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Authoritarian learning and diffusion: protests in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in 2022

MA thesis

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Tartu 2023

Authorship Declaration:

I have prepared this thesis independently. All the views of other authors, as well as data from literary sources and elsewhere, have been cited.

Word count of the thesis: 21862 words

Zhibek Aisarina, 14/05/2023

Abstract

In this thesis I study the authoritarian learning and authoritarian diffusion processes that served as a basis for some of the repressive measures taken by Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in response to mass protests in 2022. The thesis attempts to address the question as to 'whether different types of authoritarian regimes are more amenable to learning or learn in different ways' (Hall and Ambrosio 2017,154). It focuses on authoritarian regimes specifically in Central Asia. This study uses process tracing and content analysis in order to analyze the diffusion and learning mechanisms during and in the aftermath of the mass protests. I formulate 2 mechanisms for learning and diffusion that are not mutually exclusive and usually go in parallel in the Central Asian context. I analyze newspaper articles from news media outlets such as Radio Liberty Kazakh and Uzbek Services, Eurasianet, and Gazeta.uz. In addition, I analyze citizen journalism source, Youtube channel БАСЕ to make the process tracing more accurate. My findings are 1. Authoritarian learning and diffusion processes go in parallel, mostly diffusion framing authoritarian learning processes in Central Asia. 2. Kazakh and Uzbek regimes engage in authoritarian diffusion by initially framing mass protests as of socio-economic nature and instantly switching to framing them as a disorder organized by terrorists. 3. Diffusion process within the regional security organization (CSTO) context is more nuanced and needs to fit into the objective of fighting three evils: extremism, separatism, and terrorism. 4. Kazakh and Uzbek regimes engage in authoritarian learning when they base their calculations on when to switch to a terrorist threat narrative on the previous learning success or failure cases. 5. Kazakh and Uzbek regimes engage in learning from each other and domestic learning.

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Introduction

In 2022, Kazakhstan and Karakalpakstan experienced unprecedented mass protests in the post-independence era. Both in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, protests were met with repression from the ruling regime. The regimes stayed in power, despite the scale of the protests. What is puzzling is how the authoritarian regimes in Central Asia continue to stand regardless of the challenges by the protesters amounting to several thousand. Pannier (2022) argues that ‘ The causes of the violent protests in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan were the failures of those governments to address people’s basic socio-economic needs.’ What is important to know about Central Asian regimes is that mostly the social contract between the regime and the population rests on the agreement that political freedoms will be traded for political and socio-economic stability and economic development. What happened during the 2022 protests in Kazakhstan was the ‘regimes’ failure to provide satisfactory economic conditions and a safe social environment’ (Thibault and Tastaibek 2023, 90). In Uzbekistan, the protests were also a disequilibrium of the existing social contract between the Uzbek regime and Karakalpakstan’s population, albeit the one based on the change of status of the Karakalpakstan as sovereign.

In Karakalpakstan, prior to the current president’s term, the social contract has been based on the constitutional right of the Karakalpakstan autonomous Republic’s sovereign status with a right to secede (Solod 2022). The reason behind the decision to strip the autonomous republic off its right for secession was introduced at this particular moment: ‘Tashkent believed its own story: that through massive state investment, it had been able to buy quiescence in the region’(Murtazashvili 2022). In the Uzbek case, it was a clear misstep by Mirziyoyev, which he acknowledged later and made statements that signaled restoring of the social contract with Karakalpakstan’s population. After protests turned voluminous, the Uzbek President decided to cancel the constitutional amendments changing the republic’s status back to the sovereign. Mirziyoyev also attempted to demonstrate that he was not the one responsible for the amendments. The Uzbek president accused the deputies of the Zhogorgu Kenes (the Parliament) in Karakalpakstan for proposing and approving the amendment to Karakalpakstan’s status (“Вы же сами одобрили” 2022). Mirziyoyev stated that ‘if the Karakalpak population is dissatisfied, no article will be changed’ (“Вы же сами одобрили” 2022). The statement suggests that Mirziyoyev did not plan to change the terms of the agreement between the authoritarian regime and the population without the population’s support.

January 2022, or Bloody January protests, started from the gas price increase, which led to protests in Zhanaozen in the western part of Kazakhstan. Later the protests gained momentum, amounting to thousands of protesters gathering across the majority of the country. At some point during the January protests, the Kazakh regime even lost state control of the country's territory but was able to restore control with the help of CSTO's peacekeeping troops. Although Kazakhstan's government resigned on January 5th, 2022, and the protesters' demands to eradicate ex-president Nazarbayev's power had been met (RFERL's Kazakh Service 2022a), the regime itself was not toppled. Toqayev's current authoritarian regime is a simple continuation of Nazarbayev's. The so-called de-Nazarbayefication process is in full swing, with ex-President Nazarbayev losing his title of Elbasy (leader of the nation) and his immediate family losing the right of lifetime immunity (RFERL's Kazakh Service 2023b). However, Nazarbayev's loss of informal power does not evince the toppling of the Toqayev regime, which is still maintaining itself despite the popular challenge. Luca Anceschi, in his interview, argues that Toqayev's regime continues the authoritarian political line of the previous regime with partial elite succession and elite shuffles (Алимова 2023). Although the social contract between the Toqayev regime and Kazakhstan's population has changed, reality shows that the promised terms of the new agreement with the population do not materialize.

The Kazakh and Uzbek regimes' abilities to maintain their continuity points accord attention to the possible learning and diffusion processes in place. Considering the timing of the two mass protests, proximity increases the possibility that the two regimes engaged in learning from domestic and from each other's experiences with handling protests in 2022. The Kazakh and Uzbek regimes promised New Kazakhstan and New Uzbekistan. In the case of Kazakhstan, New Kazakhstan was introduced in the aftermath of Bloody January and included such changes as strong Parliament, weaker executive power, freedom for civil society, and independent media (Omarova 2022). In Uzbekistan, New Uzbekistan means democratization and freedom of speech under the New Uzbekistan's New Constitution chosen by the people (referring to new amendments as a result of the referendum in April 2023) (Avezov 2023). Based on the most recent Parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan and the Constitutional referendum in Uzbekistan, it seems political reforms transpired in neither of the countries. Some experts argued that neighboring Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine might bring 'distancing from Moscow' (Umarov 2022), while others claim that authoritarian 'solidarity networks to be developed further' with Russia at the center (Anceschi 2023). Whether with closer ties with Russia or not, the consolidation of Toqayev

and Mirziyoyev's power in recent presidential elections in Kazakhstan and the constitutional referendum in Uzbekistan are harbingers of the continuous interest in authoritarian learning and diffusion processes.

Theoretical Framework

Authoritarian learning. According to Hall and Ambrosio (2017), it is 'a process in which authoritarian regimes adopt survival strategies based upon the prior successes and failures of other governments' (143). Success and failure is measured by the (in)ability of the incumbent regime to retain its power, which makes learning easier to spot in the authoritarian context: a methodological asset that has been unaddressed in the literature. It has been emphasized that authoritarian learning is one type of political learning, including policy transfer, diffusion, linkage, and lesson-drawing (Hall 2020, 88). Authoritarian learning can take place both in relation to previous successes and failures; however, 'most studies of authoritarian learning have focused on "positive" cases in which effective and successful policy changes occur' (Ambrosio 2017, 185). Authoritarian learning should not be mixed with general learning, also framed in the literature as political learning. While authoritarian learning can be seen as a process, learning, in general, is an independent variable that leads or does not lead to the targeted outcome. Hall (2020) defines learning in general as the 'process of engagement, leading to the development of beliefs, skills, ideas, and discernment' (83).

Authoritarian diffusion. 'Diffusion refers to "any process where prior adoption of a trait or practice in a population alters the probability of adoption for remaining non-adopters"' (Ambrosio 2010, 378). Elkins and Simmons (2005) treat diffusion as 'a class of mechanisms (specifically those characterized by uncoordinated interdependence)' (37). Elkins and Simmons (2005) introduce two types of diffusion: 'diffusion via adaptation to altered conditions' and diffusion via learning'. Diffusion via adaptation means that 'the policy decisions of one government alter the conditions under which other governments base their decisions' (Elkins and Simmons 2005, 39). Ambrosio (2010) frames diffusion via adaptation the 'appropriateness', whereby 'diffusion can be nurtured through changes in the appropriateness of certain norms or practices' (382). According to Elkins and Simmons (2005), diffusion via learning happens when 'action provides information about [adoption] conditions, including the benefits and drawbacks of adopting' (42). Ambrosio (2010), in his turn, frames diffusion via learning as effectiveness, whereby 'policymakers are better able to identify what works and what does not through the experiences of others (382). 'For internally-driven diffusion processes, the primary impetus for the diffusion process comes from within the actor adopting the policy innovation' (Ambrosio and Tolstrup 2019, 2746).

‘In cases of internally-driven diffusion processes, the decision-making process of the latter adopter needs to be demonstrated’ (Ambrosio and Tolstrup 2019, 2746). Based on the case studies of Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine, Hall (2020) argued that ‘there is a significant inter-linkage between groups and a clear opportunity for learning’ (363). For instance, Hall (2020) claims that ‘elite interlinkage … means that they all know each other, learn from each other and are concerned with protecting their own power and that of their allies' (363).

Authoritarianism. Although authoritarian regimes are in no way uniform, there is one feature that unites all: the goal of preserving the incumbent regime. Hall (2020) summarizes the features of competitive, electoral, and consolidation types and provides a holistic explanation of the authoritarian regime. ‘Authoritarian regimes try to control elections and state structures while denying freedom of expression, freedom of the press and freedom to gather’ (Hall 2020, 31). Since authoritarianism can have varying definitions, it is more convenient to focus on which practices make a regime authoritarian. Hall (2020) proposes to use Gerschewski’s framework of three pillars of authoritarian stability: legitimation, co-option, and repression’ to ‘affirm that the cases at least retain authoritarian practices’ (46). Legitimation gets the regime popular support, and co-option increases the number of allies’ (Hall 2020, 47). According to Hall (2020), ‘regimes do not always resort to outright coercion, rather threatening such action to keep others in line’ (47). Costa Buranelli (2020) argues that ‘the concepts such as avtoritet (authority) and stabilnost (stability) [have been used as] normative categories that inform and regulate social relations among regimes in the region institutionalizing practices and integrating them in what is a Central Asian order’ (1013). In this study, a country will be considered authoritarian if it attempts to use legitimation, co-option, and repression tactics to preserve the status quo and stability of the incumbent regime.

Authoritarian Repression. As Lewis (2016) stated, ‘resilient authoritarian regimes find ways to go beyond this reliance on coercion and propaganda to achieve what has been termed a ‘deeper hegemony’, in which essential elements of official discourse circulate in society and are internalized by key social group’ (2). Kudaibergenova and Laruelle (2022) call the repressive regime actions ‘an authoritarian playbook, [consisting of] simple adaptive steps: arrest and imprison the leaders, harass activists, or buy off the most vulnerable social groups within the protest movement’ (3). Repression can include a ‘crackdown, a government-orchestrated violent restriction of civil society involving the killing of civilians, namely mass protesters’ (Sullivan 2019, 630). Levitsky and Way (2010) take an

organizational approach to incumbent power in competitive authoritarian regimes, whereby 'organization is the foundation of political stability' (56). From the organizational perspective, 'the greater a government's capacity to either prevent or crackdown on opposition protest, the greater are its prospects for survival' (Levitsky and Way 2010, 57). 'High-intensity coercion are high visibility acts that target large numbers of people, well-known individuals, or major institutions such as violent repression of mass demonstrations' (Levitsky and Way 2010, 57). 'Low-intensity coercion includes the use of security forces or paramilitary thugs to break up opposition meetings; vandalize opposition or independent media offices; and harass, detain, and occasionally murder journalists and opposition activists' (Levitsky and Way 2010, 59).

Stability discourse. Stability will be conceptualized as the Uzbek and Kazakh governments' intention to keep the regime status quo. Lewis (2016) frames stability in Kazakhstan's political context before the 2011 Zhanaozen massacre as follows: 'The official discourse constructs Kazakhstan as an oasis of stability and … prioritizes stability above other political values such as civil liberties' (4). Also, it was argued that 'Nazarbayev fulfills a role as a patriarchal guardian personified as the provider of stability and prosperity to the population' (Lewis 2016, 12). Such a framing posits the incumbent regime as the provider of political stability, whereby the most important objective is to sustain the status quo. It should be emphasized that the reactive framing of stability exclusively in response to Color Revolutions is not always accurate in the Central Asian context. Such a reactive framing can be found in the SCO, whose 'values and norms run counter to the spread of democracy. 'narrative of stability is aimed at undermining democracy promotion: anti-regime activities, such as the color revolutions are deemed to be inherently disruptive' (Ambrosio 2008, 1323). As Kassenova (2005) emphasizes, 'the guidelines of the [Kazakhstan's] national security law can be roughly summed up as follows: preservation of the political status quo and present form of governance, social stability, partial control over information…' (154). Moreover, in the signature strategy document, Kazakhstan 2030, 'domestic political stability and consolidation of the society' is listed among the top long-term priorities for the realization of the strategy (Kassenova 2005, 156).

Mass protests. Protests will be analyzed from the institutional perspective in order to fit the governmental narratives. From the perspective of the protesters, civil society, and the population, the January 2022 protests are more accurately formed in terms of state-society relations. For instance, Kudaibergenova and Laruelle (2022) argue that 'the key failure of the regime built by Nazarbayev is its inability to reconcile its neoliberal prosperity rhetoric with

citizens' calls for a welfare state' (2). The shift in the regime-society relations, namely, three central factors, explain the emergence of mass protests (Kudaibergenova and Laruelle 2022, 7). McGlinchey (2009) similarly argues that the institutionalist framework of protests, which contends that 'institutions and coercive capacity alone determine political opposition' (125), is not enough to explain variation in protests in Central Asia. Since the current study intends to analyze authoritarian learning by governments, it will take an institutional approach to protests, whereby 'repressive government institutions limit the ability of social groups to mobilize popular support' (McGlinchey 2009, 132). 'Conversely, should coercive capacity weaken, the likelihood that people would be willing to oppose the government is thought to increase' (McGlinchey 2009, 132).

Security Threat. In Central Asia, the perception of security threats is shared among authoritarian regimes. Paradoxically, Nourzhanov (2009) has framed the shared understanding of security threats in Central Asia as an obstacle to effective regional security. 'Security thinking in the region has been dominated by a focus on regime survival in individual countries on the one hand, and on the forceful imposition of the global security agenda' (Nourzhanov 2009, 85). Perceptions of security threats originate both in each regime's narrative and in the regional integration frameworks. Explained simply, all the Central Asian countries share the meaning of security threat, which is reflected in the regional cooperation frameworks and internalized by national strategies. In Central Asia, the security threat is an intentionally vague category, which includes 'three evil forces' of terrorism, extremism, and secessionism' (Ambrosio 2008, 1322). In his analysis of the changes in threat perceptions in Central Asia, Nourzhanov (2009) claimed the following: 'the official narrative of terrorism in Central Asia is motivated predominantly by the instrumentalist concerns of the ruling regimes, which use it as a pretext for exercising even greater social control' (92). After 9/11, religious extremism was one of the major security threats, and both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan cooperated actively with the West in its War on Terror efforts. Furthermore, Islamic radicalism and extremism threats emerged in the early 2000s in Central Asia itself from groups like IMU. Even in light of the explicit extremism threats in 2005, governments diluted the perception of security threats from Islamic radicalism with political stability. 'In a 2005 Presidential address to the people of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev named terrorism, political instability, and religious extremism as the gravest threats of the twenty-first century' (Omelicheva 2011, 84).

There are visible contradictions in the conceptualizations of authoritarian diffusion and authoritarian learning. While the definitions are available, the description of the

relationship between the two concepts is unclear. Bank and Edel (2015) highlight this limitation: ‘One reason why learning and policy change have often been lumped together is that it can be methodologically challenging to clearly identify learning because of its inherent cognitive, experiential nature “within” human beings’(6). Elkins and Simmons (2005) state that ‘diffusion is a decidedly general class of processes. One can imagine a fair number of mechanisms that satisfy its criteria: for example, learning, imitation, bandwagoning …’ (35). Hall and Ambrosio (2017) further emphasize the possibility of ‘delineating between related and oftentimes overlapping conceptions of learning. These include policy transfer/learning, isomorphism, and diffusion’ (Hall and Ambrosio 2017, 145). Marsh and Sharman (2009) state that ‘transfer is seen generally as improving the effectiveness of government operations’(282), [while] diffusion is related to ‘no such presumption of improving effectiveness or efficiency through importing foreign models’ (282). According to scholars, ’the diffusion literature concentrates on pattern-finding’ (Marsh and Sharman 2009, 269). Hall and Ambrosio (2017) also claim that ‘policy transfer focuses on the act of adoption whereas diffusion focuses on the networks which facilitate that adoption’ (148).

To complicate matters even more, the relationship between diffusion and learning has not been clearly theorized, which leads to confusion as to whether the learning and diffusion processes are linked and whether either one needs to precede another. Only a limited number of works suggest that learning comes before authoritarian diffusion. This study will not posit authoritarian learning and diffusion as mutually exclusive or contrasting processes. The current study differentiates two possible mechanisms based on the literature review of the topic: 1. Authoritarian learning on a state-to-state bilateral level. 2. Authoritarian diffusion based on regional networks. Bank and Edel (2015) divide the concept of learning into the learning process and the materialization of learning in real life. Bank and Edel (2015) argue that it is needed to ‘go back in the causal chain to evaluate whether policy change stems from learning, whether learning processes were present in unchanged policy areas, and … why their transmission into policy changes was hindered’ (6). Dorr (2021), in his analysis of the elite-level demonstration effects of the Arab spring, argues the following: ‘scholarship has not yet arrived at a consensus as to what constitutes diffusion, contagion and the demonstration effect, and their relationship with learning’ (4). Volden, Ting, and Carpenter (2008) claim that ‘to the extent that policy makers rely on external information, we may see policies spread from one government to another through a process of learning-based policy diffusion (319). Volden, Ting, and Carpenter (2008) further emphasize that diffusion or policy adoption needs to be preceded by learning from other countries in order for external diffusion

to take place. Otherwise, countries simply individually adopt similar policies under similar circumstances.

While Volden, Ting, and Carpenter (2008) state that learning is necessary to come before diffusion, the literature, in general, does not outline a clear relationship between diffusion and learning. This study will not follow Volden, Ting, and Carpenter (2008) and Bank and Edel (2015)'s theorization that authoritarian learning needs to precede authoritarian diffusion, neither will it follow Bank and Edel's (2015) theorization that learning needs to be followed by a clear policy change for it to transpire. In the authoritarian context, learning does not necessarily have tangible results that result in tangible policy diffusions or transfers. It can be explained by Tansey's (2016) claim that 'there are obstacles to applying the causal mechanisms that have been associated with the international dimensions of democratization which, includes conditionality-based approaches and normative engagement resting on shaming, pressure, and persuasion' (75). While Tansey (2016) argues about international sponsorship of material and non-material support, without a specific focus on authoritarian learning or diffusion, his argument can apply for authoritarian learning. There are no clear mechanisms for establishing if policy learning happened in authoritarian regimes. Tansey (2016) further argues, 'mechanisms through which external autocratic sponsorship operates are different. International sponsors are … seeking to help domestic elites carry out the policies that they are already committed to' (76).

One way to trace if authoritarian learning indeed happened is to focus on 'high/visibility, short term authoritarian practices [that allow] to see highly visible instances of autocratic sponsorship, and identify the causal mechanisms that link international sponsorship of domestic authoritarian politics' (Tansey 2016, 59). Authoritarian governments also can get authoritarian sponsorship in a long-term perspective, what Tansey explains as continuous forms of external sponsorship, such as sustained diplomatic or financial sponsorship over the years or even decades' (Tansey 2016, 59). In the case of Central Asian regimes, long-term sustained efforts can be considered authoritarian diffusion processes, whereby the regional gravity center provides non-material support for the regime legitimation efforts. Tansey (2016) explained that policy learning in democratic contexts has clear outcomes, as in the case of conditionality. A country is able to satisfy the conditionality terms or not; as a result, learning either happens or doesn't. But in authoritarian contexts, the goal is more to sustain the status quo, which might not be demonstrable. It might be challenging to judge if the learning indeed took place. Therefore, another way to trace if authoritarian learning took place is to analyze whether a regime took proactive attempts to eliminate

hurdles for regime stability. It might be explained as preventive repression based on learning from previous external or domestic cases.

The current study claims that authoritarian diffusion and learning are inextricably linked and parallel processes. First, considering the scope of the study, it is almost impossible to clearly separate bilateral authoritarian learning and authoritarian diffusion. Costa Buranelli's (2020) concept of institutionalized authoritarianism, perhaps, best explains why it is almost impossible to clearly demarcate authoritarian learning and diffusion from the beginning. Costa Buranelli (2020) argues that 'Central Asia is a regional international society formed by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan that, plausibly, features authoritarianism among its institutions, with authoritarianism understood here as a shared principle of legitimate government' (1005). Tansey (2016) argues that 'by working through bilateral ties or organizations, diplomatic strategies can … seek to counter the diplomatic pressure and 'shaming' that autocratic regimes frequently receive from Western and democratic powers' (69). In other words, through diplomatic instruments, the regional authoritarian gravity center endorses the main authoritarian value of regime stability.

Discussions on structure versus agency duality in the field reflect this study's consideration of the abovementioned two mechanisms. Central Asian states 'often emulate Russia's example, but there is only mixed evidence that Moscow is effectively promoting its model in Central Asia' (Ziegler 2016, 15). In other words, there is no active promotion in the region by regional non-democratic organizations or what are deemed 'gravity centers' (Kneuer and Demmelhuber 2016). Instead, 'authoritarian countries in authoritarian gravity centers actively export sets of autocratic ideas, rules or policy instruments in order to deter their regional environment from developing in a liberal direction' (Kneuer and Demmelhuber 2016, 3). Moreover, 'there are notable instances where even the most vulnerable resist Moscow's preferences' (Ziegler 2016, 15). Structure versus agency duality in Central Asia is, therefore, shaped by the lack of active authoritarian promotion and the prevalence of active democracy deterrence and maintenance of the status quo regimes. Hall and Ambrosio (2017) argue that 'many studies of diffusion downplay the interaction between actors, [where] recipient plays less of a role, and the structural factors which link actors are seen as more important for determining policy change' (147). 'Structures provide a context within which agents act and they constrain or facilitate the agents' actions' (Marsh and Sharman 2005, 275). 'Certainly, the best modern literature on structure and agency treats the relationship as dialectical, that is interactive and iterative' (Marsh and Sharman 2005, 275). In terms of authoritarian diffusion in Central Asia, it could mean that despite the presence of structural

factors such as regional non-democratic frameworks, states can have a say when and what will be diffused.

The lack of clearness in the diffusion literature has been argued to exist because of the [diffusion] use as both outcome and process' (Elkins and Simmons 2005, 36). Elkins and Simmons (2005) suggest 'to treat it as a class of mechanisms (specifically, those characterized by uncoordinated interdependence)' (37). Elkins and Simmons (2005) also emphasize that 'for most sociologists and political scientists, however, "diffusion" is not an outcome but the flagship term for a large class of mechanisms and processes associated with a likely outcome' (36). Similarly, Ambrosio (2010), who builds a framework for authoritarian diffusion, defines diffusion as 'a process by which policy choices are inherently interdependent—that is, a political entity's choices are influenced by others, and these choices, in turn, influence others' (378).

Recently, attempts have been made to analyze the non-democratic, particularly authoritarian learning and diffusion, with the help of the existing conceptual apparatus related to democratic regime change. The shortcomings in the applicability of the concepts became evident in the case of 'democratic conditionality as a part of the democratic transitioning process' (Tansey 2016, 31), which illustrates the impertinence of applying the same concepts to the non-democratic cases. For instance, Tansey (2016) notes that 'there is little evidence … that 'autocratic conditionality' exists in a way that corresponds to democratic conditionality, and there are certainly no states or international organizations that set out explicit criteria …' (31). Ambrosio (2010) has argued that 'the current rise of autocracy better fits into the diffusion concept than conditionality or integration, which are more active policies aimed at regime change or to affect the policies of target states' (376). Despite the differing types of authoritarian diffusion, the extant theoretical and conceptual framework based on democratization suffices for the analysis of authoritarian diffusion. Hall (2020) has argued that 'theoretically authoritarian and democratic learning are similar, but the aims are different' (133). Namely, a specific goal of authoritarian learning is to preserve the incumbent regime. Therefore, the current study will not differentiate whether a concept has emerged in a democratic or authoritarian context.

Authoritarian learning and diffusion literature highlight the methodological challenges of choosing authoritarian regimes as empirical cases. 'The information to trace learning processes is far more available in democracies; authoritarian systems are closed, with deliberations and decision-making taking place out of the public view (Ambrosio 2017, 144). Ambrosio and Tolstrup (2019) claim that studies of authoritarian diffusion suffer from limited

data availability because ‘not only do autocrats possess a greater incentive to conceal and obfuscate information than democracies, but they also have a greater capacity to do so’ (2752). Heydemann and Ketcham (n.d.) frame the lack of transparency in authoritarian learning through principal-agent theory, claiming that ‘under authoritarianism … principal-agent problems are minimized.’ ‘In authoritarian regimes, decision authority is tightly held by a small number of individuals who rule by fiat, ruthlessly ensure compliance, and cultivate risk-averse organizational cultures’ (Heydemann and Ketcham n.d.). In other words, it is challenging to prove that authoritarian learning happened precisely because it is unclear which players engaged in learning and which ones refused to. Hall (2020) frames the lack of data in authoritarian regimes as a Black Box Problem and makes a valuable contribution. Hall (2020) states that ‘the difficulty of finding evidence is complicated by the fact that little is written down. Rather, decisions are often vocalized or left to others to implement’ (152).

The abovementioned point on the methodological challenge of tracing authoritarian learning and diffusion brings up the first contribution of this thesis. While the emphasized methodological challenge is true, one important asset of both concepts has been left out. Regardless if diffusion and learning are taken as independent or dependent variables, both are tailored to the same anchor: authoritarian regimes’ ultimate goal is to preserve regime and status quo stability at all expenses, only if it does not go against the goal of preserving the regime. When compared to all-encompassing concepts from social sciences such as democracy and freedom, one ultimate goal of authoritarian regimes is to preserve the status quo, mitigate the methodological challenges of studying authoritarian regimes. In the case of status quo maintenance, ultimately, a regime is either preserved or ousted. In other words, any potential study in the field has at least a possibility to narrow down the conceptualization of two concepts to the perseverance of the status quo. Saideman (2012) argues that there are limits to diffusion because ‘we need to take seriously the conditions that facilitate and inhibit diffusion as well’ (716). Such conditions might depend on ‘civil-military relations in the country, fragmentations during political conflicts, strategies of social mobilization, media involvement, the role of individual politicians in authoritarian politics, and ethnic politics’ (Saideman 2012, 720).

While it is undeniable that the intervening variables are important in establishing whether authoritarian diffusion transpired, in this study, such conditions will be held constant. The intervening variables, conditions that might hamper diffusion, are held constant because they are considered to be almost identical across Central Asian regimes, except for

Kyrgyzstan. Conditions are held constant because states are within what Costa Buranelli (2020) calls the 'Central Asian order, where authoritarianism is institutionalized' (1005). 'Concepts such as *avtoritet* and *stabilnost'* are … normative categories that inform and regulate social relations among regimes in the region institutionalizing practices and integrating them in what is a Central Asian order' (Costa Buranelli 2020, 1015). In other words, the current study disregards the intervening variables due to a theoretical premise that in Central Asia, all the effort by incumbent regimes goes to maintaining regime stability by means of authoritarian tactics. Gerschewski (2013) argues that the 'stability of all autocracies -irrespective of their subtype- can be explained with reference to what might be aptly called the three pillars of stability: legitimation, repression, and co-optation' (14). Regardless of the degree of authoritarianism's consolidation across Central Asian states (except Kyrgyzstan), the ultimate goal of state-society relations rests on regime stability. Incumbent regimes attempt to employ different tools, including repression, that have been successfully employed in the neighboring states.

The possibility of mitigating the challenges of tracing authoritarian learning and diffusion can be seen from some of the suggestions in the literature. Marsh and Sharman (2009) suggest that both transfer and diffusion literature should consider previous instances (precedents) as a benchmark for measuring success and failure. It is argued that governments 'must gather information and sort previous experiences into instances where the policies have had the desired effect and those where they have not, before emulating the former' (Marsh and Sharman 2009, 282). Hall and Ambrosio (2017) similarly claim that to measure to prove authoritarian learning, one needs to look at 'a correlation between examples of prior implementation of an authoritarian practice and the adoption of similar policies by other autocratic governments later in time' (144). In the Central Asian context, such benchmarks might be based on positive and negative examples. Positive examples mean that the authoritarian leaders learn from the incumbent's success in preserving regime stability and perceived effective instrumentalization of repressive measures. A negative example would originate from the incumbents' inability to sustain regime stability. For instance, it has been argued that 'the massacre in Andijan, taken with steps to expel or limit the work of foreign media and organizations in Uzbekistan … can be seen as Karimov's answer to the Tulip Revolution' (Kubicek 2011, 122).

The fundamental methodological challenge to authoritarian diffusion studies is the need to prove whether diffusion indeed took place. Ambrosio (2010) highlights that 'research into diffusion is primarily concerned with two issues: (a)whether or not it occurs and

(b)understanding those factors which cause it to occur' (378). Ambrosio and Tolstrup (2019) argue that diffusion can be mistaken for spurious diffusion, 'a situation in which the observed similarities between actors are not connected at all, but rather have occurred independently of each other, through coincidence or because … earlier and later adopters sought similar solutions to similar problems' (2757). Volden, Ting, and Carpenter (2008) distinguish between game-theoretic and decision-theoretical models that lead to similar states adopting similar policies either due to diffusion or due to separate decision-making. Volden, Ting, and Carpenter (2008) emphasize a significant difference between the two models: 'policymakers in decision-theoretic models do not respond to successful experiments of others' (320). Ambrosio and Tolstrup (2019), who argue that the diffusion process is causal, state that 'we need to ensure that our causal claims do not outer space the available evidence and that we have constructed adequate tests of possible diffusion processes' (2742). While it is not certain that the diffusion has to be based on a causal relationship, building arguments based on the availability of data helps to minimize risks.

The second pattern in the literature is that authoritarian learning and diffusion literature has primarily focused on the regime's responses to a potential regime threat from the Color Revolutions and the Arab Spring. It was argued that 'events in Ukraine in 2004 led the Kremlin to instigate a preventive counterrevolution as it learned from the failure of Yanukovich to get elected as Ukrainian president and the ensuing Orange protests' (Hall 2020, 183). In the context of the Arab Spring, regimes' learning and diffusion is explained, allowing the emergence of recombinant authoritarianism' (Heydemann and Leenders 2011, 648). 'Counter-revolutionary strategies of regimes were shaped by processes of learning and emulation among regime elites' (Heydemann and Leenders 2011, 648). Authoritarian diffusion and learning have not been analyzed extensively in the Central Asian context. Even if analyzed, the concepts have been framed in relation to the Color revolutions. One of the few studies argued that the Tulip Revolution 'allowed a re-framing of the color revolutions as precisely not democratic, but as disorder and as such a direct threat to the survival of the Russian state' (Ortmann 2008, 365).

This study applies the theoretical framework of authoritarian diffusion and learning to demonstrate that the concepts can be analyzed outside of the empirical contexts of the Color Revolutions and the Arab Spring. Kudaibergenova and Laruelle (2022) highlighted that 'Kazakhstan's protests do not fit the model of the "color revolutions": they should be analyzed not as one-of-eruptions, but as having gradually developed and become connected over prolonged periods of contention' (5). There is one factor about the Color Revolutions

that make Kyrgyzstan an unsuitable case for the present case study and, at the same time, introduces limitations to studies that consider authoritarian learning and diffusion only in the context of Color Revolutions. ‘A common trigger for the outbreak of color revolutions in Eurasia is the public’s discontent with rigged elections. Fraudulent elections only exacerbated existing grievances against the government’ (Niyazbekov 2018, 10). Tursunkulova (2008) argues that ‘in all three countries [Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan], fraudulent elections acted as a trigger for mass protests’ (351) or ‘electoral revolutions’ (351).

Thirdly, it is important not to limit diffusion processes to the ones that take place between a regional authoritarian gravity center and a Central Asian authoritarian state only in a one-way relationship. In fact, authoritarian learning and diffusion processes are intertwined in the Central Asian context. The regimes might engage in diffusion from the regional authoritarian gravity centers but also might learn from other Central Asian authoritarian regimes. Hall (2017) has argued that ‘the Belorussian regime provides lessons to Moscow for overcoming democratic protests, having learned from the 2000 overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic’ (164). Ziegler (2016) has argued that ‘A limited process of authoritarian diffusion is evident in Central Asia, but the influence is indirect and in large part due to the neighborhood effect - the models of Russia and China’ (14). Hall (2020) has argued that ‘external networks between authoritarian regimes are flatter than previously imagined. Of course, Russia … plays the role of main protagonist, but this detracts from the evidence that the Kremlin learns from the examples of others’ (365).

CSTO, SCO, and CIS are gravity centers from where authoritarian policies diffuse to and within the Central Asian states. Ambrosio (2008) has stated that ‘the coordination of foreign policy by authoritarian states in order to ensure regime security is unlikely to be carried out overtly … instead, these regimes would create and utilize international organizations to establish regional or global norms’ (1325). Such one-way diffusion and learning are conceptualized as the Shanghai spirit (Ambrosio 2008) and ‘Moscow Consensus’ (Lewis 2016). Shanghai spirit comprises ‘regional norms, which appear to delegitimize regime change and support the continuation of autocratic regimes’ (Ambrosio 2008, 1341). Roy (2008) frames these as ‘protective integration - a form of collective political solidarity with Russia against international political processes or agendas that are interpreted as challenging politically incumbent regimes’ (186). However, it needs to be said that the Kazakh and Uzbek regimes might engage in diffusion in order to legitimize the repression in response to protests as a norm in the region but might also engage in authoritarian learning in order to apply specific repressive tactics that correspond to different degrees of repression.

Fourthly, it is important to stress that internal-led diffusion and learning are a substantive part of authoritarian diffusion. According to Hall (2020), 'authoritarian regimes are just likely to learn from the internal, as the external. The internal is as important as regimes see what worked or failed in the past in their own countries' (366). Heydemann and Leenders (2011) argued that 'although initially stunted by events, Arab regimes gradually absorbed the lessons from the first wave of protests, adapted to them as they unfolded, and developed new strategies' (649). In other words, the Arab regimes learned both from the instances of failure to preserve authoritarianism in Tunisia and Egypt but also learned internally as the Arab Spring unfolded. Polese and Beachain (2012) claim lack of a successful color revolution after 2005 'reflects inter alia the perfecting of the counter-revolutionary techniques employed by the incumbent elites, which have undergone an intensive learning process designed to ensure regime survival' (114). Similarly, Tursunkulova (2008) points at the 'power of previous domestic examples on the modular revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2005' (350). Tursunkulova (2008) focuses on Mark Bessinger's claim 'within modular phenomena the influence of example can substitute to some extent structural disadvantage' (350) and considers structural disadvantages in Kyrgyzstan 'absence of one opposition leader and the relative weakness of the local non-governmental organizations' (350). In other words, in the absence of some structural factors, successful precedents can have a substantial effect on incipient revolution.

The key takeaway from the literature which looks into domestic diffusion and learning processes is that the authors highlight the importance of analyzing both domestic and international diffusion and learning processes instead of fully disregarding the international dimension. Lang (2018), for instance, introduces a new typology of authoritarian learning consisting of 'international (top-down) and domestic (bottom-up) perspectives' (148) as well as positive versus negative examples of authoritarianism. Lang (2018) analyzes the recent civil society-related legislation in China and concludes that: 'instances of authoritarian learning mainly fall into the "domestic positive" and "authoritarian-negative" categories, being complemented by "democratic-positive" learning' (175). In other words, the authoritarian regime in China learned from the positive instances of trial and error policy-making domestically (Lang 2018, 154) and negative cases of authoritarian learning from abroad. Edel and Josua (2018) argue that 'domestic and international sources of learning influenced the choice of frames for the justification of repression' (883).

Data and Methods

Research questions and objectives. The main objective of the study is to demonstrate that if a mass protest happens in authoritarian Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the authoritarian states undertake repressive acts, and their acts reflect authoritarian learning from each other. Repressive acts can be immediate in response to the protests and long-term repressive acts. Another objective is to demonstrate that repressive acts take place not only due to authoritarian diffusion within the Central Asian gravity center. Countries are engaged in internal domestic learning and in external learning from the neighboring Central Asian authoritarian regimes. Even if it is assumed that there is a gravity center, it is not the case that 'autocratic countries actively export sets of autocratic ideas, rules, or policy instruments' (Kneuer and Demmelhuber 2016, 3). Rather, authoritarian diffusion within gravity centers corroborates the Central Asian countries' efforts in status quo maintenance. The research question informing the study is, 'How did the authoritarian regimes in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan engage in authoritarian learning and diffusion during the 2022 protests?'

Theoretical expectations. In his 2013 Article 'The League of Authoritarian Gentelement', Cooley (2013) argued that 'Autocrats in Russia, China, and Central Asian states have been … working hard to forge an international front of anti-democrats, developing a new set of counter-strategies and regional legal tools.' Cooley (2013) mentions that the regional organizations, including SCO, create 'a new authoritarian architecture', thereby undermining the democratic order. The reasons behind the authoritarian regime's perseverance and the making of significant inroads in international systems have not been extensively researched, let alone researched in the Eurasian political context. The only comprehensive attempt to date has been a research network organized by the German Institute of Global Affairs and Area Studies under the topic 'International Diffusion and Cooperation of Authoritarian Regimes'. The scholars' network highlights that ‘the strand of research that does approach [the issues of reverse wave' of democratization, the expansion of non-democratic rule, and the 'backlash against democracy promotion' from an authoritarian durability perspective still need to develop a comprehensive conceptual approach’ ("International Diffusion and Cooperation" n.d.).

There is a significant theoretical and conceptual gap in understanding authoritarian learning and authoritarian diffusion, one of the ways the regimes cooperate in upholding authoritarian regime practices. The concepts of learning and diffusion are employed in International relations to showcase how authoritarian regimes engage in cross-border cooperation. However, studies of both concepts should engage with adjacent disciplines in an attempt to provide a holistic theoretical grasp for the scholars of International relations. The

current study is also at the intersection of international relations and comparative politics, but the central concepts of authoritarian learning and diffusion are still part of International relations.

The expectations of the current study are explained well by Markowitz and Radnitz (2021), who carve out how Central Asian studies keep up or fall behind the trends in studies of regimes and states in comparative politics. While scholars concentrate on comparative politics, It is almost impossible to limit the analysis of the regimes and states from comparative politics and overall interdisciplinary approaches. There is a larger trend in 'the micro-political ove in both Central Asia and comparative politics scholarship, reflecting greater value placed on explaining specific outcomes over large-scale developments' (Markowitz and Radnitz 2021, 3). More specifically, with the 'end of transition paradigm, scholars [focused] on studying the largely non-democratic regimes of Central Asia that were in fact not in transition at all' (Markowitz and Radnitz 2021, 3). Increased attention on the authoritarian durability in Central Asia is then part of a larger trend that goes beyond the post-Soviet transition from authoritarianism to democracy. A more nuanced gap lies in the disconnect of Central Asia from other studies of regimes and states, whereby Central Asia was seen as a region that had been isolated during the Soviet period. To mitigate the 'often-overlooked connectedness of Central Asia' (Markowitz and Radnitz 2021, 9), the current study can employ the existing conceptual framework on authoritarian learning and diffusion to demonstrate that the region might exhibit similar tendencies as in other authoritarian contexts. If mass protests happen, then authoritarian governments in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan engage in authoritarian learning of repressive tactics to retain the status quo.
The mechanisms look like:

Mechanism 1. If mass protests take place => authoritarian governments' repressive acts reflect authoritarian learning.

Mechanism 2. If mass protests take place => authoritarian governments' repressive acts reflect authoritarian diffusion within the regional gravity center

Methods. This study will apply case study methodology. Process tracing is considered a case study type because it is a within-case study, which will be applied to describe a case across time. Therefore, it is important to explain the choice of a case study methodology for the analysis of the research question of how mass protests led to authoritarian learning in repression in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. According to Gerring (2004), 'the case study methodology is correctly understood as a particular way of defining cases, not a way of analyzing cases or a way of modeling causal relations' (342). The case study is the only

methodology suitable for describing the government's reactions to the mass protests that swept Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in 2022. The mass protests in two countries will be considered unique cases rather than parts of a generalizable sample. The current study will follow multiple case study research methods but will compare and tackle each case in a way that is tantamount to comparing two separate single units. Baxter and Jack (2008) argue that a 'study might contain more than a single case because 'the context is different for each of the cases. A multiple or collective case study will allow the researcher to analyze within each setting and across settings' (550). Yin (2018) emphasizes that 'a major insight is to consider multiple-case studies as one would consider multiple experiments - that is, to follow a "replication design" [not a sampling design]' (91).' The sampling logic requires an operational estimation of the entire universe or pool of potential respondents' (Yin 2018, 93). The major justification why the current study applies the case study methodology is the ability to follow the in-depth, contextual replication design instead of seeking to generalize authoritarian learning to the entire Central Asian region or any authoritarian regime in general. At the same time, it is almost impossible to create conditions akin to those presupposed by the replication research design. Blatter and Haverland (2012) state that 'case selection in the Causal Process Tracing (CPT) approach does not follow the sampling logic of large-N studies, and it is also not based on similarity with respect to potential alternative causal factors [replication design]' (104). 'Case selection in a small-N study that attempts to reveal causal configurations is based on similarity with respect to the outcome' (Blatter and Haverland 2012, 104).

The study will be organized as a case study and will employ a process-tracing method. It is important to highlight that the study will rely on probabilistic process tracing and an inductive approach. 'A probabilistic view argues that because mechanisms interact with the context in which they operate, the outcomes of the process cannot be determined a priori by knowing the type of mechanism at work' (Trampusch and Palier 2016, 6). Perhaps the most important characteristic of the research method is well explained by Trampusch and Palier (2016): 'Process tracers take the term' process' seriously. They analyze 'causal process observations' (6). The process tracing method's emphasis on a process is then in alignment with the object of this research study. Authoritarian learning is described as 'a process whereby some states have altered their policies to resemble one another' (Hall and Ambrosio 2017, 145). According to Trampusch and Palier (2016), 'inductive analysis of processes … forms a theoretically informed analysis (=decomposition) of processes that looks for causal chains between the observed events' (9). The major methodological task for the current study

is then to clearly outline the process or mechanism of authoritarian learning and diffusion at play.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are part of the Central Asian region, which I define in this study as consisting of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan in addition to the two countries being studied. I purposefully chose process tracing because it is a 'within-case technique of causal inference' (Blatter and Haverland 2012, 82). 'The CPT technique does not strive to make generalizable conclusions on the effect of a specific cause within a population of cases with similar conditions' (Blatter and Haverland 2012, 101). By choosing this research method, it is possible to limit the scope of the study to Central Asia, where the political and other contexts may not be found in other authoritarian countries. Blatter and Haverland (2012) outline two characteristics of the process tracing method. The first states that 'a plurality of causal factors working together to create an outcome' (Blatter and Haverland 2012, 81), which is also framed as configurational thinking. 'The second basic feature is that CPT as a technique of drawing causal inference takes advantage of the fact that causality plays out in time and space' (Blatter and Haverland 2012, 81)

The current research will follow the *research design* guidelines outlined by Ricks and Liu (2018), who claim that it is important to 'identify theoretical expectations, to establish timelines, and to outline a causal graph before embarking on data collection' (844). Ricks and Liu (2018) suggest that 'establishing testable hypotheses based on our theories is the first step in good process-tracing' (843). However, for qualitative process tracing in the current study establishing a hypothesis goes against the very reason why the research methodology was found suitable for studying the research topic in the first place. According to Blatter and Haverland (2012), 'within a CPT approach, we do not refer to dependent and independent variables and do not focus on the co-variation of these variables' (114). '*Instead, we use the terminology of 'causal conditions' and focus on the temporal contiguity and temporal order of 'turning points*', and 'phases of transition' in the development of these conditions' (Blatter and Haverland 2012. 114). Trampusch and Palier (2016) called the mentioned contiguity mechanisms, which are contrasted to causal hypotheses. The main causal mechanism that will be analyzed in this study is the following:

In process tracing, we are concerned not only with our theory of interest; we also must juxtapose rival explanations that we intend to test (Ricks and Liu 2018). Consideration of rivaling theories allows to reduce the problem of equifinality: 'The researcher can limit the list of alternative theories to those that address those dimensions of the dependent variable that are of interest' (Benett and George 1997, 16). Within the context of this study, the

anchoring dimension of the outcome, authoritarian learning, is repression. It should be emphasized that a researcher should 'seek first hypotheses that are clearly related to the outcome, simple, and testable before employing more complex explanations' (Ricks and Liu 2018). In the current study, it would mean selecting causal explanations that are clearly leading to a specific outcome. According to Ricks and Liu (2018), 'The second step is to sequence events. Timelines should be according to the theoretical expectations' (843). 'The more inductively oriented types of process tracing also include a mode that views time as playing a key role in the causal explanation for … that takes 'temporality seriously' (Trampusch and Palier 2016, 9). Trampusch and Palier (2016) argue that 'we should carefully investigate when the processes we analyze have started and when they end' (14). Blatter and Haverland (2012) emphasize that 'CPT as a technique of drawing causal inference takes advantage of that fact that causality plays out in time and space' (81). Based on the theoretical expectations, the study will distinguish the following timelines for Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

Kazakhstan: January 2nd-11st and the time period after the protests up until February 2023. For Uzbekistan: July 1st-July 3rd and the time period after the protests up until February 2023.

The rationale behind the choice of the timeline is informed by the theoretical expectations and the protest developments. In Kazakhstan, the protests started on January second and continued until January eleventh, which is when President Toqayev announced the planned gradual withdrawal of the CSTO peacekeeping troops ("Тоқаев: ҰҚШҰ әскері" 2022). In Uzbekistan, the protests themselves lasted between July first and July third, when the protests (Solod 2022). The timeline is extended from the end of the protests until February 2023 because the government's repression continues by means of judicial and extrajudicial measures long after the protest events.

Process tracing in authoritarian regimes might be challenging, which uncovers both the limitations and advantages of the research method. Gonzalez-Ocantos and LaPorte (2021) argue that due to the missingness of data in some contexts, 'scholars may choose to avoid conducting research on these topics or cases altogether, in an attempt to prevent "disconfirmatory" bias' (1409). Therefore, 'researchers risk falsely rejecting a valid hypothesis due to the evidentiary pressures generated by data-poor environments' (Gonzalez-Ocantos and LaPorte 2021, 1409). The issue of missingness permeates other research methods as well, such as historical research, archival research, and even statistical methods. However, process tracing methods, together with the tools for mitigating data

missingness, provide the opportunity to study topics in the authoritarian context. Since the method is Based on causal chains/mechanisms, scholars can benefit from the division between necessary versus sufficient steps in the chain.

In order to better analyze and to organize the analysis, the current study will use a content analysis method to analyze the political leaders and regional organizations' speeches, court decisions, and extradition case reports. Process tracing, together with content analysis, will enable the researcher to more comprehensively trace the repressive actions of the regimes. Content analysis allows us to analyze the narratives of the authoritarian regimes used while carrying out repressive acts. The need to triangulate methods for this study feeds off of the choice of the process tracing method as the main method. If the study is intended for study processes of learning and diffusion, there is a need to go back and forward in the suggested timelines. It is important to trace if the narrative, which legitimized certain repressive acts during protest momentum, still held true during the repressive acts undertaken several months after the protest events. Hermann (2008) emphasizes that 'speeches are usually designed for particular audiences and occasions. Care and thought have generally gone into what is said and how it is said' (153). Within the context of framing theory, Edel and Josua (2018) argue that 'In autocracies with censorship and controlled media, governments convey certain messages more directly to the public. Thus, we study the nature and origins of justification frames rather than their transmission' (883). Analysis of the authoritarian leaders' speeches and court decisions will then look at the direct meanings of the statements. The current study will take a qualitative approach with a consideration that the analyzed data is 'instrumental in nature - that one cannot take the message at its face value but needs to examine what it conveys given its context and circumstances' (Hermann 2008, 156).

The coding units in this study are words and/or sentences. Just words by themselves might not contribute to an accurate interpretation of the data. At the same time, concentrating only on sentences might include redundant data. The following categories will be used for coding: foreign influence, external security threats, regime stability, authoritarian diffusion, and authoritarian learning. According to Weber (1990), a researcher needs to decide 'whether the categories are to be mutually exclusive and 'how narrow or broad the categories are to be' (23). All the mentioned coding categories are mutually exclusive and narrow due to their specificity and coverage only of the Central Asian region. Due to time and resource limitations, the reliability of the content analysis might suffer because the researcher will not be able to perform stability and reproducibility checks. 'Stability can be determined when the same content is coded more than once by the same coder' (Weber 1990, 17). 'Reproducibility

refers to the extent to which content classification produces the same results when the same text is coded by more than one coder' (Weber 1990, 17). Reliability will be accounted for by the application of the definitions for the coding categories from the existing literature. While it is difficult to control for different interpretations of the quotes from the existing literature, the definitions still provide more stability than the researcher's subjective definitions.

Two types of validity have been distinguished by Weber (1990): 'correspondence and generalizability' (18). 'Validity as a correspondence between concepts, variables, methods, and data' (Weber 1990, 18) has been ensured in the current study because the concepts that the study intends to analyze and the type of data for analysis is most suitable for the choice of content analysis as a research method. 'Validity as the generalizability of results, references and theory' (Weber 1990, 18) can be allocated less attention because process tracing research methodology does not intend to generalize the research results. 'A second distinction … is between the validity of the classification scheme or variables derived from it, and the validity of the interpretation relating content variables to their causes or consequences' (Weber 1990, 18).

There are two points to consider regarding the validity of variables and the validity of the interpretation. First, since the current study does not analyze variables but rather concepts and the mechanisms through process tracing, the concepts in use are less measurable and more abstract. Mass protests do not need to be limited to a specific parameter in terms of the number of protesters or the nature of the protests. As the protests in 2022 have demonstrated, the number of protesters can rise significantly in a short amount of time, and the nature of the protests can quickly shift from socioeconomic to political as in the case of Kazakhstan. Secondly, the validity of interpretations is an issue under question since the existing literature shows that even attempts to theorize authoritarian diffusion and learning have not established a clear relationship between the two concepts. For instance, it is unclear if either of the concepts is a subtype of the other and if the two concepts are mutually exclusive. If they are not mutually exclusive, then there is no indicated how the relationship between the concepts holds if they are 1. Taking place in parallel, and 2. According to a specific sequence. Since the theory itself of authoritarian diffusion and learning is unclear, it might be the case that establishing generalisability validity will be challenging.

Sampling

The choice of data (coding units) will follow non-probability and purposive sampling. Non-probability sampling is explained by the nature of the chosen research methodology. Unlike correlational and co-variational analysis, 'causal process tracing does not strive for

'statistical generalization" (Blatter and Haverland 2012, 135). Rather, the focus is on 'probabilistic generalizations, [which] can be drawn toward sets of causal configurations or toward sets of causal mechanisms' (Blatter and Haverland 2012, 135). Since the objective of the study is not to draw statistical generalizations, the choice of non-probability sampling is justified. The choice of purposive sampling technique is explained by the need to focus on the data (coding units) from a specific time period and the limited media freedom in authoritarian contexts. The study will focus on two independent news platforms: Eurasianet, RadioFreeEurope, and Gazeta.uz. The indicated news platforms reference Uzbek and Kyrgyz language news and independent journalism sources and can, therefore, provide more or less accurate coverage of the events.

Samples will be drawn based on the two timelines explained above the protest momentum itself and the period from the protests until January 2023. For Kazakhstan, the first timeline will dictate the choice of samples from the population of all news articles. That is, the samples for timeline 1 in Kazakhstan will cover the period between January 2nd to January 13th, 2022. As for Uzbekistan, timeline 1 will cover samples in the period from July 1st until July 3rd. For the second timeline, the data collection will also follow purposive sampling but with a slightly altered technique. Court trials and extradition requests are the main events guiding the sampling for timeline 2. Therefore, for the purpose of analysis of extradition, the current study will focus on the Human Rights Watch articles and for the court cases also on RFERL news articles, but only those mentioning specific court cases. For Uzbekistan two biggest court cases in Bukhara were taken as samples: the case on January 31st and February 7th. For Kazakhstan, the case was on January 23rd in Atyrau and on February 8th in Taraz City.

In order to provide a more holistic analysis of the possible authoritarian learning and diffusion mechanisms, the current study will rely on citizen journalism sources. For both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, videos from the Youtube Channel БАСЕ will be included in the pool of coding units. The sampling of the reporting (videos) from the БАСЕ Channel will be purposive because the study will focus on the videos from a specific playlist titled 'Revolution in Kazakhstan: January 2022' and by searching for the keyword 'Karakalpakstan'. Video sources from the БАСЕ channel are in the Russian language, but some of the footage from the protest events included in videos might be fully in Karakalpak language. Due to the researchers' fluency in both languages, the analysis of the sources in local languages might bring depth to the study. Most importantly, the citizen journalism sources provide live updates as the events happened in 2022 during the protests. By including news from such

sources, the study can trace possible smoking gun evidence that might not have been covered by Eurasianet, Gazeta, or RFERL.

Case selection

For case study methodology, Yin (2018) suggests two important steps to follow in 'defining cases: defining the case and bounding the case' (62). Cases for the present study will be defined as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan's governments. '[Temporal] bounding of the case … will help to determine the scope of your data collection, in particular, how you will distinguish data about the subject of your case study (the phenomenon) from data external to the case' (Yin 2018, 65). In the case of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, temporal bounding is important, as the study explores particular time periods when authoritarian learning might have taken place. More specifically, 'the major technique of drawing a descriptive and causal inference in process tracing is accessibility' (Blatter and Haverland 2012, 102). In the case of Central Asian authoritarian governments, the criteria of accessibility are even more pronounced. Compared to neighboring Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan are more accessible in terms of accessing information covering the period under study in this research study. The adoption of the process tracing methodology (among case studies), in itself, introduces bounding to the case selection. Blatter and Haverland (2012) argue that 'selecting one or few positive cases is methodologically acceptable because the causal inferences that we draw are based on epistemology and techniques of causal-process tracing and not on comparing cases and accounting for co-variation' (101). The rationale behind process tracing, that is, explanation of which causal mechanisms explain the dependent variable (outcome), presupposes that the researcher would limit themselves to the cases where a specified outcome is observable. 'If we want to determine whether a causal factor is a 'necessary condition' for an outcome, only the investigation into 'positive cases' (cases in which the outcome exists) makes sense' (Blatter and Haverland 2012, 101). If a researcher does not choose positive cases, the study will need to focus on the infinite amount of negative cases until a positive case appears.

Both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan experienced mass protests in 2022, with both protests resulting in the incumbent regime's stay in power. Kassym Jomart Toqayev In Kazakhstan and Shavkat Mirziyoyev continue heavy-handed authoritarian rule as the incumbent presidents. Therefore, the positive outcome based on which both cases were chosen is success in authoritarian learning. In the case of Kazakhstan, Kudaibergenova and Laruelle (2022) argue, 'the Nazarbayev family also remains in the country and has kept its assets. Thus suggests regime change is limited, and can therefore be seen as a success for

Nazarbayev' (15). While the so-called de-Nazarbayevication is ongoing, it does not necessarily point to the authoritarian regime's failure. As Kudaibergenova and Laruelle (2022) argue, the January 2022 protests point at the' failure of Nazarbayev era' (5), but not the authoritarian regime per se.

Two more justifications inform the choice of two countries as cases for the current study. First, membership in CSTO might provide variation in the regime's propensity to learn from other Central Asian states, through regional organizations, or from both. Kazakhstan has been a CSTO member since 1992, while Uzbekistan withdrew its membership twice, with the latest in 2012. Roy (2008) has argued that 'CSTO has a more specific and compelling function [protective integration], especially since the color revolutions' (188). 'CSTO creates a basis for political solidarity between state leaders and their protection against or resistance to perceived international agenda of democracy-promotion' (Roy 2008, 188). Kazakhstan's membership and Uzbekistan's non-memberships then allow it to analyze whether regional protective integration frameworks serve as an important source of learning or diffusion. Second, the nature of the incumbent authoritarian regimes informed the choice of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Mirziyoyev and Toqayev embarked on building a 'New Uzbekistan' and 'New Kazakhstan, respectively' with the promises of political reforms. Toqayev established a so-called 'listening state [which] claims to produce a more accountable government by allowing citizens to voice complaints and even have officials removed' (Lemon and Karibayeva 2023, 59).Based on these political promises of bringing more pluralism, it can be presumed that the regimes might be motivated to employ different repressive tactics in response to mass protests, rather than outright violence. It is important to study authoritarian learning because such regimes might be motivated to engage in authoritarian learning of variegated repressive tactics.

Data collection

The study will use process tracing to analyze the first causal mechanism. Specifically, it will look at the extradition cases and the biggest court trials. To analyze the second mechanism, the study will look at news sources and official statements of the regional organizations. For the analysis of the first mechanism, the study will focus on the judicial cases of state repression and leave out extrajudicial cases. It will analyze how authoritarian regimes in Central Asia learn from each other based on repressive actions. Court trials will be first accessed through news articles, as some of the court statements made by the regional courts might be inaccessible at the time of research. As a research methodology, process tracing looks for a specific type of evidence because it 'focuses on the temporal contiguity

and temporal order of 'turning points' and 'phases of transition' in the development of these conditions' (Blatter and Haverland 2012, 114). The current study will concentrate on the ‘smoking gun for' observation that presents a central piece of evidence within a cluster of observations, which together provide a high level of certainty for a causal inference' (Blatter and Haverland 2012, 115). For the purposes of analyzing the first causal mechanism in Kazakhstan, the study will focus on court trials that took place in Atyrau on January 23rd, in Shymkent on February 9th, and in Aktobe on February 1st, 2023. For analyzing the same mechanism in Uzbekistan, the current study will focus on the court trials from February 1st and March 6th. The study focuses on data related to specific events (court cases) due to the extensive media coverage of the abovementioned court cases compared to the others. As Blatter and Haverland (2012) argue, 'first and foremost, when we want to apply CPT, the cases have to be 'accessible' to identify the kind of empirical information that is necessary to make causal convincing claims' (99).

The coding process will take place in the NVivo platform, which allows coding data according to nodes. Nodes in this study will correspond to the four concepts that have been outlined in the theoretical framework part: authoritarian diffusion, authoritarian learning, regime/status quo stability, and security threat. Additionally, the foreign influence node will be added to the coding process. A data unit will be coded as pertaining to the foreign influence node if it mentions the direct participation or involvement of foreign/external forces in the protest organization. Authoritarian diffusion code will include data that focuses on 'appropriateness or Diffusion via adaptation' (Elkins and Simmons 2005, 39). It means that 'the policy decisions of one government alter the conditions under which other government's base their decisions' (Elkins and Simmons 2005, 39). In other words, one Central Asian regime's repressive responses to the mass protests demonstrate to the other regime the appropriateness of carrying out repressive acts in its own territory.

The authoritarian learning node will include cases when the regimes learn from each other authoritarian tactics from each other according to their effectiveness to prevent challenges to the status quo from the mass protests. However, the employed tactics might not necessarily be due to learning but the authoritarian countries' individual attempts to repress. Hall and Ambrosio (2017) argued that 'the best studies of authoritarian policy learning are … the most precise in outlining the clear similarities in policies and illustrate that the adoption of later policies was driven by a need to react to similar circumstances' (150). However, in authoritarian contexts the decision-making processes are highly non-transparent and it is challenging to provide precise measurements as to which calculations made the authoritarian

regime learn or not to learn. This study will consider that the Central Asian regimes learn from each other when to repress and how to repress. 'Acts of repression can serve as "transformative events", pending that the wider population views the state's repressive tactics as "unjust" and the occurrence of such an "event" is disseminated to "receptive audiences" (Sullivan 2019, 643). On the other hand, the regimes can violently repress and 'suffer political-reputational costs' (Sullivan 2019, 644), whereby the violence itself looks as an act of desperation' (Sullivan 2019, 644). Another benchmark for the possible influence on an authoritarian president's calculations is 'political space that opens up in the aftermath of incidents of transformative violence that leads to both spontaneous dissent and greater authoritarianism' (Marat 2016, 532).

Limitations

The process tracing method mitigates the problem of ‘equifinality of similar outcomes occurring through different causal processes’ (Bennett and George 1997, 6). ‘Process tracing forces the investigator to take equifinality into account, and it offers the possibility of mapping out one or more potential causal paths that are consistent with the outcome and the process tracing’ (Bennett and George 1997, 6). The major limitation of the current study will be the lack of equifinality, which is unlike other studies that employ process tracing. In their practical guide to process tracing, Ricks and Liu (2018) argue that it is crucial to test rivaling hypotheses because ‘the objective is to dismiss as many explanations as possible, leaving only one hypothesis as the most likely’ (845). Ricks and Liu (2018) suggest including ‘counterfactuals especially when no alternative cases are considered’ (844).

With the aim of limiting the scope of the current study, the current study does not analyze rivaling hypotheses. At the same time, it takes into account two parallel processes of authoritarian learning and diffusion in order to claim that the processes are inextricably linked. It is almost impossible to divide learning and diffusion in authoritarian contexts. One action can be considered to happen both due to authoritarian learning and authoritarian diffusion. What Ambrosio (2010) terms appropriateness and effectiveness principles are interlinked in authoritarian contexts. If appropriateness in the Central Asian context means the appropriate level of repression to maintain regime stability, effectiveness is the success of the repressive acts in contributing to regime stability. Therefore, in Central Asia, both appropriateness (what is considered normal) feeds off from effectiveness (learning from actions) and vice versa. In such a context, it would be inaccurate to disconnect diffusion from learning. This study considered two processes in parallel and, therefore, covered a bigger range of possible hypotheses that might have been left uncovered otherwise if diffusion and

learning were disconnected. The main group of rivaling hypotheses that are left undiscovered are those based on decision theoretic models (Volden, Ting, and Carpenter 2008).

It has been argued that process tracing suffers from a 'degrees of freedom problem, [which emerges] when a researcher has many independent variables but only one or a few observations on the dependent variable' (Bennett and George 2012, 10). In fact, limited degrees of freedom is concealed under the configurational nature of process tracing, which is based on the assumption that 'almost all social outcomes are the results of a combination of causal factors' (Blatter and Haverland 2012, 101). Bennett and George (1997) claim that 'each qualitative variable has many different dimensions rather than providing 'a single observation' (10). Based on configurational thinking, process tracing allows to group of several dimensions of mass protests. Mass protests can include the following dimensions: whether a mass protest voiced clearly delineated demands, whether opposition to the government was strong and organized, whether it was carried out by institutionalized oppositions, whether the protest was anti-regime or evolved into anti-regime. By relying on the configurational nature of the concept under study, repression by authoritarian governments, the current study assumes that all authoritarian regimes are similar in Central Asia. Intervening variables are important in analyzing mechanisms in process tracing method because it allows one to analyze if the mechanism stated by the researcher holds, regardless of the intervening variables. Some variables that might have significant weight are the linkage to the West, state capacity to suppress, and degree of the opposition institutionalization.

Another limitation of applying process tracing in authoritarian contexts is the issue of 'missingness' (Gonzalez-Ocantos and LaPorte 2021). Two important steps out of the three offered by Gonzalez-Ocantos and LaPorte (2021) can be applied to mitigate missingness. The first is, 'contextualizing data generation process, [which] entails making a thorough evaluation of the setting, the actors, and their individual interests vis-a-vis the potential publication of tangible evidence' (Gonzalez-Ocantos and LaPorte 2021, 1417). The second 'when faced with undocumented steps in the causal chain, scholars can specify the analytical status of steps in causal chain and use this information to minimize the disconfirmatory effects of missing data' (Gonzalez-Ocantos and LaPorte 2021, 1425). The first one, in fact, speaks to the limitation of considering smoking gun evidence type for process tracing in an authoritarian context. That is, by looking only at the evidence that corroborates the main mechanism, a researcher might engage in cherry-picking evidence. However, the current study is more prone to cherry-picking by the nature of the data units that it considers. By

looking primarily at the statements made by authoritarian regimes and the information about the actions taken by the regimes, the study looks only at the available approving, not disproving, evidence. As a result, contextualizing the data generation process explains both why cherry-picking might have taken place and why missing data might be missing.

Analysis

Authoritarian Diffusion. During the extraordinary session of the CSTO on January 10, 2022, CSTO member state representatives made statements that supported the second mechanism: the legitimation of the repressive acts through authoritarian diffusion. Throughout their speeches, the politicians highlight the shared values among the CSTO members and within the confines of regional organizations. These values are best explained by the term 'protective integration' (Roy 2008, 185) and happen because of authoritarian diffusion processes. As argued previously in the literature, 'This takes the form of collective solidarity or 'bandwagoning' with Russia (and China in SCO) against processes and pressures that are perceived as challenging incumbent leaders and their political entourage'(Roy 2008, 185). However, this study does not single out Russia and/or China. It considers that collective solidarity happens within the authoritarian gravity centers, which include 'autocratic countries [that] actively export sets of ideas, rules, or policy instruments to deter their regional environment from developing in a liberal direction' (Kneuer and Demmelhuber 2016, 3). While the concept was developed in the context of countering color revolutions by authoritarian regimes in post-Soviet states, the current analysis will modify the goal of deterring the liberal direction to maintaining the status quo, which is about preserving the incumbent authoritarian regimes.

Analysis of the speeches demonstrates that CSTO member states' regimes use a 'framing' (Megoran 2008) strategy to advance the following frame: Foreign elements, including terrorists and extremists as a threat to security and constitutional order. Edel and Josua (2018) argue that 'when the security apparatus acts forcefully against certain groups, state representatives often represent the target as a threat to the public' (883). From President Toqayev's speech, it is clear that the target of the framing is part of the population that protested in January. Toqayev states: 'The organizers of the attack on the Republic of Kazakhstan arranged several waves of aggression. In the first stage, as I said, there were peaceful protests. Then, particularly in Almaty, political rallies were held, and then armed militants rushed into the city from three directions' ("On January 10, an extraordinary" 2022).

Toqayev essentially argues that the protesters encroached on constitutional order, which is an implicit way of framing protesters as terrorists. This is different from a statement that the population was influenced by foreign terrorist elements and was susceptible to the terrorists' mobilization tactics. Rather the peaceful protesters themselves are implicitly called foreign terrorists. According to Edel and Josua (2018), 'framing denotes the way in which issues are presented, what underlying narratives and what solutions are offered' (883). Toqayev stated the following: 'the moral support of our CSTO partners is very important to us. All the member States of the organization have spoken with one voice and strongly supported Kazakhstan's appeal''("On January 10, an extraordinary" 2022). Moral support here means that by supporting Kazakhstan's appeal for the deployment of the CSTO peacekeeping troops, the member states agreed that the situation caused a security threat. Tajik president Rakhmon also notes that 'At our meetings within the CSTO, the CIS and the SCO, I have repeatedly drawn your attention to the presence of sleeper cells of international terrorism, extremism and religious radicalism in our countries'("On January 10, an extraordinary" 2022).

From the speeches of the CSTO member state representatives, it is possible to elicit one type of framing present both in the authoritarian learning and diffusion mechanisms. Kazakh and Uzbek regimes resort to the practice to frame the protests by the populations as socio-economic, providing ad hoc, cursory solutions and disregarding the sipping structural problems that are laid bare during mass protests. In case socio-political framing does not work and the protests engender political demands, then the regimes learn from the previous domestic and neighboring countries' mass protests as to when to transfer to the terrorists' narrative. In parallel, the same framing is mentioned several times during the CSTO session either directly or indirectly. Apart from Toqayev himself, Tajikistan's president Rakhmon claimed the following: 'The information presented by Kasym-Jomart Kemelevich clearly shows that decisions were taken on urgent issues of socio-economic nature and stabilization of the situation in the country' ("On January 10, an Extraordinary" 2022). The Kyrgyz president Japarov indirectly argues that the protests were a disruption of the socio-economic well-being by stating: 'instability and increased violence are more likely to lead to a deterioration of the socio-economic situation both in the Republic of Kazakhstan itself and to have a negative impact on all of us' ("On January 10, an Extraordinary" 2022).

Authoritarian diffusion transpired in the authoritarian regime's support and repeated approvals of the Kazakh and Uzbek regime's repressive actions. Tansey's (2016) concept of diplomatic sponsorship, perhaps, best explains the authoritarian diffusion dynamics after the

Karakalpak protests. ‘By offering vocal diplomatic support, and by confirming their role as supporting allies (often involving the use of language of friendship), external sponsors can lessen the sense of Isolation that Western normative pressure might entail’ (Tansey 2016, 86). In light of the challenge to the status quo in Uzbekistan, all the region’s authoritarian regions expressed public support for Mirziyoyev’s crackdown of the protesters. Once again it is a sign of ‘protective regionalism, [where] the primary motivation is the reinforcement of domestic regime security’ (Roy 2008, 185). The Kazakh Foreign Ministry issued a statement claiming the following: ‘We welcome and support the decisions of the highest leadership of Uzbekistan to stabilize the situation in Karakalpakstan’ (“Kazakh Foreign Ministry Issues” 2022). Indeed, as mentioned by Tansey (2016), the statement included the phrases such as fraternal state and friendly country (“Kazakh Foreign Ministry Issues” 2022). Another telling step by Toqayev was the expression of support via telephone call for the ‘decisive measures taken by the head of state to curb illegal actions’ (“Mirziyoyev and Tokayev Discuss” 2022). Apart from Toqayev, the presidents of Central Asian states, Belarus, Russia, and China expressed support of Mirziyoyev’s actions (Coalition of human rights NGOs 2022).

What is instructive, the other Central Asian regimes and the Russian government did not include in their official statements regarding Karakalpak protest the security threat from terrorists and extremists. Although the Uzbek government claimed about the alleged presence of terrorists, its claim was not echoed by the neighboring authoritarian regimes. While in the case of Kazakhstan, during the CSTO extraordinary session on January 10, 2022, all the Member states representatives stated the presence of the ‘sleeper cells of extremists and terrorists’, ‘controlled groups of fighters … obviously trained in terrorist camps abroad’, and ‘terrorists, extremists, Islamic radicals and various criminal elements; with a special focus on Salafia movement (“On January 10, an Extraordinary” 2022). In the case of Kazakhstan, the regimes had to go beyond the usual narrative employed for bilateral secondment and to use a specific language to legitimize the CSTO troop deployment.

Early signs of authoritarian learning

One of the conspicuous authoritarian tools that have been employed both by the Kazakh and Uzbek governments is the limitation of physical access with the state of emergency and of virtual access through internet shutdowns. On January 4th, on the fourth day after protests started in Kazakhstan, Toqayev issued a presidential decree imposing a state of emergency in Almaty and Mangystau regions on January 5, 2022 (Eurasianet staff 2022b). Decree stated an introduction of the state of emergency from January 5 until January 19, 2022 (Eurasianet staff 2022b). The time point when the state of emergency was

introduced requires elaboration. Peaceful protests started in Zhanaozen on January 2nd over the dramatic increase in Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) prices. By the following day, other cities in the Western part of the country joined the protests in solidarity with the Zhanaozen protests. On January 4th the protests turned violent in Almaty: 'several police cars had been set alight and that some demonstrators were smashing the windows of stores and restaurants' (Eurasianet staff 2022a). It should be noted that the violence did not originate from amongst the peaceful protesters. Kudaibergenova and Laruelle (2022) argued that 'eyewitness accounts from Almaty and Taldykorgan identified some of the violent groups as meticulously organized: taking orders from specific curators and acting with a clear plan in mind: occupation, destruction, unprecedented violence' (10).

Regardless of the nature of the violent groups, the violence itself has played in the hands of the authorities for whom it was easier to justify the narrative of a security threat from extremists and terrorists. Another important factor about the time period when the state of emergency was introduced is that by January 4, security forces had already resorted to violence in response to the protesters' attempts to storm the Almaty mayor's office (RFERL's Kazakh Service 2022b). Therefore, to legitimize the violence used against the protesters with a narrative of a security threat, the government needed to instrumentalize the state of emergency. The physical limitations introduced by the state of emergency are the major layer, which enables the government to materialize its alleged function to protect its citizens from the alleged terrorists from abroad. It has been argued previously regarding the Covid-19 pandemic, that 'for authoritarian regimes, like those in Central Asia, the virus offers an opportunity to suppress dissent, test strategies of public control and strengthen authoritarian norms' (Lemon and Antonov 2020, 1). Although the pandemic is a slightly different context, it is simply a more elevated attempt by the regimes to restrict unwanted public mobilization, which present in the authoritarian ruling strategies anyways. The tendency to use state of emergency as a public control is not evidence of authoritarian learning in itself. What is important are the circumstances in response to which the emergency is introduced. To preserve the status quo, authoritarian regimes should know not only what measures to use, but also when to apply them.

A similar set of measures were taken by Uzbek President Mirziyoyev, who announced the imposition of a state of emergency in Karakalpakstan between July 2nd to August 2nd, 2023 ("В Каракалпакстане введено" 2022). Same as in the case of Kazakhstan, the imposition of the regime follows the government's attempt to violently quell the protestors and the president's statements about the presence of a security threat. Once again, the timing

of the state of emergency announcement matters. In an obvious attempt to parallel the Kazakh government's authoritarian narrative and likely to prevent the same scale of protests as in Kazakhstan, the Uzbek government blamed the unnamed "organizers of the riots"... [who] "made an attempt to seize these state institutions' ("Что заявил президент" 2022). State of emergency based on the claim of a terrorist threat narrative brings with it a handful of useful measures for controlling the population. According to Kumenov (2022), 'The law governing communications states that during a state of emergency, authorities can suspend access to networks and communications facilities for everyone except government agencies.' On January 4th, Kazakh population already experienced intermittent internet signals, while on January 5 the population was sometimes disconnected from the internet entirely in the period of almost a week (Lillis 2022a). Internet blackouts during Karakalpakstan protests were also framed by the government as a measure to 'to prevent the spread of fake news "aimed at inciting separatism" and "destabilizing" the country' (Najibullah and Babadjanov 2022). In this study is it demonstrated that shutdown of internet in the protest areas demonstrates an instance of authoritarian learning both in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

During the January protests in Kazakhstan, the regime shut down the internet right after the number of protesters amounted to thousands across the entire country. By January 4, 2022, in Aktau the number of protesters reached approximately 5000, who peacefully protested in the city's square and chanted the hymn (БАСЕ 2022c, 0:36). The protesters also chanted '50' in Kazakh language, which stands for their demand from the authorities to reduce the price for the natural gas to 50 tenge (БАСЕ 2022c, 3:42). Due to the complete internet shutdown, the government, to a limited degree, prevented the protesters and the passersby from sharing information about state-initiated violence, which could have spawned more protest mobilization. Although the Kazakh government did not succeed, the Uzbek regime learnt an important lesson. Tellingly, the Uzbek government started shutting down the internet starting from June 27th, an approximate date 'when reports on the possible suspension of autonomy began to circulate' ("Uzbekistan: Unrest-Stricken" 2022). It can be observed that the Uzbek leadership learned from its Kazakh counterpart that the shortage of information allows it to control the population more easily. What is more suggestive of the authoritarian learning of the Uzbek regime is the Uzbek State Security Service's prohibition of publishing material that covers January 2022 protests in Kazakhstan (Бобоматов 2022). Reportedly, bloggers and journalists were 'prohibited from publishing video footage from Almaty because it can lead to protests'(Бобоматов 2022). The Uzbek regime's cautiousness of the information about Kazakh protests and the preemptive internet disconnection before

July protests demonstrate that the regime was engaging in authoritarian learning from the protests in Kazakhstan.

Lemon and Antonov (2020) argued that the control of information imposed during the covid-19 pandemic was akin to ‘previous crises of public order such as the Andijan massacre of 2005, the Zhanaozen protests in 2011 … when the governments took measures to monopolize the narrative on the events and suppress any alternatives’ (3). What demonstrates that the Uzbek regime engaged in authoritarian learning from the Kazakh regime is the usage of preventive repression. Once again, it is important to consider the timeline when the internet disconnection started in Karakalpakstan. Against the usual practice of limiting internet connection in response to large-scale mobilization, the Uzbek government decided to disconnect the Karakalpak population from the information flow before the official information about the Constitutional amendments was made public. It indicates that the Uzbek regime was mostly acting having the January protests in mind, to assuage the galvanization of the protests preemptively.

Framing the protests through securitization

In fact, destructive forces, including terrorists and extremists, appeared in the Kazakh government's narrative not only recently and not only in relation to mass protests in 2022. 'During the 2004 and 2005 parliamentary and presidential elections [in Kazakhstan] the regime framed the opposition as a group of "destructive elements" that sought to rob the country of its political stability' (Niyazbekov 2018, 21). In other words, even when there is no violence mentioned in the state's narrative, still specific groups can be targeted as destructive elements. Edel and Josua (2018) have also argued that in Uzbekistan' long-standing narrative is to accuse opposition movements of conspiring to destabilize the country and the region' (891). 'High level of Islamist threat in Uzbekistan from 1999 on has resulted in the marginalization of all opposition groups and any mobilization by citizens is perceived as a security threat' (Trisko 2005, 374). Framing is the main instrument that both Toqayev and Mirziyoyev used during the 2022 protests to present the protests as a disorder and the protesters as terrorists. Schatz and Maltseva (2012) state that framing is 'the selection, emphasis, and presentation of aspects of material reality to 'organize experience and guide action" (47). Framing happened in relation to the protesters and the mass protests in both countries, whereby protesters were presented as criminals and the mass protests as a disorder due to malign influence. In this case, the framing through discrediting and delegitimization of the 1. Peaceful protests and 2. Mass protests themselves were the tactics that both governments learned internally.

According to Balzacq, Léonard, and Ruzicka (2016), securitization happens 'when an issue is given a sufficient salience to win the assent of the audience, which enables those who are authorized to handle the issue to use whatever means they deem most appropriate' (495). Authoritarian regimes, including Kazakh and Uzbek regimes, resort to securitization without necessarily getting the audience's acceptance. What is important for authoritarian regimes is the attempt to legitimize repression in response to mass protests. Within the context of the present study, the 'securitizing agent, the agent who presents an issue as a threat through a securitizing move' is the authoritarian regime. Regimes frame the mass protests as the 'referent subject, an entity that threatens' and the regime stability as a 'referent object, an entity that is threatened' (Balzacq, Léonard, and Ruzicka 2016, 495). Ideally, securitization presupposes that the 'audience, the agreement of which is necessary to confer intersubjective status to the threat' (Balzacq, Léonard, and Ruzicka 2016, 495). However, in authoritarian contexts, regimes artificially create a threat of a foreign nature, framing protests as a threat to the constitutional order and territorial integrity ("Что заявил президент в Нукусе" 2022). This way, the regime can announce the presence of the so-called foreign threat and hold itself responsible in identifying and destroying the threat. The 'diagnostic and prognostic framings' (Lemon and Karibayeva 2023) are useful mechanisms in the hands of the regimes to involve the population in eliminating a threat of a foreign and/or terrorist nature, which in fact, is not proven to exist. Diagnostic framing was used by the Kazakh regime when it framed the protests as disorder and the protesters as terrorists causing security threats (Lemon and Karibayeva 2023). In other words, the regime diagnosed the security threat or engaged in securitization without audience agreement.

Lemon and Karibayeva (2023) identified motivational framing in the Central Asian context that the authoritarian regimes use to inorganically engage the population (audience) in securitization without the population's agreement. ‘Motivational framing prompts action by providing a rationale for audience engagement and prescribes what his engagement should look like' (Lemon and Karibayeva 2023, 62). It is a continuation of the government's tendency to insulate the population from blame and to blame foreign forces for directly participating in or for orchestrating unconstitutional acts. Since the governments portray the population as innocent victims of foreign influence, the narrative allows the regimes to attempt to mobilize people under a common goal. Motivational framing is easy to trace from the statements of Toqayev and Mirziyoyev. Mirziyoyev blames 'certain unhealthy external forces' for 'targeted information releases and distortion of ongoing events' ("Власти Каракалпакстана заявили" 2022). In response to these external elements, the president calls

on the population to 'act jointly in ensuring public stability and security, preventing citizens from rash and illegal actions' ("Власти Каракалпакстана заявили" 2022). In another statement, Mirziyoyev emphasized that 'it is the duty of all of us to preserve the centuries-old friendship and brotherhood between the Uzbek and Karakalpak peoples' ("Шавкат Мирзиёев: Наш долг" 2023).

Both presidents, Toqayev and Mirziyoyev stated that 1)the nature of the protests was foreign and 2)extremists and terrorists either participated in the unrest or influenced the local population to engage in unlawful behavior. Lillis (2022c) reported that Mirziyoyev framed the Karakalpak protest as being prepared "for years by foreign forces," and that their aim was to "infringe the territorial integrity of Uzbekistan and create interethnic conflict." Lillis (2022b) also reported that 'Tokayev claimed that 20,000 "bandits" had emerged from sleeper cells to attack Almaty with a clearly defined strategy and reporting to a central command point.' Both presidents pointed at a well-orchestrated attempt to destabilize the countries by foreign destructive forces. In fact, during the Andijon events, Uzbek ex-President Islam Karimov used identical framing as his Kazakh counterpart. 'He [Karimov] insists at the outset that they must be named 'armed criminals', and regularly refers to their actions as 'criminal'. However, as the narrative progresses, they are increasingly called 'terrorists' and 'religious extremists' (Megoran 2008, 20).

Domestic Authoritarian learning: From socio-economic to political demands

At the first moments of the Zhanaozen events in 2011, 'the government media outlets carried reports discrediting the strikers by 'exposing the greed' of oilmen. Thus the strikers found it difficult to convey their message to workers in other economic sectors' (Satpayev and Umbetaliyeva 2015, 127). Indeed, the framing of oil industry worker protesters as greedy fits into the government's tendency to frame any protest as of socio-economic nature, which can be resolved with an ad hoc solution. When socio-economic worries quickly escalate into political demands, then the government no longer acts as ready to resolve these demands. The socio-economic issues that the protesters address are not fixable with ad hoc solutions because they point at the underlying structural problem in the authoritarian regime. Thibault and Tastaibek (2023) claim that 'the government's refusal to acknowledge the grassroots character of protests is, in fact, a way for the authorities to … avoid taking responsibility for its own inadequacies in satisfying people's economic and social needs' (90). During January 2022 protests, the government's initial reaction was to confine the protests discursively to a technocratic problem. That is, after the protest regarding the LNG price increases on the first day, January 2, the government's response was to frame the protests as socio-economic in

nature and to provide a temporary solution for fixing underlying structural problems. Lewis (2016) has claimed that 'an important element of the government's response to the Zhanaozen violence was an emphasis on the socio-economic roots of the problem, and the need for technocratic, managerialist response' (12).

Schatz and Maltseva (2012) state that it depends on 'what resonates better with a given target audience, a precise policy decision or a more broadly couched framework' (62). At the beginning of the protests, both during the 2011 and 2022 protests, the governments framed the oil workers as greedy and the gas price spikes as socio-economic issues, but later the government's framing dramatically changed to the security threat discourse. Chairman of the Board of the biggest pro-state TV channel, Berik Uali, even had to refute a claim that Toqayev was not creating his public speeches and that someone else was guiding the president's decisions during January protests ("Берік Уәли: Тоқаев халыққа" 2022). Such a claim emerged, allegedly, because Toqayev's statements about the nature of the protests changed so dramatically that it was making some social groups doubt whether the decisions were made by the president himself ("Берік Уәли: Тоқаев халыққа" 2022). The dramatic change in narrative points at the regime's preference for an ambiguous narrative as a response to the political demands voiced by the protesters. Political demands encroach on the political regime's stability. For instance, by January 5, 2022 protesters in Pavlodar city demanded an end to 'election falsifications' (БАСЕ 2022e, 1:39) and the 'advent of parliamentary republic' (БАСЕ 2022e, 1:52). Once the regime realized that it can no longer frame the protests as a socio-economic issue that requires a technocratic solution and once the protesters started to voice political demands, the regime started to frame protests as terrorist attacks and the protesters as terrorists and extremists.

Kazakhstan's domestic learning

Domestic authoritarian learning happened in Kazakhstan from the Zhanaozen protests (2011). At first sight, it might seem that domestic authoritarian learning from the Zhanaozen massacre in 2011 failed for the Kazakh regime in 2022. In 2011, the regime used repressive violence against the protesters and was able to suppress the protests with a targeted framing of Western Kazakhstan. As Satpayev and Umbetaliyeva (2015) argue, 'it was pointed out that the demands of demonstrators are alien to the local population, in particular, it was mentioned that they were promoted by Oralman' (128). Targeting Oralmans (ethnically Kazakh repatriates to Kazakhstan) allowed the government to insulate the rest of Kazakhstan from what was happening in Zhanaozen. In 2022, peaceful protests also started in Zhanaozen but quickly found support from other Western cities and towns. As a result, the regime could not

confine the protesters' demands to one area, as the demands became resonant across the entire country. One important statement that surfaced across all of Kazakhstan in January 2022 was the message by protesters about support for Zhanaozen. The protesters' video messages to the government and to the president led to 'discursive dislocation, [which is] a destabilization of a discourse that results from the emergence of events which cannot be domesticated, symbolized, or integrated within the discourse in question' (Lewis 2016, 7). It was a discursive dislocation of the narrative that tends to confine the socio-economic demands of the protests to one region and to Oralmans. The smoking gun evidence. By January 4, protesters in Almaty region, Oral city, Merke town, Kyzylorda region, Aktobe city, Atyrau region, Turkestan region, Aksay city and probably many others gathered together to protest and filmed themselves with the message that the protesters support Zhanaozen (БАСЕ 2022a). If compared with the protest momentum in 2011, the protesters' message is a clear challenge to the regime's attempt to insulate the Zhanaozen city protester's demands as socio-economic problems characteristic only to Zhanaozen.

Amidst discursive dislocation, the regime needed to learn from its own domestic experience to maintain the regime stability. 'Such governments need to identify a variety of means of retaining power and are constantly adapting their survival strategies to changing circumstances' (Hall and Ambrosio 2017, 144). The smoking gun evidence of domestic authoritarian learning from Zhanaozen protests during the January 2022 protests was the instantaneous shift in the regime narrative due to discursive dislocation. The regime responded promptly by employing the terrorists' narrative. It was authoritarian learning because of the following sequence of logic: In 2011, the government was able to suppress the protests in Zhanaozen by using repression (violent force) against protesters. During January 2022 protests, the regime instantaneously framed the protests as a terrorist attack because it realized the impending need to use violent force across the entire country rapidly, unlike during the Zhanaozen protests. During Kazakhstan's Security Council meeting, Toqayev argued the following: True terrorists are causing public disorder in Almaty and other regions right now ("Тоқаев террористік банда" 2022). The president further argued that 'these groups that have undergone a serious preparation is an international terrorist group' ("Тоқаев террористік банда" 2022). During the CSTO emergency session, Toqayev also stated that the aggression carried out by the terrorists was organized preliminarily and swept all Kazakhstan in a synchronous manner ("On January 10, an Extraordinary" 2022). Explained simply, initially, the regime engaged in authoritarian learning from past domestic events, but

when the use of violent repression to quickly suppress the protesters in one region did not suffice, both the regime narrative and the scale of violent repression expanded.

During the January 2022 protests, protesters were primarily shouting 'Shal Ket' (Тойкен 2022) slogan, which targets Nazarbayev and its family. However, it would be mistaken to claim that learning was unsuccessful and the regime was crushed. Nazarbayev and his inner circle were eventually stripped from power, but the essence of the authoritarian regime still remains. Toqayev's notorious shoot-to-kill order clearly demonstrated that the mass protests were not able to topple the essence of the authoritarian regime. Also, the intra-elite links between Nazarbayev and Toqayev circles show that not all of the elites from the Nazarbayev era have been stripped from power' (Алимова 2023). In his commentary on former Committee of National Security Head Karim Masimov's sentence for 18 years, Ancheschi argues that 'a kind of purge was carried out among the distant relatives of the former president, but the first family itself was not affected' (Алимова 2023).

Uzbekistan's authoritarian learning from Kazakhstan

Regarding the level of repression involved in government responses to the protesters, it is evident that Mirziyoyev was involved in authoritarian learning from the experience of neighboring Kazakhstan. It can be explained by applying the term of 'transformative violence' (Marat 2016), which poses a significant challenge to the stable rule of an authoritarian leader. Marat (2016) calls transformative violence ‘an interruption of typical repression: a moment when the state crosses the boundary of acceptable force and deploys illegitimate violence' (532). In response, the violence galvanized an even bigger part of the population and authoritarianism became deeper (Marat 2016). Transformative violence happened in Kazakhstan during the Zhanaozen protests and in Uzbekistan during the Andijan massacre. According to Marat (2016), ‘the process of deepening authoritarianism was not straightforward. The leaders acted to forestall further violent dissent while simultaneously cultivating the appearance of the democratic process' (Marat 2016, 532). Toqayev and Mirziyoyev both boasted of the New Kazakhstan and New Uzbekistan, but against the background of these empty promises of political reforms, authoritarianism percolated the state-society decisions even deeper. In the case of Kazakhstan, the regime resorted to transformative violence when Toqayev issued the order to 'shoot to kill without warning' (Lillis 2022b), which was a green light to kill the population.

Uzbekistan engaged in authoritarian learning primarily from the Andijan massacre. The unprecedented violence used against protesters in 2005, can be explained by Garner and Regan's modified theory, which is a 'decision-theoretic theory aimed at predicting the level of

repression used by governments' (Trisko 2005, 375). As explained by Trisko (2005), 'repression will be employed in a rational response to challenges to the ruling coalition or status quo' (376). The rational response rests on the logic that 'with an increasing level of opposition threat, the marginal increment of government repression should decrease' (Trisko 2005, 377). However, the scale of repression undertaken by the Uzbek government in response to the 2005 May protests can be considered irrational. The regime's scale of repression did not decrease in proportion to the serious threat to the political status quo posed by the protesters.

In May 2005, the Uzbek government incarcerated twenty-three local businessmen in Andijan because they posed a threat to the political center by gaining public support in the region. In order to eradicate the support, the regime embarked on repressing the businessmen by judicial means. After the businessmen were given out sentences for no reason, protesters gathered near the court to challenge the court decisions (Putz 2015). According to Putz (2015), 'a group of armed men stormed the prison where the 23 men were being held, freeing them and other inmates.' The nature of the armed group is not definitive, but the Uzbek government imposed the Islamist and extremist labels to the peaceful protesters who amounted to several thousand during the protests (Putz 2015). Karimov used armed vehicles and brutal force to suppress the protesters. Just like the Kazakh president during the 2022 protests, late Karimov ordered the security forces to shoot the peaceful protesters. According to Garner and Reagan's theory, the reason why the Uzbek regime acted irrationally was the low international costs for the violent repression of the Islamist groups (Trisko 2005). Low costs of repression in Uzbekistan were explained by the condescending position of the international community to the government repression in light of the post 9/11 climate (Trisko 2005). Trisko (2005) claims that the Andijan crackdown was a deviation from Garner and Reagan's theory because of the low international costs of carrying out violent repression, which would not be possible if the post-9/11 order did not transpire. As a result, the Karimov regime used disproportionately violent repression to target Islamic terrorists while failing to delineate between peaceful protesters and gunmen.

While the Mirziyoyev regime could use an equivalent repressive response as Karimov's, in the present international milieu, the international costs are expected to be high. The Mirziyoyev regime was aware that the usage of excessive force might 'backfire by mobilizing broader groups in the population to support the victims of the violence and to condemn the means of repression' (Marat 2016, 532). From Mirziyoyev's decision to 'abolish the country's Karakalpakstan Autonomous Republic's right to secede' (RFE/RL's Uzbek

Service 2022), it can be stated that the regime learned from the Kazakh example. Specifically, it was evident that in case of disproportionate repression and the ensuing mobilization of an even bigger amount of population would place the regime at serious risk. In a conspicuous attempt to prevent future mass mobilizations and the ensuing loss of control as in Kazakhstan, the security and police force employees made claims that no ammunition was used against the protesters. In an interview, an Uzbek Police chief colonel stated that 'Security forces used only tear gas, water cannons, stun grenades and smoke bombs to disperse protesters, but they refrained from deploying live' (Lillis 2022c). It is worth mentioning that the MIA of Uzbekistan released an explanatory video about the usage of non-lethal weapons for crowd dispersal ("МВД показало средства" 2022). Reportedly, the video mentioned the following: 'these grenades are brought from abroad, checked. They do not lead to death, but are used during mass riots to calm and disperse people' ("МВД показало средства" 2022). If in Kazakhstan, the Toqayev regime resorted to the regional authoritarian block and cracked down the protests with the aid of the CSTO peacekeepers, Uzbekistan's non-membership in CSTO was perhaps in the regime's calculations. Moreover, the government abstained from using violence tantamount to the one used during the January protests in Kazakhstan due to its strong determination not to follow the Kazakh example and to lose state control over security in the country. It can be explained by the fact that 'the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was blunt in "asking" Kazakhstan to avoid requesting outside assistance from CSTO' (Hashidova 2022).

Why terrorists? Authoritarian learning from the Andijan massacre

One of the main pieces of evidence the government provides in arguing that the protesters are terrorists is the alleged damage to infrastructure and the state institution buildings. In doing so, the regime can claim that terrorists deliberately target state institutions in an attempt to disrupt the statehood and constitutional order of the state. The Kazakh and Uzbek regimes instrumentalized the presence of unknown groups alongside the protests for the regime narrative's benefit. The regime's claims of the terrorists' goal of toppling constitutional order by targeting state institutions are smoking gun evidence for ongoing authoritarian learning. Authoritarian learning from the Andijan massacre (2005) in Uzbekistan allowed the regimes to frame the mass protests as terrorist attacks based on the actions of an unknown group of armed men, a group present during the Andijan massacre and the January 2022 protests. Andijan protests started on May 10 as peaceful protests against the incarceration of twenty-three businessmen at the forefront of financially aiding the poverty-ridden Andijan region. 'By 'May 12-13th, the businessmen were freed by a group of

armed people who, earlier in the day, raided a military barracks and police station, seized weapons, led a prison break to free businessmen, took over the local government building, and took law enforcement and government officials hostage' (Human Rights Watch 2005).

It is important to note that beyond the peaceful, unarmed protesters, 'none of the demands of the attackers had any manifest relation to Islamic fundamentalism' (Human Rights Watch 2005, 11). Yet still, 'the government has characterized the Andijan events as an attempt by terrorists, motivated by an Islamist agenda and supported by foreigners to seize power in Andijan' (Human Rights Watch 2005). In the case of the twenty-three businessmen, their membership in the religious group Akramiya was unclear (Human Rights Watch 2005), but the regime tapped into this unclearness to showcase the protests as a terrorist attack. In the case of Andijan protests, the religious element was present because, at least, the businessmen's membership in Akramiya religious group was not fully denied.

In January 2022 protests in Kazakhstan and July protests in Karakalpakstan, religion did not play a role, but the authoritarian regimes still decided to paint the pictures of terrorist attacks. The main narrative of how both regimes learned from the Andijan protests was to emphasize the capture of the state institutions as an act characteristic of terrorists and a clear sign of the terrorist elements' goal to encroach on constitutional order. Smoking gun evidence on the Kazakh regime's engagement in authoritarian learning is President Toqayev's statement on January 6, 2022: 'real terrorists … are now making trouble in Almaty and other regions. Infrastructure buildings and, most importantly, buildings where firearms are stored are being captured' ("Тоқаев' террористік банда" 2022). The President's statement signals that the regime most likely engaged in authoritarian learning primarily from Andijan protests. During and in the aftermath of the Zhanaozen (2011) and land protests (2016), the government did not resort to the foreign terrorists' narrative. Therefore Andijan is the most likely conspicuous case of mass protests in Central Asia when a regime fabricated a narrative about the presence of terrorists resorting to Islamic radicalism.

During the protest, state institution buildings and private enterprises experienced attacks. However, it has not been fully established as to who organized and engaged in the attacks. In Shymkent city, as of January 6, it was discovered that 30 cars were burnt down and an unknown group of people tried to break into the city Mayor's office ("Шымкентте 30 шақты" 2022). However, on January 5, 2022, in Almaty the demonstrators accounting in thousands, broke into and captured the City Mayor's office (Қалмұрат 2022). Overall, it was reported that in 8 regions, 53 mayors' offices were attacked ("Қаңтардағы оқиға кезінде" 2022). Even if the attacks were carried out and a part of protesters took part in it, protesters

did not voice demands referencing religion or the claims to overtake constitutional power. The most telling statement by protesters was: 'We are not terrorists! We are simple people' (Synovitz 2022). Despite the regime's attempts to saw vagueness by using several framings, such as terrorists, extremists, criminals, and destructive elements, protesters' statement reveals the regime's intent and refutes the framing.

At times, the capture of the state institution buildings did not correspond to the truth. An activist and citizen journalist Aidos Sadykov argued that the claims about the seizure of the Aktobe regional mayor's office are unfounded and that protesters were not the ones who used violence to capture government buildings during the January protests (БАСЕ 2022d). Just like in Aktobe, there was no attempt by the peaceful protesters to seize the Department of Internal Affairs in Aktau city and to burn down cars in Almaty city, it was all arguably organized by the Committee for National Security (KNB) to legitimize the use of state violence (БАСЕ 2022d). A similar line of argumentation was put forth in regard to Karakalpakstan. The Uzbek state claimed that the protesters, influenced by criminal groups, tried to storm the Zhogargy Kenes (Parliament) building and twice the main police precinct in Nukus (Lillis 2022c). In an obvious manner, the Uzbek regime interpreted an alleged storming of the state institutions as indicators of encroachment on Uzbekistan's socio-political stability and statehood. In the case of Kazakhstan, there is recorded evidence of the Prosecutor's office and the ruling party headquarters being set alight. Although there is no clear evidence to single out a specific group responsible for the burnings, evidence on the fact of the burning is present. Meanwhile, in Uzbekistan's case, there is no evidence that clearly shows a capture of the police precinct in Nukus. The protesters marched towards the Jogargy Kenes (Lillis 2022c), but there is no evidence to claim that the protesters stormed the building.

Status quo

In the narratives of both Kazakh and Uzbek regimes, it is possible to observe the statements that the political status quo will be restored. Toqayev made a claim on January 5 that he is not going to leave Astana ("Тоқаев күштік құрылымдар" 2022). Toqayev also stated that 'the government will not fall, but we want mutual trust and dialogue rather than conflict' (RFE RL's Kazakh Service 2022b). It is worth noting that the protesters did not clearly voice whether the target of their political demands is Toqayev, the target more likely being Nazarbayev. In Aktau and Zhanaozen the protesters chanted "the government should resign! Old man go! (Shal ket!)' (Тойкен 2022). In Almaty, more than five thousand protesters marched from the policy station to the Republic square and '"Shal ket!" They

chanted. That means "old man go!" in Kazakh. The old man is, of course, Nazarbayev…' (Moldabekov 2022). Similarly in Shymkent, predominantly young protesters numbering in two thousand gathered in front of the Russian theater and demanded the exact same 'Shal ket!' (Иса 2022). In response to the demonstrations and slogans, by January 5, Toqayev rushed to state that the status quo will be maintained at all expenses. Reportedly, Tokqayev stated: 'As head of state … I intend to act as robustly as possible. Whatever happens, I will remain in the capital. It's my constitutional duty to be with the people' (Eurasianet staff 2022a). In Uzbekistan, the same demands were not voiced by the protesters, but the government still made reassurances that the status quo would be restored. In reference to the attempt to seize government bodies by alleged criminals, the Uzbek MIA made a statement that 'our state has the necessary potential to prevent further deterioration of the situation' ("Власти Каракалпакстана заявили" 2022). Uzbek Ministry of Internal Affairs highlighted the following:

We declare that no forces are capable of preventing [Uzbekistan] from consistently continuing the course of democratic reforms and confidently moving towards building and strengthening humane, legal, and social state that cares about the honor, dignity, well-being and interests of every citizen ("Власти Каракалпакстана заявили" 2022).

The emphasis on the continuous path towards a goal and the maintenance of a stable political status quo attempts to mobilize the population around a shared collective responsibility. In fact, the emphasis on a larger societal goal is evidence of internal authoritarian learning, as it borrows the logic of the narrative from late ex-president Karimov. 'The frame that Karimov used in narrating the Andijon was that it [was] a subversion of … 'scientific laws' controlling the trajectory of development of states, a form of teleological thinking that emphasizes process' (Megoran 2008, 25).

Foreign threat narrative

There are two layers that the foreign influence narrative comprises: the first layer delegitimizes the protesters and the second layer blames foreign sources. However, both layers are refined attempts to vindicate protesters from the alleged blame and, at the same time, strip the protesters of political agency. According to Pannier (2022a), blaming foreign forces is a shared feature of the deadly protests in Central Asia. The external influence 'implies the population is sufficiently content that no one would think of protesting unless a devious foreigner or foreign power manipulated them into doing so' (Pannier 2022a). One way Uzbek state institutions delegitimize the protesters was by stating that the protesters had invented slogans ("Генпрокуратура сообщила" 2022) and that the protesters were under the

influence of alcohol. Thibault and Tastaibek (2023) argue three explanations for the instrumentalization of the narrative about the foreign agents' presence. Two of the three provide novel perspectives in the existing literature on the government's motivations. 'Shifting away the blame from the population allows the authorities to minimize and to some extent write off the profound underlying popular discontent' (Thibault and Tastaibek 2023, 82). The parties that were blamed by the Kazakh and Uzbek governments included criminals, destructive foreign forces, terrorists, and extremists. The regimes intentionally used the terms interchangeably so that it would not be possible to easily discern which groups are responsible for alleged terrorist acts.

According to Thibault and Tastaibek (2023), while the regime does not blame the peaceful protesters and blames foreign forces instead, its goal is still to delegitimize the peaceful protesters. Interestingly, during the Zhanaozen protests that swept West Kazakhstan in 2011, 'the blame for the conflict was also placed on Kazakh ethnic repatriates, the Oralman' (Satpayev and Umbetaliyeva 2015, 127). As Oralmans were not Kazakhstan's citizens from birth, they were framed as Others that posed a threat to stability. According to Megoran (2008), 'Karimov framed the Andijon incident as being instigated by people who were not authentically Uzbek, [who failed to abide by] notions of hegemonic masculinity, prescribing how Uzbek Muslim men should behave' (21). The Uzbek president and other state officials made more nuanced targeting attempts. The branch of Uzbekistan's Interior Ministry issued a statement claiming that 'the organizers of the riot are hiding behind populist slogans' ("Uzbekistan President Backtracks" 2022). The organizers of the riots were deemed a criminal group ("Власти Каракалпакстана заявили" 2022), destructive forces ("Что заявил президент в Нукусе" 2022). The vice speaker of the Uzbek parliament also blamed populists who 'hoping that provocative actions would yield results, fell prey to slogans and called on people to take to the streets' ("Конституционная комиссия следит" 2022).

Interestingly a Kyrgyz citizen, Vikram Rizahunov's (musician) case became well known because he was one of the few foreign nationals who was singled out as a foreign terrorist. Reportedly, the Kyrgyz Jazzman admitted his guilt after being tortured in custody and shared to state television that 'people contacted [him] and offered 90,000 tenge (about $207) to take part in meetings [in Kazakhstan]' (Pannier 2022b). The Kyrgyz government's denial of the charges and the clear attempt by the government to make a scapegoat out of the Kyrgyz citizen are clear. Another excerpt from the musician's confession included: 'Besides saying he was invited to come to Kazakhstan by unknown people who bought him a ticket for

January 2, the musician also said he was taken to a room where there were Tajik and Uzbek citizens -- "about 10 of them" -- and that he was frightened' (Pannier 2022b).

Thibault and Tastaibek (2023) argue that 'invoking the presence of foreign agents in the unrest was a necessary condition for the involvement of the Collective Security Treaty Organization forces' (81). The foreign terrorists narrative is a common tool in the authoritarian leaders' toolset, so it was not used by the Kazakh government for the first time just to be able to invoke CSTO collective defense mechanism. However, the timing of the foreign terrorists' narrative is crucial in the Kazakh president's narrative and it shows the accuracy of Thibault and Tastaibek's (2023) argument. CSTO troops' deployment was the last instance for the Toqayev regime to survive. It was reported that Toqayev dramatically changed the choice of vocabulary from "listening to the opinion of the people", "dialogue", "political reform" in his first speeches to "terrorists", "extremists", "thugs" right before the CSTO request ("Берік Уәли: Тоқаев халыққа" 2022). Starting from January 4, it became evident that the number of the protesters is exponentially growing in thousands and that the events such as the burning of the Nur Otan Party headquarters and the Prosecutor's office in Almaty signaled the loss of control by the state.

At the same time, it can be seen from the Uzbek regime's narrative about the Karakalpak protests, the claims of foreign threat persistence is pushed forwards even if a country is not a CSTO member. Therefore, as Lemon and Karibayeva (2023) also argue, CSTO troops deployment 'supplied military reinforcement and ensured the restoration of control over the strategic infrastructure' (66) and signaled 'admission of regime weakness' (66). Despite the repetitiveness and sapless nature of the authoritarian narratives, Lemon and Karibayeva (2023) break down different types of framings used by the Kazakh government. 'Diagnostic framing involves problem identification and attribution, which was accomplished via Toqayev's labeling of the participants in the protests "bandits", "marauders", "terrorists", "pirates", and "foreign fighters" (Lemon and Karibayeva 2023, 61). Followed by diagnostics is prognostic framing, which aims to articulate a strategy to solve the problem, "what is to be done"' (Lemon and Karibayeva 2023, 61).

Court cases

Court sentences were used as a repressive measure, which subsumed the government's blame narratives during and in the immediate aftermath of the protests. However, in the case of court sentences, neither the mechanism 1 (authoritarian learning), nor mechanism 2 (authoritarian learning 2) held true. There was no smoking gun evidence to establish that the regimes targeted activists and protesters due to authoritarian learning or diffusion processes.

Rather regimes' individually adopted similar policies under similar circumstances' (Volden, Ting, and Carpenter 2008). Trisko (2005) defines repression as 'an effort by a national government to suppress unrest or opposition through the use of judicial means, arbitrary arrest, torture, and police or military action' (373). Repression can be immediate during the protests, but it can also span long, mostly when authoritarian regimes repress their opponents through court cases and targeting outside the state borders. In the case of the Uzbek government's framing of the Andijan events in 2005, Edel and Josua (2018) make a statement worth consideration.' Whilst other frames such as 'disruption' or 'foreign influence' vanished shortly after the repressive event, terrorism and extremism are forms of harmful behavior both governments stressed in the months and years after the crackdowns' (Edel and Josua 2018, 891). Perhaps, because terrorism and extremist claims are easily convertible into court cases, the foreign influence is more challenging to align with the country's criminal code. In the case of the 2022 protests both in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, court sentences demonstrate that the foreign influence remained as a stable narrative even months after the protest events.

The consistency of the foreign influence narrative is evident from the court sentences according to which the defendants were convicted in both countries. The main logic employed in the government's foreign influence narrative was that destructive forces from the outside spread disinformation and orchestrated the protests. In Uzbekistan, the foreign influence translated was seen from the fact that most of the twenty-two defendants on court trial on January 31, 2023, were convicted for the organization of mass riots ("Оглашены приговоры" 2023). The sentences correspond to the official narrative of the Uzbek regime. The main figure who was deemed an orchestrator of the so-called unrest in July 1-2, Dauletmurat Tazhimuratov, has been convicted based on several sentences, including 'conspiracy to seize power or overthrow the constitutional order of the Republic of Uzbekistan' ("Оглашены приговоры" 2023). Along with Tazhimuratov, other defendants were convicted under the same charges but were either given more lenient sentences and/or the sentences were revoked. 'All the defendants but Tazhimuratov admitted at least some degree of guilt [and] delivered a collective performance of contrition ("Uzbekistan: Karakalpakstan Trial" 2023). Another charge that most of the 22 defendants received were the paragraphs' a' and 'd' of article 244-1 from the Criminal code, which is the 'production, storage, distribution or demonstration of materials containing a threat to public safety and public order' ("Оглашены приговоры" 2023). The charges align with the state institutions' joint statement, which identifies external forces that resorted to 'purposeful information emissions and distortion of ongoing events' ("Власти Каракалпакстана заявили" 2022a). A

similar combination of court sentences surfaced during the trial on February 7, 2023. '20 of the defendants are charged with organizing mass unrest, while seven are charged with distributing materials inciting social discord' (RFE/RL 2023b).

In Kazakhstan, Toqayev announced an amnesty for the participants of the January protests, with the exception of 'riot organizers, terrorists, and treason committers' (Staff Report 2022). It is suggestive of the government's attempts to persecute mainly activists and opposition members. Just taking a closer look at two of the biggest court cases in Atyrau and Aktobe indicates that the government instrumentalized the foreign influence narrative. On January 23, 2023, the Atyrau region specialized court found a majority of the 23 protesters guilty under the same charge of the organization of mass protests as in Uzbekistan (Сапарова 2023). However, pertaining to the president's amnesty, the judge absolved the protesters' prison sentences and emphasized the need to 'spend '[energy] not on the crime, but on seeing the good side of life' (Сапарова 2023). In order to uphold its narrative that the protesters embarked on criminal, illegal actions under the influence of foreign destructive forces, the regime even imposed guilty charges to five protesters posthumously (RFE RL's Kazakh Service 2023a).

Extradition request

The issuance of extradition requests and cooperation between the Kazakh and Uzbek regimes in persecuting political activists is considered in this study as a case of authoritarian diffusion. The regional order based on authoritarian gravity center is based on the shared norm that political persecution through extradition is a norm, if the persecuted actor causes threat to the sovereignty and stability of the country.' Bringing exiles back home to face prosecution is a powerful mechanism not only to target particular individuals but to spread fear among other political activists and dissidents abroad' (Lewis 2014, 13). Uzbekistan was placed on the international wanted list of four Karakalpak activists in Kazakhstan's territory and Kazakh authorities detained all four between September and October 2022. It has been claimed that the Uzbek state has yet to make an official extradition request ("Kazakhstan: Don't Deport Activists" 2023). Extradition is a legal mechanism Central Asian states can employ for persecuting their citizens abroad on the basis of criminal court sentences. While the mechanism itself is treaty-based, what qualifies as a criminal act is tacitly agreed upon by the member states. The extradition requests can transpire by extra-judicial means, an indicator that the Central Asian governments are ready to use all means to uphold the shared goal of maintaining regime stability. According to Amnesty International, 'Uzbek authorities filed hundreds of extradition requests to Kyrgyzstan requesting to extradite hundreds of

refugees that fled to Kyrgyzstan' ("The Andijan Massacre Remembered" 2015). Four of the refugees were handed over by Kyrgyzstan to the Uzbek authorities, but in cases official extradition procedure did not work, the Uzbek government tried to influence the refugees via relatives in Uzbekistan and even kidnapped the refugees' ("The Andijan Massacre Remembered" 2015). In case a citizen poses a challenge to regime security, then most likely, the authoritarian regimes will frame the person as a threat to the status quo. Authoritarian diffusion processes enable the CIS to act as a channel for the transmission of the common values of preserving the regime's security and status quo stability. 'The [1993 CIS] convention calls for the Contracting Parties to extradite to one another upon demand in accordance with the terms set therein persons located on their territory for purposes of criminal prosecution' (Ginsburgs 1999, 330). 'Extradition for purposes of criminal prosecution is effected for such acts which under the laws of both parties are punishable' (Ginsburgs 1999, 330).

The incarceration and subsequent death of one of the defendants during the court trials in Uzbekistan on January 31, 2023, is instructive. Polat Shamshetov, a former chief of Karakalpakstan's Interior Ministry's detective unit, was convicted for organizing mass unrest (RFERL 2023a). The activist reportedly died of heart failure when remaining in custody, which was challenged by the diaspora activists abroad (RFERL 2023a). 'Central Asian governments mount extensive propaganda exercises to discredit political exiles, creating a discourse in which diasporas and citizens based abroad are seen as potential security threats' (Lewis 2014, 11). Considering the statements by the diaspora activist voiced in relation to Shamshetov's death, it is highly likely that the Uzbek government will continue its repression efforts abroad and will insist on extradition requests. Uzbekistan makes use of 'extraterritorial security practices to maintain regime security by extending the scale of domestic political controls across borders into transnational spaces occupied by diasporic and exile communities' (Lewis 2015, 141). Apart from the abovementioned 1993 CIS Convention, Uzbekistan's extradition requests are endorsed by the SCO, which facilitates extradition of anybody suspected of "terrorism" or "extremism"' (Lewis 2015). Two ethnic Karakalpak activists abroad have been sentenced in absentia, which shows that the Uzbek government is attempting to eliminate all opposition, even abroad. Amanbay Sagidullaev, the leader of the Alga Karakalpakstan, who currently lives in Norway, has been found guilty, among many, on charges of encroachment on the president of the Republic of Uzbekistan ("Суд над лидером" 2023). Niyetbai Urazbayev, a Karakalpak activist residing in Kazakhstan, has been found guilty, among many, on charges of encroachment on the constitutional order of the Republic

of Uzbekistan ("Суд над лидером" 2023). Reportedly, on April 28, 2023, Kazakhstan's security services detained three Karakalpak activists legally residing and working in Kazakhstan's Mangystau region (Bureau.kz editorial 2022).

Conclusion

Two recent events in Central Asia are illustrative of the authoritarian regimes' tendency for authoritarian learning in the future. On April 10, 2023, oil sector workers from the town of Zhanaozen arrived in Astana and organized a sit-in in front of the Energy Ministry("Kazakhstan: Police Disperse" 2023). The protesters voiced their demands in regards to their dismissal from the employer company Berali Mangistau Company and, as a result, were detained by police ("Kazakhstan: Police Disperse" 2023). While the protesters in Astana were detained, the population in Zhanaozen quickly mobilized in front of the city hall and dispersed after the sit-in organizers were freed ("Kazakhstan: Police Disperse" 2023). The detention of the protesters is a clear sign that the regime will continue to repress the socio-economic protests that have the potential to galvanize the wider public across the country. It is also a sign that the Toqayev regime will engage in authoritarian learning from Bloody January in an attempt to hold to power. Luca Ancheschi, in his analysis of the authoritarian dynamics in Kazakhstan, suggested that due to the regime's unwillingness to carry out economic reforms to meet the economic issues in the country, the only regime response left is repression(Алимова 2023). According to Ancheschi, Uzbekistan's current regime demonstrated that changes in the management of the economy grants some degree of legitimacy even to authoritarian regimes (Алимова 2023). However, even in Uzbekistan's case, Mirziyoyev's economic changes were associated with economic liberalization rather than addressing the structural problems of the Uzbek economy, such as poverty and the energy crisis.

The results of the recent referendum demonstrate that the Uzbeks voted for the constitutional changes that cemented Mirziyoyev's presidential power (RFERL's Uzbek Service 2023). It would allow Mirziyoyev to run two more terms until 2040 and extend the presidential terms from five to seven years (RFERL's Uzbek Service 2023). The political consolidation of Mirziyoyev's authoritarian rule is suggestive of the impending power consolidation. As the liberalization of the economy was Mirziyoyev's legitimation basis from the previous terms, it can no longer serve as a legitimation, and the regime eventually would face the need to tackle structural economic problems. It is highly unlikely that both Mirziyoyev and Toqayev will embark on such socio-economic reforms that would come at the expense of political stability. As a result, during his consecutive terms, Mirziyoyev will

likely resort to repression in order to consolidate the regime. Within such a milieu, the processes of authoritarian learning and diffusion will not cease but rather become more widespread.

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