, though includes some progressive changes to the Constitution, does not weaken the hyper-presidential system built by Nazarbayev. Both present and former presidents are under legal immunity and can only be tried in case of proven treason. The legislature is still under the executive control, as the Amanat (ex-Nur Otan) party continues to dominate the parliament. According to the newer Constitution, the president is simply not allowed to have a party association and the number of his personal picks in the Senate decreases

from 15 to 10 people. There are other smaller “cosmetic” changes, but in a true diversionary fashion, Tokayev is promoting this referendum as a step towards stronger human rights protection, as one of the constitutional amendments removes death penalty.

Although Tokayev promised easing registration for new parties on March 16th, none of the parties announced by the civil activists were given registration, even after collecting the required number of signatures (Ахуал Сегодня, 2022). Moreover, Sanzhar Bokayev, the political activist who exposed Aliya Nazarbayeva’s laundering scheme through the “Operator Rop” company, received death threats after attempting to get this party registered (KazTag.kz, 2022a). More recently, the authorities also released a video of a person, resembling Sanzhar Bokayev, who is consuming cocaine on camera, to compromise the activist's reputation (KazTag.kz, 2022a).

Tokayev has also lied on the issue that is traumatic for the Kazakhstanis, who suffered The Semey Nuclear Bomb Testings - the construction of the nuclear plant in the country. He promised to hold a referendum on the issue in June 2019, considering its traumatism in the Kazakh history (Tengrinews.kz, 2019). However, on June 9th, 2022 he suddenly announced that he has already picked the site for the construction of the nuclear plant (Гринштейн, 2022). Tokayev could have included the proposal on nuclear plant in the referendum, but the fact that he did not, shows that he is continuing Nazarbayev’s tradition of making lucrative energy contracts privately.

The main issue Kazakhstan is going to have, going forward, is continuation of these turbulent transitions during each cycle of personalist leadership. It seems as if the current successor is not interested in institutionalizing the leadership. Both Nursultan Nazarbayev and Kassym-Jomart Tokayev have failed to strengthen the state institutions or to formalize the succession process, to set a positive precedent, but this is more evidence that it is incredibly

challenging for the personalist autocracies to have smooth transitions, even with years of careful preparation.

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