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**ETHNIC EXCLUSION & CONFLICT IN THE CASPIAN:  
COMPARING KAZAKHSTAN & AZERBAIJAN**

**by**

**DANNY KRIKORIAN**  
M.A. University of Central Florida, 2018

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Science  
in the Department of Political Science  
in the College of Sciences  
at the University of Central Florida  
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2018

Major Professor:

Houman Sadri

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I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to the mentorship of Dr. Houman Sadri, who since my undergraduate career, has served as a role model as a professor, scholar, theorist & researcher. It is my truest honor to have worked with him and have earned his support in this endeavor to explore the relationship between ethnic exclusion & violence.

## **ABSTRACT**

Political science explains various motives for political violence. This research focuses on a particular kind of motivation: ethnicity. The 20th century has seen many instances of ethnic violence, and this research seeks to understand why it occurs in one place and time and not the other. Traditionally the literature on ethnic violence reflects on economic conditions, regime type, geopolitics and historical context as significant variables. This research posits that Kazakhstan managed to avoid ethnic violence because it is more politically developed. The existence of an accommodative legislative assembly, which assures the rights of ethnic minorities, is an example of Kazakhstan's model of ethnic inclusiveness and harmony. Such mechanisms are wholly absent in Azerbaijan, despite immense oil wealth; it exhibits cases of extreme ethnic violence, terrorist mobilization and threats to regime survival. Relatively politically developed states like Kazakhstan are more inclined towards ethnic tolerance, inclusion & harmony, while underdeveloped states lack the apparatus' therein, resulting in exclusion and conflict. The main implication of the research is that neither territorial disputes, nor resource curse nor post-Soviet disintegration help to explain why ethnic conflict happens in one place, Azerbaijan, and not in the other, Kazakhstan. There is however a positive relationship between ethnic inclusion & ethnic harmony.

This is dedicated to my family, the Armenian people, the people of Kazakhstan, and last but not least all communities who continue to suffer from the haunting specter of ethnic exclusion.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Research Question

This research is an attempt to answer the question of why ethnic conflict occurs in some states and not others. In order to properly address the question, I've chosen a multi-method approach, including a logit regression as well as a comparative case study. I've chosen two Caspian states, Kazakhstan & Azerbaijan, rich with oil. The Caspian Sea region, or Central Asia rather, has become of growing importance, particularly since the dissolution of the USSR, but even more so perhaps, following the rise in Islamic fundamentalism. This has resulted in coordination between western and Caspian states like Azerbaijan & Kazakhstan in security measures in attempt to prevent instability.

More importantly for this research, instability has also taken the form of ethnic conflict, such as in the Caucasus, but also in CA states like Tajikistan, Uzbekistan & Kirgizstan. Out of the CA states, only Kazakhstan has oil abundance, and is thus vulnerable to the resource curse argument. That is Kazakhstan has averted any major conflict or crises altogether through a rentier system (Franke et al 2009). To counter this argument, and in order demonstrate that a lack of ethnic conflict (ethnic harmony) is not caused by oil wealth but rather by institutional accommodation I compare Kazakhstan to Azerbaijan.

### Variables

In this research my aim is to demonstrate a relationship between the extent of political development, indicated by the degree of ethnic inclusion, and the extent of ethnic conflict, defined in the upcoming sections, exhibited in these two oil-rich post-



Soviet, predominantly Muslim, Caspian & Turkic states. Beyond their security relevance, Azerbaijan & Kazakhstan serve as prime examples of states with variance in ethnic conflict and institutional development, despite the presence of oil in both states. I argue that ethnically inclusive states are more likely to form institutions & legislate policies that protect, preserve and encourage ethnic inclusion. As a result, they exhibit less ethnic conflict. My independent variable is ethnic exclusion or inclusion; my dependent variable is the degree of ethnic conflict or harmony – respectively. The research is organized into the following sections respectively: introduction including research question and variables as well as background history on the cases; followed by a literature review including Wimmer et al's regression results and implications; the main component which is the comparative case study of minority conditions in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan; and finally a conclusion.

### Hypothesis

Inclusive states imbued with a resource curse are stable such as in Kazakhstan. Exclusive states, can be unstable like Azerbaijan, which has exhibited ethnic cleansing against Armenians, mass deportation of Kurds, terrorist attacks by dissident ethnic militants like SADVAL, mass mobilization by Lezgin & Talysh populations, a coup d'état & an ongoing war in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh). Azerbaijan feels entitled to the territory despite a population that is 98% Armenian, a sign of the ethnic exclusivist character of the state.

## Case Selection

The history of the Caspian is rather unique, rich with a prevalence of tribalism, nomadism, and clan relations. This was further enriched by the arrival of Islam, and the legacy of imperial dominance by Russia & Iran. The USSR would eventually encompass the entire region. It's eventual collapse lead to the modern independent Kazakh & Azerbaijani republics. The purpose of this segment is to demonstrate how these historical similarities, while sharing some resemblance, do not ensure a shared degree of political stability and ethnic harmony.

The history of the Caspian region as populated with nomadic, tribal people with clan-based hierarchies greatly reflects in the political structures of the states therein. Nomadism has played a huge role in the histories of both Kazakhstan & Azerbaijan. In modern times, this is expressed through informal social institutions such as nepotism and patronage. That these societies embrace informality arguably induces corruption. Neither Kazakhstan nor Azerbaijan experienced autonomy until after the dissolution of the USSR. Before the USSR, Kazakhstan was mainly under the auspices of Russia, and Azerbaijan was ruled by Iran.

Traditionally, the influx of ideas, religions and cultures came along what is now called the Silk Route, connecting the east and west through trade networks and other forms of cultural interaction. Prior to the introduction of Islam by Arab warriors into the region in the 8th century, the Caspian region exhibited a diverse religious demography, including the mystical Shamanism, Tengrianism & Buddhism (Edelbay 2012).

The integration of Azerbaijan & Kazakhstan into the USSR only reinforced the tradition of authoritarianism and the centralization of power. They have carried on even into the post-soviet era (Tokaev 2004).

The disintegration of the USSR produced a vacuum of power. This vacuum was either to be filled by extremists or a continued legacy of authoritarianism. Kazakhstan & Azerbaijan, like most Caspian states, chose the latter. Similar security measures to the USSR were adopted, continuing the legacy of Soviet-inspired police-state. The only difference was that Moscow had essentially less control over the region it once easily swallowed up.

Azerbaijan & Kazakhstan also share linguistic roots. Both languages are Turkic in origin. This renders them an even more ideal comparison. Perhaps most importantly of all commonalities – both states are among the top twenty-five oil-exporters in the world.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theory

To understand the relationship between ethnic conflict and exclusion, it is important to define four major concepts in this research: Ethnicity, Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Exclusion (discrimination) & Ethnic Inclusion.

*Ethnicity* is defined as “subjective experienced sense of commonality based on belief in a common ancestry and shared culture. Indicators of common ancestry and culture include common language, phenotypical features, and belonging to same faith (Wimmer et al 2009).

*Ethnic conflict* is described as mass violence between two communities that each belongs to a distinct cultural group with common heritage and other subjective commonalities. In order to be classified as an ethnic conflict, armed organizations must seek to achieve “ethnonationalist aims, motivations & interests and recruit fighters and forge alliances on the basis of ethnic affiliations” (Wimmer et al 2009). Ethnic conflicts are distinct in their “armed organization, recruitment and alliance structures. In other words, ethnic conflicts are typically fought over ethnonational self-determination, ethnic balance of power in government, ethnoregional autonomy, ethnic and racial discrimination, and language and other cultural rights” (Sambanis).

In many cases, antagonist ethnic groups will not be able to agree on new constitutional arrangements or a peaceful separation. These kind of ethnic disputes consequently become violent, some escalate into all-out inter-ethnic war. This is the situation in Angola, Kashmir, Shi Lanka, Bosnia, and Caucasus. Some scholars explain reasons of ethnic conflicts with collapse of the authoritarian rule. As an example, the

main reason why ethnic conflicts have sprung up in Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and elsewhere, because the authoritarian rule has collapsed and made such conflicts possible. This is the conventional wisdom. This argument ignores other potential causes of ethnic conflicts. It remains a daunting task to explain why ethnic conflicts have broken out in some places, but not others, and why some ethnic conflicts are more violent than others (Ismayilov 2008).

To elaborate further, ethnic conflicts can be defined as conflicts between ethnic groups within a multi-ethnic state, which have been going on some time, which may appear to be unsolvable to the parties caught up in them. An ethnic conflict is a dispute about important political, economic, cultural, or territorial issues between two or more ethnic communities (Brown 1993). The most distinct feature of ethnic conflict is the explicit targeting of a group on the basis of a shared culture (Wimmer et al 2009). It is a long lasting tension between two groups that wish to advance their interests (Ismayilov 2008). In non-ethnic conflict, members of the same ethnic group might be in conflict, whereas ethnic conflict is distinctly between two separate groups on the basis of their subjective cultural differences and the political implications therein. As the literature indicates, as with many abstract political concepts, there is little consensus on the definition of ethnicity. The use of 'subjective' is to indicate the 'ambiguity' of the definition. In Lebanon for example the political system is known as consociationalism, in which religion is deeply tied to ideology and ethnicity, thus making it difficult to really distinguish any ethnic group.

It is also important to define *ethnic exclusion*, or discrimination rather, so as to demonstrate how this exclusion is being gauged. Members of an ethnic group that are

excluded from government or discriminated against are subject to intentional, targeted disenfranchisement. Discrimination entails limiting access to government positions to citizens who speak a certain language, exhibit phenotypical features or members of a particular faith. Discrimination can be informal too, that is – it can exist without legal enforcement, if a society actively prevents a particular ethnic group from mobilizing in that society (Tescur & Gurses 2017). An example of ethnic exclusion or discrimination includes African-Americans until the civil rights movement. Some might argue that informal discrimination persists today (Wynne 2004).

On the other hand, *inclusion* can be described as institutional accommodation, beyond nominal laws, intended to help raise social status and political representation levels of ethnic minorities. The Civil Rights Act of 1995 & Affirmative Action are two examples of such accommodations in the US (Wynne 2004).

Inclusion is a key concept in this article, particularly because I focus on Kazakhstan's unique institutional infrastructure, the APK, which reduces the risk of ethnic conflict. The theoretical basis of my argument on the positive relationship between ethnic inclusion and ethnic conflict draws from Wimmer's Model of Ethnic Inclusion (Wimmer, Cederman, & Min. 2009). Wimmer's model suggests that ethnic inclusion does reduce the chances of ethnic conflict, but that this inclusion must go beyond mere laws. In other words, institutions and policies must be in practice that wholly address and accommodate the needs of ethnic minorities based on their experiences in given states (Wimmer et al 2009).

Ethnic conflicts occur in a multi-ethnic state, have been going on some time, and appear to be difficult to resolve. An ethnic conflict is a disagreement about political,

economic, cultural, or territorial issues between two or more ethnic communities (Brown 1993).

The most distinct feature of ethnic conflict is the explicit targeting of a group on the basis of a shared culture (Wimmer et al 2009). It is a long lasting tension between two groups that wish to advance their interests (Ismayilov 2005). In non-ethnic conflict, members of the same ethnic group might be in conflict, whereas ethnic conflict is distinctly between two separate groups on the basis of their subjective cultural differences and the political implications therein. As the literature indicates, as with many abstract political concepts, there is little consensus on the definition of ethnicity. The use of 'subjective' is to indicate the 'ambiguity' of the definition. In Lebanon for example the political system is known as confessionalism, in which religion is deeply tied to ideology and ethnicity, thus making it difficult to really distinguish any ethnic group.

The literature is vast on ethnic conflict, but there is almost no focus on the relationship between ethnic exclusion and ethnic conflict (Edelbay 2012). Instead most researchers focus on secessionist movements or insurgencies, but not on mere violent clashes, pogroms, and massacres. Furthermore, the literature suggests that most ethnic conflict is the result of collapsing authoritarian regimes, but this does not account for the occurrence of ethnic conflict in one region, and not the other (Ismayilov 2005).

The emergence of ethnic nationalism, such as in Azerbaijan, makes ethnic conflict much more likely. The rise of ethnic nationalism in one group can be seen as threatening by others. But even Kazakhstan, and most other post-soviet states exhibited high rates of nationalism for the sake of nation building. The mere disintegration of the authoritarian, cross-national empire of the USSR left a vacuum of power and the need for new states to

emerge and address collective political needs. Not all states exhibited the same degree of nationalism. There is a distinction between Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan in this regard. Neither country is democratic by any means, but Kazakhstan has clear institutional differences in terms of ethnic minority inclusion. So what is this difference? A degree of political development, or institutionalized representation and inclusion has the potential to help mitigate ethnic tension by allowing for the establishment of an inclusive means of governance to address the needs of all ethnic groups in the state. This inclusiveness goes beyond just mere protection of minorities but accommodates and addresses grievances (Porter 2003). Now that we understand these important concepts and their definitions, of ethnicity and ethnic conflict, and the various sources of dispute, and expression of grievances, we can apply this reasoning to the two cases. I'll begin first with Kazakhstan followed by an assessment of its ethnic harmony and the presence of robust institutions that enable it, followed by a section on ethnic exclusion, discrimination & ethnic conflict.

Before the data section, it is imperative to understand the importance of controlling for resource curse (oil abundance), soviet past & religiosity in order to demonstrate the relationship between ethnic exclusion and violence. Resource curse can be defined as a state imbued with abundant natural resources that tilt the political spectrum economically, often leading governments towards the fate of the rentier state, where resources – instead of accountability – are managed to clients in order to secure power, appease and stabilize society (Watts 2004). Wimmer & Cederman account for all of these control variables in their research design, including also imperial (soviet) legacy, homogeneity (linguistic fractionalization) & secessionist movements, through a logistic regression of 192 countries (Fearon 2003).



## Data

This section illustrates with the use of two major databases focusing on ethnic minorities the relationship between inclusion and stability. The first set is UNPO and it demonstrates 33 cases of ethnic exclusion across the globe. These cases help to contextualize the dynamics of each state within each ethnic conflict & exclusion occurs, by comparing levels of oil wealth, imperial past, conflict & inclusion. Two of these cases, are the Talysh & Lezgin in Azerbaijan.

The second database Ethnic Power Relations, which is broader with a sample size of 157, illustrates through a logistic regression the relationship between ethnic exclusion and violence by controlling for variables like oil, colonialism, and geography. These databases serve to complement & reinforce my hypotheses, which are listed below.

Most oil rich states are stable but not enough to deem it a significant variable, given forty percent of oil rich countries remain unstable, throughout the second half the twentieth century, experienced much violence. This includes Nigeria, Venezuela & Libya.

Ethnic Power Relations 3.0 is a dataset that demonstrates the relationship between ethnic exclusion and ethnic conflict. The dataset identifies 150 politically relevant ethnic groups and their access to state power between the years 1946-2010. The dataset includes 157 countries and 758 ethnic groups, and measures the degree of exclusion from government ranging from total representation to over discrimination. Regression results demonstrate that changes in exclusion of ethnic groups produces the greatest increase in the risk of ethnic conflict.

Variables such as oil abundance, imperial past, ongoing war nor secessionist movements have an effect as statistically significant on ethnic conflict as the variable of ethnic exclusion. In other words, neither oil wealth, the USSR's legacy of imperialism in the Caspian region nor the Nagorno-Karabakh War are as statistically significant in their overall influence on ethnic conflict as one might expect. The same logic applies to oil curse, secessionist movements, homogeneity, imperial past or religiosity. The data indicates that none of these intervening variables are anywhere near as significant as ethnic exclusion in its relationship to conflict.

## **KAZAKHSTAN**

### Political Structure

The political stability of Kazakhstan cannot be understood without analysis of its political structure and process. In this section I argue that the internal politics of Kazakhstan, while negatively affecting its stability, due to corruption, fraudulent elections and opposition suppression, is also a source of stability with regards to the strength of the state and its overall legislative structure. Of the eight variables, only political development and economic conditions pose a challenge in analysis. In a sense, both the endurance of the state, and the vast endowment of oil, which I discuss in the economic section, are a “gift and a curse”. While the political development of Kazakhstan shares a negative relationship with its political stability, it arguably serves as a window of hope for its future, noting its resilience in the face of radicalism and foreign pressure. Still, recent legislation passed by parliament has abolished executive term limits for President Nazarbayev, securing his role as leader of Kazakhstan for life. This dims the hopes for democratic reform. Furthermore it underscores the urgency of an impending succession crisis.

Kazakhstan is a unitary republic, with its president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, as the head of state. Legislative powers reside in a bicameral legislature, which includes the Majlis, the upper house and the senate, the lower house (Popjanevski 2006). Political parties are allowed to compete, but the authenticity of the election process is challenged by internal and external sources (Kendall-Taylor 2012). Some parties however are deemed illegal, wholly banned and actively suppressed (Popjanevski 2006). Neither of the opposition parties possesses enough support or power to pose a significant threat in

the election process. Furthermore, private media is largely suppressed, with the majority of publications being in support of the current administration. This is telling of the credibility and reputation of the constitution of Kazakhstan, which nominally protects private media — nominally.

Kazakhstan’s leadership under President Nazarbayev has been remarkably effective in stabilizing the country. It has endured less attacks and Nazarbayev has done well to smear his opponents as “gangsters and criminals” (Wynne 2004). He has displayed his effectiveness in maintaining a steady economy, while appeasing both his Russia, American, and Chinese counterparts, in what has been deemed a “multi-vector foreign policy” (Sambanis).

Kazakhstan has made many strides with regards to political reform, but it has also been guilty of backpedaling (Oka 2009). Nonetheless, with careful consideration of the diverse forces forming the political fabric of Kazakhstan, there is reason to believe that its successes are equally worthy of attention as its shortcomings. Key points must be considered in order to clearly understand why the country’s progress towards democracy has lagged and been the subject of criticism. Since Kazakhstan is a newly independent republic, it must be taken into consideration that comparing its degree of ethnic inclusion may not be as sophisticated as provisions for minority rights in western liberal democracies, however imperfect they may be.

In context, compared to its neighbors, especially Uzbekistan, it has undoubtedly surpassed them in terms of stability and progress (Rezvani 2008). Research indicates unprecedented civic activism and voter turn-out rates in Kazakhstan’s presidential elections. That being said, opposition parties are largely disenfranchised and discouraged

from participating in the political process, often echoing accusations of fraudulent elections (Fearon et al 2003). In this regard, Kazakhstan's leadership has been able to deploy the rentier mechanism by which political reform is substituted with public services funded by oil-wealth. The immense importance of the role played by oil in shaping the political dynamic of Kazakhstan can thus not be ignored, because it the source of much of the tension that exists between the various domestic forces competing for power and foreign political forces influencing Kazakhstan's political stability.

The persistence of the authoritarian model of governance in Kazakhstan is arguably a product of President Nazarbayev's initiative to secure his power for life. Both houses of the parliament voted to abolish his executive term limit, thus sidestepping the 2017 presidential election – an exception made only for Nazarbayev. Future leaders would have to abide by the original two-term limit. Despite the face of modern Kazakhstan, this is largely considered another step away from democracy. Furthermore it underscores the succession crisis faced in the country. How can Nazarbayev's reputation as stabilizer, modernizer and developer be reconciled with his tainted legacy of crackdowns, corruption scandals and cult-like rule? In reality it cannot, but the presence of foreign powers in the region, as well as the early stages of political development within which Kazakhstan currently finds itself in a post-Soviet world, should make critics of Nazarbayev more considerate of the political dynamic. There is reason to believe that while Kazakhstan has been characterized by relative stability, Nazarbayev's policies might incite terror and conflict in the long run, as is evidenced by sporadic cases of violence today. The presence of a robust, internationally supported security apparatus has perpetuated political underdevelopment, but the hand played by the West, in its

oxymoronic mission of simultaneously promoting security and democracy, cannot be overlooked. Therefore another likely scenario might trace Kazakhstan's reluctance towards democracy to the stubbornness on the part of both domestic political elites and global powers, like Russia, Europe, China & the US. Furthermore, how can the promotion of democracy and a robust security initiative be reconciled if the strategy is contradictory and counterintuitive? It appears that prospects for democracy are threatened equally by Nazarbayev's grip on power as much as by foreign meddling and terrorism, together. From this regard, Nazarbayev appears to be more of a pragmatic ruler, who compared to his peers, performed effectively in ensuring Kazakhstan's development and stability. This is an impressive feat as it was accomplished in the face of competing forces for power. It suggests that Nazarbayev's power-hunger might have more to do with resisting subjugation to foreign powers, which might be detrimental to Kazakhstan as a whole, than it does with his own self. Seeing that foreign powers do in fact benefit from the persistence of authoritarianism, it appears that promoting democracy is not in their best interests, which raises the question of legitimacy of both the West's double standard as well as the institution of democracy itself. Both Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs have viewed Nazarbayev as the harbinger of Kazakhstan's sovereignty, which has propped him up politically. Perhaps if foreign powers exercised less coercion over the region, democratic movements might be more possible, reducing the allure of both authoritarianism and radicalism. Equally if Kazakhstan exhibited democratic institutions like term limits, free speech, political competitiveness, fair elections and civil liberties wholly, the country might be less imbalanced politically, socially and economically. More importantly, it might be less subservient to foreign pressures because in democracy

a leader draws legitimacy from his constituents, not by accommodating foreign powers, as exhibited in Kyrgyzstan following the civil war and the institution of democracy. In revealing the complicity of the US, leader of the democratic world, in helping authoritarians, raises questions about the West's intention, but also about the nature of democracy itself. It might be a stretch to suggest that democracy is either slipping or unattained in the US even. Authoritarianism is not entirely absent from American history therefore allying with authoritarians is not completely surprising, whether it is cooperating with authoritarian governments of Russia or Kazakhstan.

Tensions in Kazakhstan's domestic politics—whether they are between members of the political elite, or between the political elite and the mass—have often been the subject of exploitation by global powers, using the fragility of the region to their own advantage. This leads us directly to the next variable.

In the realm of foreign politics, Kazakhstan is a key player in “The New Great Game” (Oka 2004). Russia is arguably the greatest threat to Kazakhstan's political stability. Managing the longest contiguous border in the world, Kazakhstan's leadership perpetually fends itself against the threat of Russian imposition (Country Reports 2015). However the US has also played an influential role in this regard. As global hegemonies play tug-o-war over the region, it becomes more apparent that its foreign relations share a negative relationship with Kazakhstan's political stability.

Statements made by Vladimir Putin at the Selinger Youth Camp in 2014 reveal Kazakhstan's vulnerability to Russian domination, especially with a significant Russian population living in mainly Northern Kazakhstan. The Georgian and Ukrainian crises, and Russia's post-soviet neo-imperialism tradition, have done nothing to mitigate Kazakh

fears of Russian influence (Nyussupova 2011). The threat of Russian separatism emanates from the Northern Kazakhstan Province (De Waal 2007). For this reason, Nazarbayev moved the capital of Kazakhstan from Almaty to Astana, which is along the Northern border, closer to Russia (Oka 2004). An act of defiance against Russian hegemony, Nazarbayev further proved himself a prolific player in the great game.

Russia's proximity to Kazakhstan has served as somewhat of a double-edged sword. Despite the constant fear of Russian imposition, President Nazarbayev has utilized his close relationship with Russia as a means of resisting western influence, namely pressure from the US for democratic reform. Nazarbayev has lifted term limits on executive leadership and a lack of political development prevents power sharing and encourages corruption. In another sense however this close relationship with Russia is a way of preserving both Kazakhstan's national sovereignty in the face of what is perceived to be western imperialism. Not only does it help to keep Nazarbayev in power, it prevents the West from being the arbiter of the East. Equally, Nazarbayev's flirtatious relationship with Russia can be viewed as an attempt to solidify his rule and establish a so-called pro-Russian nationalist dictatorship for life. Criticism of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a multinational means of preserving autocracy in the region echoes this sentiment.

On the other end of the foreign political dynamic rests Kazakhstan's intimate economic relationship with the US. Nonetheless, by associating demands for democracy with neocolonialism, Nazarbayev has legitimized his ideology. By balancing the priorities autonomy, growth and stability, he has solidified what has been coined as his "multi-vector-foreign policy" (De Waal 2007). That he has maintained Kazakhstan's



independence, autonomy, and economic progress, has further legitimized his position. But Russian hegemony is nothing new to the Central Asian giant; as the stains of Imperial Russia surely remain engrained in the memories of Kazakhs (Karin et al 2002). But the demise of the USSR has essentially opened a vacuum of power it could be argued. The world, having transitioned from a bipolar to a unipolar political dynamic, with the US essentially having grip on global power, has essentially allowed the US to reign in on the region's vulnerability and economic appeal.

Like its eastern counterparts, the West, namely the US, has simultaneously played an inconsistent role in the region; often indirectly propping up extremists, neglecting delayed reforms, and dipping their hands in scandalous oil politics. Despite pro-democratic rhetoric, it seems neither of the global hegemonies, Russia, China nor the US, are genuinely committed to a "democratic process" in Kazakhstan. This factor is perhaps the most overlooked in current literature on political stability in Central Asia (Oka 2004).

With regards to its regional and local allies, Kazakhstan has maintained a positive relationship for the most part. The greatest threat to its stability comes from its relationship with the global powers of Russia, China, the US and the EU, who have engaged in double-dealings, policy inconsistency and moral negligence. Kazakhstan enjoys a positive reputation among international organizations, especially the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, or SCO, of which it was a founding member (Ulasiuk 2013). Nonetheless, it faces continued scrutiny over the process of its elections and accounts of corruption various international organizations, despite being an active member of the U.N (Wimmer et al 2009).

The SCO however has played a more direct role in the region. On one hand, it has

served a stabilizing force, enabling coordinated security efforts, economic fluidity and immigration. Furthermore, it has counterbalanced European and American influence in the region, which may or may not serve the overall security interests of the region. But considering sovereignty as a crucial variable for stability, it would appear that the SCO serves this purpose effectively. On the other hand, the SCO has strengthened the grasp of autocratic regimes, raising the question as to whether international organizations promote or discourage democratization. Equally such criticism may be premature considering the region is still newly independent & the republics newly formed.

In 2008, Russia annexed South Ossetia from Georgia, prompting international ridicule and fears of a reemerging Cold War. When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014, following with the annexation of Crimea and Abkhazia, these fears seemed almost perfectly vindicated. While such aggression by Russia is unsurprisingly of alarm to the international community and particularly the West, the actions themselves must be of little surprise, that is – if one is to look through the lens of Moscow’s leadership. Expanding NATO global operations as well as increased US military involvement in the Middle East, prompted fears of a Western encroachment on Russia’s sphere of influence. From this angle, it might be less difficult to grasp the motives for Russia’s behavior in the past five years.

This segment of the research is of particular importance as I argue later in the paper, it is the most crucial variable in the relationship with political stability. The threat of Islamic fundamentalism is perhaps the greatest security issue for Kazakhstan. The threat of Russian separatism, though very real, especially following the Georgian and

Ukrainian crises, has been thus far contained. In this section I demonstrate how the security and military condition of Kazakhstan has made it less stable.

National security poses a very unique challenge for Kazakhstan. However Kazakhstan has been essentially able to mitigate the threat relative to its neighbors. The threat is both foreign and domestic, with large swaths of ideological fanaticism being imported from abroad, mainly from Saudi Arabia in the Middle East, in the form of Wahhabism (Kleveman 2003). Kazakhstan has remained stable despite the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia. Repressive retaliation by Central Asian governments has only aggravated the situation. Various influential terrorist and extremist networks operate in the region, such as the Hizb-ut-Tahrir, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Islamic Jihad Union, Soldiers of the Caliphate, and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (Edelbay 2012). There also exists a threat from Uyghur separatist groups within Kazakhstan as well as a threat from external sources of radicalization emanating primarily from the Middle East (De Waal 2007). These forces altogether represent obstacles to Kazakhstan's national security, which is evidently a significant factor of consideration in the political stability of Kazakhstan. They suggest another reason why democratic reform has lagged. Furthermore, they focus attention on the authoritarian nature of the regime, and the relationship of that authoritarianism with the rise of dissenting groups of radical Islamic persuasion. On the other hand, the existence of these extremist networks is perhaps another reason why Nazarbayev has been able to maintain power—by portraying himself as a champion of the cause against terrorism, he has garnered immense support from the U.S. and has replaced Uzbekistan as Central Asia's primary force against Islamic fundamentalism (Franke et al 2009). These forces also

underscore the immense responsibility bestowed on the government of Kazakhstan in balancing the agendas of all power players and potential threats to Kazakh stability and autonomy. Since the inception of the post 9/11 era, and the ensuing “War on Terror” as led by the US, there has been little success in mitigating the overall threat of terrorism in the region, further underscoring the need for reconsidering policy measures (Country Reports 2015).

It becomes uniquely difficult to isolate the security threat from the other variables. There have been instances in which groups like the IMU have engaged with global hegemonies directly and indirectly (Oka 2004). If this is true, it could be argued that religious radicalism is exploited by foreign powers as means of destabilization.

In sum, there is a negative relationship between the security conditions of Kazakhstan and its overall political stability. Despite its leader’s attempts to mitigate the threat compared to his neighbors, especially Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the threat remains. Since 2011, there has yet to be an attack (Markedonov & Sergey 2009). Furthermore, Kazakhstan’s military has been relatively dormant in terms of full-fledged combat. This is a signal of its relative stability compared to its Central Asian neighbors.

Kazakhstan’s political structure is developed but constitutional provisions are mainly nominal, and power is centralized economically and politically. The press enjoys relative freedom, but this is counterbalanced by clan based politics, a dominant ruling party, and questionably fake elections. Still, Kazakhstan unlike its Caspian counterpart experienced no war or coup, no ethnic cleansing, or ethnic tension since the dissolution of the USSR, amidst rampant territorial conflict in Central Asia. The APK enables the authoritarian system to endure longer and be more stable by providing more

representation for minorities. This results in ethnic harmony because ethnic minorities are able to preserve language and identity while gaining a proportionate number of seats in the legislature. Currently there is no active ethnic conflict, tension or movement in Kazakhstan, although every now and then demonstrators are arrested for protesting one party rule. Kazakhstan enjoys more autonomy due to its accountability at home. While it is influenced by Russia, this influence is not as forceful as it is in Azerbaijan. Turkey also heavily influences Azerbaijan. This is possible, I argue mainly because it is less politically developed. This leads to more ethnic conflict and renders the state vulnerable to pressures from foreign powers. It appears that the political culture of Kazakhstan made a cognitive choice to be more tolerant. While it is far from perfect, these qualities render Kazakhstan's future more promising than its neighbors. While Azerbaijan could have used oil as a means of stability, the state reacted to the dissolution of the USSR desperately and centralized far too much power at expense of ethnic minority rights. Ethnic equality gives leverage to Kazakhstan to depend on accountability at home (albeit imperfect) instead of arbitrary foreign lobbies & ethnocentric authoritarianism.

Immediately after the collapse of Soviet Union, Kazakhstan conducted one of the most effective reforms among the countries of the current Commonwealth of Independent States. This included price liberalization, reductions in trade distortions, privatization of small and medium-sized enterprises, and improvements in budget and treasury processes. This resulted in rapid economic growth (Jalles 2011).

In Kazakhstan there is a connection between the autocratic regime, rentierism, and "pre- and post-Soviet habits and legacies". Post-communist methods of control over society at large, the restriction of basic political rights, are still entrenched deeply,

because of the financial ‘benefits’ of the rentier system in a resource curse state but also the constructs of political, & social disenfranchisement (Franke et al 2009).

Unlike the majority of post-communist states, Kazakhstan achieved independence rather smoothly following the collapse of the Soviet Union. It has often been described as an ‘accidental country’ (Mateeva 1997). The formation of the first independent Republic of Kazakhstan occurred without any interruptions and general split with the incumbent Soviet government. The first secretary of the Kazakh Communist Party, Nursultan Nazarbayev, was immediately elected – or reinstated rather – practically automatically, as the first President of the Republic of Kazakhstan in December 1991 remains in power today. Many members of the staff of the Central Committee of the KCP in 1991 have also remained in positions of power. This is *neo-Communism. The new USSR* if you will (Franke et al 2009).

Initially Kazakhstan could be seen as a parliamentary democracy based on its first constitution, but this was interrupted by the suspension of democratic, parliamentary reforms. The 1990s saw a regression to authoritarianism. “For the most part, this failed transition has been internationally tolerated for economic reasons” (Franke et al 2009). The autocratic structure provided a stable political environment, necessary to attract foreign investment. The Kazakh elite quickly learned that liberal democracies like the US & those in Europe were superficial in their insistence on human rights and democracy, since no sanctions against the state were taken (Kendall-Taylor 2012).

In 1995, significant changes were made to constitution rendering Kazakhstan a full fledged presidential autocracy. All authority of the state rests with the president, who is not accountable to any legitimate electorate or authority. Impeachment is possible

through but not likely. The term of the government ends coincides with the president. He can dismiss or appoint a new government at his discretion, as he pleases, demonstrating the weakness of the opposition and the lack of a separation of powers. The parliament exhibits two chambers and is a directly elected body. But it has no authority to challenge the president's authority. Nazarbayev and his political party have governed without any democratic checks, hence the absence of a separation of powers & checks & balances. Not a single opposition party member occupies a seat in parliament. The legislative branch—the parliament and the local legislatures—are unable to challenge his authority. Loyal mayors, governors and governmental elites have secured power. Political development has many dimensions, so while Kazakhstan & Azerbaijan are distinct in their institutional accommodations for ethnic minorities, they share a similar trend of deeply entrenched authoritarianism.

Surrounding Nazarbayev exists a network of power comprising of his family and a smaller group of political allies. Nazarbayev's elder daughter essentially controls the Kazakh media. The president's younger daughter controls the construction, water and gas industries. Nazarbayev's former son-in-law controls the food industry, security, taxation (as head of Almaty's Taxation department) and the position of deputy foreign minister, ambassador to Austria and to the OSCE. Nazarbayev's new son in law has been appointed head of energy, dealing with oil, which is the most influential sector. Nazarbayev has no sons, thus his daughters and sons-in-law shape the structures around him. The most influential and wealthiest women in Kazakhstan are the first lady, and her two daughters. This family network creates a neo-patrimonial system based on trust, kinship & interests (Franke et al 2009)

Like The Sopranos™, the Kazakh regime and its inner-circle is referred to a “the Family”. Approval of political action is at the discretion of ‘the Family’. This method of control is a means of securing loyalty, perpetuating patronage and clientelism. Despite its diversity, Kazakhstan exhibits a “pyramid of elites”, which is, furthermore, embodied by a robust ethnocentric tradition (Franke et al 2009). At the top sits the president and his family and his most immediate ‘clientele’, “followed by the administrative tier”, whose jobs are mainly occupied by Kazakhs instead of Russians. And yet amidst this ethnocentrism favoritism Kazakh elites are not monolithic and often exhibit tensions and competition amongst each other. Personal interests take precedence, rendering policy ineffective and absent (Mateeva 1997).

The party system in Kazakhstan is weak and scattered; it is personalistic and is lacks a real mechanism for application of platforms. There is no party system with oppositional structures, similar to those found in other post-communist states. Kazakh opposition parties are subject to permanent repression, rendering programs and policy obsolete & futile. Attempts have been made to create competition among elites during the parliamentary elections of 2004 and 2007, as well as the presidential election of 2005, which were considered by observers as unfree and unfair, but there remains no alternative to the Nazarbayev’s rule & whatever direction is successor goes (Franke et al 2009).

The political elite in Kazakhstan can be grouped into two categories. On one side, there exists the traditional order of the horde, which depends on genealogical seniority and size manifested as clan based politics. On the other hand is a strongly entrenched and developed system, which are basically the remnants of the Communist Party, the former USSR’s economic structures and emerging business elites. These so-called business clans



have become institutionalized as personalized parties and oligarchic groups (Franke et al 2009).

### Ethnic Inclusion & Harmony

In Kazakhstan, this accommodation exists via the establishment and continued involvement and development of the People's Assembly of Kazakhstan or APK.

Prominent ethnic groups include Uzbeks, Tatars, Uighurs, Chechens, Koreans, Turks, Azerbaijanis and Germans (Nyussupova 2011). Kazakhs make up 65%, Russians 21.5%, Uzbeks 3%, Ukrainians 1.8%, Uyghurs 1.4%, Tatars 1.2% & Germans 1.1%. There are many others, as Kazakhstan boasts 120 various ethnic groups, but their numbers are drastically smaller.

It is important to note that the population of Russians is the second largest. Before independence, Kazakhstan's own national ethnic group, the Kazakhs, comprised less than 40% of the total population. During this time Russian was more widely spoken. Following independence however, Kazakh was nationalized as the official language. Furthermore, quite recently, Kazakh's became the official ethnic majority within their own national boundaries for the first time in their history (13).

To highlight the significance of demography, the presence of Uzbeks in southern Kazakhstan provide insight into the assertion that modern Central Asia is an artificial creation traced back to the initial "cutting up" of the region by USSR leaders. It is likely that the environment and conditions created by these "partitions" created much of the imbalance and instability in the region today. Despite being Uzbek by ethnicity, Kazakh Uzbeks are loyal to the soil in which they have inhabited for centuries. That ethnic

irredentism really highlights the role of the New Great Game in determining the overall demographic structure and dynamic of Kazakhstan, and Central Asia altogether (Oka 2009). Uzbeks are currently satisfied with their political condition in Kazakhstan no and are unlikely to mobilize against the state or make nationalist demands.

Relative to his Central Asian neighbors, President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan has witnessed under his rule a relatively stable and harmonious interethnic relationship in his country. This is most likely attributed to Kazakhstan's overall moderate approach to policy, which sees a balancing of foreign, domestic, and minority interests, contrary to Ilham Aliyev's cult-like rule in Azerbaijan.

Nazarbayev rules with more pragmatism. Kazakhstan has witnessed no significant episodes of violent deteriorations of society.

More importantly perhaps, is how Nazarbayev's vision of stability and harmony expressed itself domestically. Through the establishment of the People's Assembly of Kazakhstan in 1995, ethnic minorities are represented in this legislative body, which is intended to protect, preserve and celebrate their rights as well as the ethnic pluralism, which defines Kazakhstan. The APK (Assembly of People of Kazakhstan) consists of 384 representatives of all ethnic groups in the state (Jones 2010). The APK elects nine members to the Majlis; Kazakhstan's lower-chamber of Parliament. Finally, all laws passed by the legislature must meet a certain criteria ensuring ethnic harmony, a significant check on executive power protecting ethnic minorities. Everything is at the discretion of the President – yet these provisions are wholly absent in Azerbaijan implying they do in fact limit the executive's power over minorities.

Kazakhstan has successfully employed national efforts to promote cultural tolerance and cohesiveness through its making of the Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan. National efforts to promote cultural/ethnic tolerance include: insuring each ethnic group has a voice within the government through policies, organizations, assemblies etc., granting all minorities equal rights and representation within the country, not using ethnicity as a tool for political mobilization but instead creating a “national identity” for everyone to be apart of equally (one that does not have to do with ethnic background at all but rather being a citizen of the said country), creating equal opportunities in the business realm for all ethnic groups, instilling strict laws against ethnic discrimination even down to ethnic slurs, as well as promoting peace through cultural events, parades, and the alike. The APK exemplifies directly national efforts in promoting cultural/ethnic tolerance and cohesiveness. Contrarily Azerbaijan exhibits paranoia towards the idea of political representation of minorities as this threatens the ethnocentric character of the incumbent regime. It must be noted that the previous regime had in place proportionate rule in government. This was removed by the current administration.

It has become evident that Kazakhstan’s politicians are aware of the need for inter-ethnic accord, in order to maintain political stability. Institutionally, Kazakhstan’s laws prevented the formation of political parties along ethnic lines; instead, in 1995 – by order of executive decree, President Nursultan Nazarbayev established the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan in March 1995, a legislative and presidential consultative body, largely touted by Kazakh officials as a representation of the nation’s progressive policies.

Ultimately though, the APK has served mainly as a means for controlling ethnic minorities and securing a national Kazakh identity. This was underscored by the APK’s

name-change, which was meant to signify its purpose as a unifying project. In other words, while the mission is to encourage harmony between ethnicities; the more underlying purpose is the stabilization of society under a unifying Kazakh identity. While ethnicities are preserved, minorities are simultaneously proud of their Kazakh nationality. They are not mutually exclusive in Kazakhstan.

The main objectives of the APK include the preservation of inter-ethnic harmony and political stability, developing new mechanisms for fostering healthy relations between various ethnicities and nationalities within the state; to promote spiritual and cultural enrichment; development and equality. Despite its ambiguity, and its close ties to the executive branch, considering it was the APK, which proposed extending Nazarbayev's term, the APK enjoys a level of autonomy and influence on legislative matters, but a new decree centralizing the aim of the APK around Kazakhstani identity might raise some eyebrows (Jones 2010). The APK's overarching goal is to essentially supervise ethnic groups and their leaders so as to make sure inter-ethnic harmony preserves Kazakhstan's stability. The APK has been generally used to portray Kazakhstan's image as an inter-ethnic paradise.

The Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan has generated many benefits for both Kazakh society as well as its political infrastructure. Since its creation over two decades ago, The APK has enabled minority ethnic groups the ability for representation, protection and preservation, a guarantee that does not exist not only in developing states, but in even some of the most developed states in the world experiencing minority and ethnic tensions today.

While many have criticized and simplified the APK has an extension of President

Nazarbayev's arm into political affairs, seeing as he is the official Chairman of the institution, these criticisms are premature and lack a clear objective understanding of the regional landscape and history. This isn't to suggest that Kazakhstan is a democratic paradise, on the contrary. Kazakhstan exhibits significant shortcomings in press freedom, political opposition, and economic competition. Furthermore, its tremendous oil wealth, dubbed the resource curse, has often paralyzed the process of modernization. Still, the extent of ethnic inclusion, representation and national unity are unprecedentedly higher in Kazakhstan than any other Central Asian state (Oka 2009). As demonstrated in the research, ethnic conflict was rampant in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. A lack of representation and guaranteed protection for minorities, as well as a robust mechanism for preserving ethnic traditions, was accompanied by violent episodes between ethnic groups. In Azerbaijan, ethnic minorities are suppressed and institutions like the APK in Kazakhstan are absent. There are no constitutional provisions that protect minorities like Uzbeks, Tajiks, Ukrainians, Russians, Germans, Kurds, Armenians, etc.

The mere fact that the APK has legislative authority, representation and leverage as well as the presence of explicit constitutional provisions that protect ethnic minorities both underscore the distinct degree of internal political development in Kazakhstan (Jones 2010) This cannot be easily dismissed as a product of its resource abundance relative to its neighbors, considering, even other post-Soviet states endowed with oil, like Azerbaijan, are substantially more discriminatory towards ethnic minorities. Oil itself has neither stifled nor promoted political development to coincide with economic development. Rather, it has existed as a mere backdrop feature, while ethnic minorities' fates remain largely in the political landscape and culture of the host nation. That is why

in Kazakhstan, cultural and religious tolerance together have resulted in a less contentious atmosphere, the necessary precondition for ethnic inclusion and institutional development in that regard.

The most important element of this research is the consideration of the regional implications as well as the theoretical implications. This research does not suggest that Kazakhstan is in any way an advanced democratic state, but rather, that it has made significant and commendable strides to protect its ethnic minorities which have in most other cases suffered tremendous discrimination, violence and destitution. Ethnic minorities in Kazakhstan contrarily, have access to social, political and economic capital to advance their ethnic groups in society, protecting their heritage's past and future (Oka 2004).

Furthermore other research on the region vindicates these assertions as Kazakhstan has exhibited political stability and interethnic harmony since the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. This has not been the case for other Central Asian & Post-Soviet States, where ethnic conflict and exclusion are simultaneously prevalent. Even where there is abundant oil, or the lack thereof - when there are ongoing wars, or the lack thereof - ethnic conflict exists wherever there is an absence of political institutions designed to accommodate and advance their needs.

Even in the US and in most European countries like Germany, Northern Ireland and Denmark, there are various institutions and accommodations designed to integrate minorities into society and politics. The EPR data indicates that in situations where such accommodations are made, ethnic conflict is less likely to occur. Contrarily, the absence of institutional provisions meant to protect and integrate ethnic minorities beyond mere

cultural tolerance will result in conflict.

Equally said is the need for more improvement for political development and minority protection in Kazakhstan, given that most provisions are often nominal, at the discretion of the Chairman and President, Nazarbayev. Furthermore, the low level of democracy in Kazakhstan renders even the most genuine of efforts to accommodate minority groups as politicized interests. The APK itself is limited in that it can likely be abolished or ignored at the discretion of Nazarbayev given the two branches clash (Tussupova 2010). As with most cases in Kazakhstan, the executive branch tends to overpower the others. Kazakhstan boasts of a many ethnic minorities, but it appears that granting the APK only 9 seats in parliament or the Majlis, is disproportionate to their population. Such improvements could further legitimize the APK as an institution of minority protection and ethnic harmony. Furthermore, Kazakhstan must work to integrate ethnic minorities into all facets of Kazakh society, include the economy. Limits on free press and political opposition also stifle the representative potential of the APK (Jones 2010).

Still it is worth noting that its mere existence is a stride towards democracy. As demonstrated, in places around the world where ethnic groups are excluded and underrepresented, there is higher chance that conflict might spur (Jones 2010).

## AZERBAIJAN

### Political Structure

Azerbaijan's constitution nominally ensures human rights and freedoms and denotes its democratic institutions. This facade reveals the government's terrible performance in the war over Nagorno-Karabakh and its incompetence. Its democratic process came to an abrupt halt in June 1993, when a coup d'état brought former Politburo member and KGB general Heydar Aliyev to power (Heinrich 2010).

In 1995, a new constitution was drafted. This solidified a strong executive branch, with wide-ranging powers. The constitutional amendments of 2002 entitled Aliyev's son as the heir, and when Heydar Aliyev died in 2003 his son Ilham immediately replaced him. More constitutional amendments in 2009 further strengthened the president's grip on power by abolishing executive term limits (Heinrich 2010). This has essentially transpired into a form of monarchy or what has been referred to as neo-Sultanism (Clifton et 2005).

The 1995 constitution guarantees an independent legislative branch. The parliament or Majlis consisted of 125 members elected through a mixed majority proportional electoral system in 1995. Parliamentary elections occurred every five years, but the constitutional amendments of 2002 ended proportional representation. This threatened minority rights. Ilham Aliyev's ruling faction is New Azerbaijan Party (NAP). According to the OSCE and international election observers, neither election has been free nor fair (38).

Unlike Kazakhstan, the ruling regime in Azerbaijan is rooted in a national



movement of independence. Azerbaijan gained independence in 1991 under the rule of the former Soviet leadership, which was weakened by the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh resulting in the opposition's victory in 1992 (Kendall-Taylor 2012). The chairman of the People's Front, Abulfaz Elchibei, was elected new President of the Republic in 1992. But the Karabakh conflict and worsening economic conditions, internal party competitiveness, and interethnic tensions across the country between Azerbaijanis and Armenians, Lezgins & Talysh, resulted in a military coup d'état and Elchibei resigned.

Even though a former opposition member led Azerbaijan, unlike Kazakhstan, he had no realistic chance to fully implement the democratization of Azerbaijan it had commenced. The coup introduced the former head of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev to power in 1993. He established a hardline, dynastic authoritarian system, based on regional groups of elites. Similarly to Kazakhstan, this is a continuation of the clan-based legacy of pre-Soviet times. It had been established initially by Aliyev during his rule during the Soviet era and was reestablished in independent Azerbaijan.

As in Kazakhstan, there is no sustainable democratic alternative to the ruling elites in Azerbaijan. Weak civil society is also observed in Kazakhstan.

Quantitative analysis demonstrates that oil-rich leaders can manipulate pre-electoral fiscal policies to win over the electorate and weaken political rivals, but that this isn't as significant as the government's tendency towards ethnic exclusivism. This finding has important policy implications, which suggests that not only efforts to strengthen a country's electoral institutions may be a fruitful path for promoting democracy in many petroleum-rich countries, but also the establishment of ethnically

inclusive legislative apparatuses meant to proportionately represent and protect minorities, especially those at risk.

A coup in Azerbaijan and the presence of active terrorist groups & national liberation movements amidst pogroms and war against Armenians is hardly an indication of the service oil abundance has done to manipulate elections & render regimes more durable.

Azerbaijan has a population of approximately 8 million people, 91% of which are ethnic Azeris. The main ethnic minorities are Lezgins (178,000 or 2.2 %), Russians (141,700 or 1.8%), Talysh (76,800 or 1%), Avars (50,900 or 0.6%), Turks-Meskhetians (43,400 or 0.5%), Tatars (30 thousand or 0.4% ), Ukrainians (2900 or 0.4%), Georgians (14,900 or 0.2%), Kurds (13,100 or 0.2%), Tats (10,900 or 0.1%), and Jews (8,900 or 0.1%, which are divided into European (Ashkenazi), Mountainous and Georgian Jews) (Arslan et al).

Since the majority of Azerbaijan is 90% ethnically Azeri, the rather small minority is that much more vulnerable to nationalism xenophobia and ethnocentrism, prompting an urgent need for measures that translate into proportional political representation, civic and linguistic rights all of which are absent from the constitution and from the national parliament (48). The absence of which have produced negative results for ethnic minorities. Kazakhstan is more diverse, but even Turkmenistan, which is oil rich and homogenous, does not exhibit any distinct instability. Turkmenistan is a Central Asian state also with a Soviet & Islamic history.

Early on in Azerbaijan's independence, security threats largely determined its

foreign policy trajectory, which has been shaped mainly around the priority of oil revenue. The collapse of the USSR caused an economic crisis in Azerbaijan amidst a vacuum of political power. Azerbaijan's foreign policy is also multi-vector, because it is characterized by a diplomatic approach of appeasing its various neighbors such as Iran, Turkey & Russia while balancing its own national interests, namely oil. The legal status of the Caspian Sea as well as the Nagorno-Karabakh War together set the course of Azerbaijani foreign policy since its independence.

Unlike Kazakhstan however Azerbaijan is more vulnerable to foreign pressure. This is evidenced by the boldness of Kazakhstan's leadership. By shifting the capital city from Almaty to Astana, which is closer to Russia, Kazakhstan made it clear that secession was not an option, thereby demonstrating a degree of national self-determination and autonomy. I argue this is in part due to the accountability Nazarbayev enjoys at home, especially among minorities who could otherwise pose a problem.

Russia officially opposed any Armenian territorial claims to Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) and considered them a threat to the already teetering Caucasus. In response to a riot against Armenian demands, the USSR sent troops to Baku in 1990. This fomented pro-independence and anti-Russian sentiments among Azeris and largely impacted the future direction of the foreign and domestic policies of Azerbaijan.

Ayaz Mutalibov became the first president of the independent Republic of Azerbaijan when Azerbaijan declared its independence on October 18, 1991. His priority was maintaining strategic cooperation with Iran and Russia but the military defeats in Karabakh destabilized and delegitimized his regime. After the Khodjaly massacre in

1992, a presidential election was held in June and the Azerbaijan Popular Front leader, Abulfaz Elchibey, won (Ipek 2009).

He followed an anti-Russian strategy due to their rigid demands and instead adopted pan-Turkism as the ideology of his party platform. In response Russia began siding with Armenia, resulting in Azeri setbacks. Elchibey had also set his country on a pro-Western course in foreign policy. Elchibey's prioritized negotiations with Western oil companies and made it clear to all foreign investors that mutually beneficial deals would be guaranteed. Russia was totally excluded from contracts that would be established with the West. Meanwhile the Armenian community in the US lobbied for American support. In April 1992, the US Congress passed the "Freedom Support Act" which allocated assistance to former Soviet republics transitioning towards democracy and market economy, but one clause in the Freedom Support Act restricted the US government's assistance to Azerbaijan. This posed an obstacle for Azerbaijan's efforts to earn American assistance in strengthening its economy and national security (50).

Simultaneously, the Talish minority in the southern town of Lenkoran started an upheaval. The Lezgin minority, inhabiting the North, was also mobilizing. Azerbaijan was in chaos and threatened to collapse into a various regional districts united against the central authorities in Baku. The new president Aliyev, succeeded in squashing these rebellions (50).

Beyond homogeneity and secession as alternative explanations for Azerbaijani ethnocentrism, there lies the dilemma of foreign policy for Azerbaijan, which largely influences, shapes and determines the trajectory of the state. Since the beginnings of

Russian imperialism, through Soviet rule, Turkish and Iranian influence, Azerbaijan has been at the whims of the foreign powers. Each of these powers harbors their own interests, which often contrary to the interests of the region at large. While leaders like Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan have managed this type of pressure by world powers through a multi-vector policy approach that places Kazakhstan's stability as its priority, Azerbaijani leadership has reacted contrarily. President Ilham Aliyev, and his predecessors have sought to reap the benefits of such pressures, instead of balancing them with the grievances of Azerbaijanis, minorities included. This has resulted in tensions between the state and its minorities, as well as more moderate Azerbaijanis. Furthermore, it illuminates the vulnerability of Azerbaijan to foreign powers, and sheds further light on the relationship between authoritarianism, ethnocentrism and imperialism.

### Ethnic Exclusion & Conflict in Azerbaijan

In stark contrast, on the other side of the Caspian Sea, is the case of Azerbaijan. There are four major cases of ethnic conflict in Azerbaijan, including tensions with Armenians, Kurds, Lezgins and Talysh. A 2009 census reveals ethnic minorities in Azerbaijan, represent 8.9% of the population, including Lezgin (the largest minority group, making up 2.0% of the population), Russian (1.3%) and others, such as the Talysh making up 1.5%. The Armenian population of Azerbaijan in the 1900s was 12% it is now 1.5% (Kendall-Taylor 2012).

Azerbaijan's political structure is mainly nominal and very centralized with little to no press freedom. Private and public goods are managed and owned by a family run state. This type of underdevelopment coincides with a nominal constitution and fake

elections. Azerbaijan's foreign policy against Armenia eventually resulted in a coup d'état as a response to the war in Artsakh. Violent ethnic cleansing campaigns and decapitation strikes against the Armenian minority would ensue. Currently there are no provisions to protect and preserve the rights, representation, languages and identities of the Lezgin, Talysh, Armenian, and Kurds (Kendall-Taylor 2012).

Azerbaijan's transition, initially aimed at democracy building, was not completed and has led to the installation and a formation of a new type of autocracy. The regime type in Azerbaijan can be described as "sultanistic semi-authoritarianism" (Guliyev 2005). Interestingly, "sultanistic semi-authoritarianism" commenced in 1993 when Heydar Aliyev buried the second democratic experiment in Azerbaijani history. There are opposition parties, civil society organizations, and unfree press outlets in Azerbaijan, which are allowed to function to the extent that they do not menace the regime's existence (Meissner 2011).

Surprisingly, some of the post-Soviet states have a stable and prevalent tendency to become even more undemocratic (take, for instance, Uzbekistan or, even worse, Turkmenistan). In these cases, non-democracy tends to become institutionalized, undermining the very prospects of successful and complete transition and further consolidation (Mateeva 1997). This is particularly true with the region that is often geographically identified as Central Asia and the Caucasus. However, this is not a sub-regional peculiarity; all states of the post-Soviet world demonstrate a clear variance in transition outcomes and all still have to do a lot to become democracies and not merely façade democracies. Azerbaijan represents a perfect case of a political regime that has fallen into the gray zone of political uncertainty and ambiguity.

It is evident that institutionalized corruption and nepotism, which are peculiar traits of a “sultanistic” type of political regime, are present in Azerbaijan. Family, cronies, clans, and patronage are more influential social constructions than formal legal institutions. The Academy of Public Administration under the president of the Azerbaijan Republic in Baku, for instance, is not understood as a higher education institution that operates under the institution of presidency. On the contrary, it is perceived by the university administration and professorship as a service for training a younger generation of “*Aliyevphils*” (Guliyev 2005).

Before Stalin, politics in the USSR encouraged cultural diversity and ethnic identity. Minority ethnic groups enjoyed their own schools and published multiple magazines and editorials. This was operated by the state. Ethnic inclusion went as far as creating alphabets for ethnic groups without written languages. Everything changed when Stalin came to power. Policy towards ethnic groups would be fundamentally transformed forever (Gerber 2007). Ethnic grievances were repressed were impossible to address. Autonomy was not a matter for debate or discussion.

Soviet population censuses intentionally minimized the demographics of minority ethnic populations or, rather, they were grouped into larger ethnic communities. Some vanished entirely from the Soviet ethnic map. Part of the USSR’s malicious ethnic policies, was to aggregate Muslim ethnicities, such as the Kurds, Talysh, and Lezgins into “Turks” as an assimilation tactic to encourage Azeri ethnic predominance.

Most of the Armenians, many Russians, Jew and Greeks have already left Azerbaijan. According to a 1999 census, the Russian population in Azerbaijan fell to a third of its 1979 level. The current estimates are even lower, at about 100,000 Russians

actually living in the country. This in the Soviet sense was a method of nation building from central command (Gerber 2007). Moreover, minorities are seen as susceptible to manipulation by outsiders, since many of them live in the border areas next to their kin states.

Secessionist movements in the early 90s largely influenced the state's approach towards ethnic minorities. Aliyev's approach to minority policy was a continuation of the Soviet tradition of suppressing political demands for autonomy for ethnic groups.

The state practiced detention and prosecution for even *alleged* separatists, such as Talysh and Lezgins, who were given arbitrary long jail sentences for their "terrorist activities". The president himself nominates local authorities.

According to the Azeri constitution, every person has the right to preserve its national or ethnic identity, and while Azerbaijan became a Member of the Council of Europe in 2001, signed and ratified the *Framework Convention on National Minorities* Azerbaijan has still not set up a special legal framework addressing the rights of national minorities. This pales in comparison to the APK in Kazakhstan, which does exactly that.

A new *Law on the State Language* was passed by the parliament in 2002, demanding all procedures be in Azerbaijani. No provisions in the new law ensure the right for national minorities to use their native languages in public life. Minorities are even restricted in their right to use their language in the public. Moreover, Azerbaijan has yet to ratify the *European Language Charter*. Legal guarantees for national minorities to receive education have been reduced since 1992, with the passing of the *Law on the State Language* which made it ambiguous the extent to which languages are persevered and



allowed to be taught in schools. There is no state program for the integration of minorities into the Azeri society, unlike Kazakhstan's APK (Clifton et 2005).

### Armenians

The situation with Armenia is likely the worst, and involves a 'secessionist' movement in Nagorno-Karabakh. Therefore the NK conflict can be seen as a product of three ambitions, ethnic power balance in Azerbaijani politics as well as self-determination & territorial secession. The history of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can be traced to the dissolution of the USSR. The decentralization of power, and the vacuum of power left by the absence of an authoritarian central authority, led to the emergence of nationalist movements. In many cases, arbitrary boundaries and geographic heritages were even further confused. Following the establishment of post-soviet republics such as Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, conflict ensued between Azerbaijan and its Armenian population. Nagorno-Karabakh is 80% Armenian in population, but remains within the boundaries of Azerbaijan. Without independence and disconnection from its Armenian homeland, Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh to Armenians) has become another symbol of Azerbaijan's ethnic nationalism & aggression.

An utter suppression and discrimination of Armenian culture, language and freedom is part of policy in Azerbaijan. While the conflict is arguably territorial, the pogroms of Armenian-Azerbaijanis as well as other mentioned characteristics of the Azeri state demonstrate that necessary national provisions such as ethnic minority protections were not only unsecured, they were blatantly averted so as to strengthen the ruling party's grasp on power under the banner of Azerbaijani ethnic nationalism.

Various pogroms and massacres of Armenians prompted a mass exodus to Armenia and NK from the Azerbaijani mainland. This mass exodus numbers up to 350,000 Armenians (Country Report 2015). Prior to the onset of the conflict, which began in the 80s, inter-ethnic tensions were brewing. A series of pogroms, such as the Sumgait, Baku, Kirovabad or Maraga targeted Armenian minorities in Azerbaijan. In essence, “Armenophobia is institutionalized and engrained into Azerbaijani statehood & Karabakh is at the center of this “policy”.

Some of the approximately 20,000 to 30,000 citizens of Armenian descent living in the country reported discrimination in employment, housing, and the provision of social services. Ethnic Armenians often concealed their ethnicity by legally changing the ethnic designation in their passports. There were no reports of violence against Armenians during the year. Some groups reported sporadic incidents of discrimination, restrictions on their ability to teach in their native languages, and harassment by local authorities. These groups included Talysh in the south, Lezgins in the north, and Meskhetians and Kurds (Country Reports 2015).

Destruction of cemeteries so as to erase Armenian history and heritage, the targeting of religious infrastructure, denying entry, and linguistic suppression are all policy practices of the Azerbaijani state, which explicitly target and discriminate against Armenians. Such harassment of Armenians by the Azeri state persists today.

The Lezgins exhibit a different condition. They are now considered the most vocal minority claiming discrimination in Azerbaijan (Fayos 2014). They make up the second-largest group in Azerbaijan. Lezgins often disguise themselves as Azeris to avoid losing job opportunities or discrimination in education. As a result, current official

statistics in Azerbaijan have arbitrarily reduced the population.

In 1989, another ethnic minority, the Talysh (on which I elaborate further along) gained the right to register as a distinct ethnic group. The accurate number of Talysh in Azerbaijan may be much higher than census results, which is due to the suppression of their identity, language and culture, “leading to internalized self-repression”. Azerbaijan lacks any robust, comprehensive legislation regarding ethnic minorities. The presidential decree of 1992 is insufficient in this sense. It lacks a “national framework for minority rights protection” and limits the focus to arts and crafts. Azerbaijan also lacks legislation to tackle anti-discriminations issues (Fayos 2014).

There is no political institution or constitutional provision that addresses needs of the minority, unlike the APK in Kazakhstan. Azerbaijan does have the “Office of the Ombudsman”, which aims to compensate for this void however the priority of the state is less on minority inclusion and more on preventing secessionist movements. Such is symbolic of the paranoia, which dictates the Azerbaijani regime, compared to Kazakhstan’s harmonious and unifying approach. Any legal frameworks proclaimed by the Azerbaijani state to protect minorities is exaggerated, and often only nominal.

There are few institutions as mentioned before which aim to support ethnic minorities in Azerbaijan, but none of them, neither the Forum of Religious Communities of Azerbaijan nor the Coordination Council of the Cultural Centers of National Minorities are involved in policy-making. They serve merely as consultative bodies and nominal entities. This is in sharp contrast to the APK in Kazakhstan, which not only protects and preserves ethnic minority culture – it grants them representation in the

national legislature and the ability to propose laws.

Furthermore indicative of Azerbaijan's ethnic exclusion is the fact that it has still not ratified the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. The fact that Azerbaijan actively promotes the usage of the Azeri language underscores the need for some type of institutional protection for ethnic minority groups. Unlike Kazakhstan where the populace relatively respects laws and institutions, the "Law on State Language" in Azerbaijan, undermines any of the constitutional provisions, which guarantee minority ethnic groups linguistic rights. There is, however, a lack of national legislation for preserving and promoting the use of minority languages (Fayos 2014).

The downside of being accepted into greater Azerbaijani society is that minorities risk losing their languages. Indeed, while some minorities appear able to preserve their linguistic other ethnic groups appear to be losing ground to linguistic assimilation; many members of the largest groups (e.g. the Talysh and the Lezgins) have expressed displeasure at this outcome, requesting greater government attention (Marquardt 2011).

Azerbaijani multiculturalist policy of appeasing minorities without giving them real rights pales in comparison to Kazakhstan's APK. In Kazakhstan ethnic minorities have legislative representatives that can actually vote on national policy. Minorities are free to preserve and educate in their indigenous languages( and broadcast media in their respective languages – all of which is explicitly prohibited in Azerbaijan (Marquardt 2011).

I argue that the ethnocentric dimension of the Azeri state is influenced mainly by Turkey's sensitivity to the "Armenian question"; while the authoritarian character is a

legacy of continued Russian influence. If the political culture resembled Kazakhstan more closely, perhaps cognitive decisions to protect minorities by the state would be taken into account because they would provide for more accountability at home, and thus less dependence on the appeasement of powerful neighbors.

To the Azerbaijani state, ethnic identity is associated with the events in Nagorno-Karabakh; the Talysh state which was briefly declared in 1993 and the Lezgins independence movement, which began in the early 1990s. Likewise, these groups are seen as easily manipulated by outside forces that wish to harm Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. The Azeri government sees all ethnic identity movements as imperial schemes by Russia to instigate separatism, whether it is among the Lezgins or the Armenians (Marquardt 2011).

Kazakhstan is more politically developed as a result mainly of its political culture and history as a diverse state.

The comparison of these two post-Soviet states is to demonstrate that the imperial soviet legacies were not as significant as expected in determining future stability. In Kazakhstan, the establishment of an institution that promotes ethnic diversity and tolerance, the APK reflects the pluralistic ideology of Kazakhstan, contrary to what has become the ethno-nationalistic character of the Azerbaijani state.

Unlike Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan has a cognitive national preference & political culture inclined towards ethno-nationalism/centrism. This ideology is wrapped around Aliyev's cult of personality, and therein shields the authoritarian structure of Azerbaijan's state. The system is designed to suppress any attempt at decentralizing power for the sake of minority representation and indigenous ethnic rights such as linguistic education for

Talysh & Lezgin minorities.

The dispute between Azerbaijan & Armenia is not territorial. With a 98% Armenian population it is pretty evident that Artsakh belongs to independence and Armenia, as per its own people's self determination, but certainly not to Stalin's manufactured modern Azerbaijani territory. The problem, as with most regions rife with ethnic disputes and conflict, is the authoritarian and exclusivist nature of the government. Ethnic minorities are not protected; and thus violence ensues. The territorial dispute is a result of the legacy of Stalinism, and in fact is more a reflection of the state of Azerbaijan's authoritarian, ethnocentric & exclusivist character. The data demonstrates this by controlling not only for oil and "imperial past" which is also relevant, but also through the variable of "ongoing war". The findings support the argument that neither ongoing wars, imperial pasts, resource curses nor secessionist movements have caused the ethnic violence in Azerbaijan, but rather its political structure (Wimmer et al 2009).

#### Talysh

The Talysh peoples are an ethnic group with a distinct language and culture seeking greater autonomy within Azerbaijan. They have their own language, Talyshi, which is suppressed by law enforcement. The largest concentration of Talysh people is in southern Azerbaijan and northwestern Iran with major population center in the city of Lenkoran. Azerbaijan's Turkic linguistic nationalist policy discourages the Talysh minority from practicing and preserving its own language.

Talysh press & literature enjoyed free distribution until Stalin came to power. This era saw Talysh being sent to gulags & closures of local media. Talysh were encouraged to assimilate into Azerbaijani SSR culture. Ironically, being part of the USSR

also prevented them from being entirely vulnerable to Azerbaijani nationalism, and thus enabled the Talysh heritage to carry on until today. While the Talysh were never fully realized by any of their more powerful neighbors like Russia or Iran, it wasn't until the birth of the Azeri state that ethno-nationalism and authoritarianism became a major threat to their persistence and survival.

There is no formal education in the Talysh language and Talysh people are encouraged to speak in Azeri or Persian. According to UNESCO, the number of young people being educated in Talysh is dropping significantly. One of the key aims of the Nationalist Talysh Movement (NTM) is greater linguistic freedom. In 1993, violence overtook the Caucasus. The Talysh seized this opportunity and established Talyshstan, an autonomous republic within Azerbaijan. The Azeri coup, which ushered in the Aliyev family rule, ended this brief autonomy abruptly. This might underscore the association between the significance of Aliyev's distinct authoritarian and nationalist policy agenda versus his predecessors as the primary cause of minority suppression and ethnic conflict with Armenians. Official census figures place Talysh population at 500,000 but they claim the number is much higher, closer to one million, another tactic perhaps to suppress minority rights movements. It is important to note there are 43 known unrepresented indigenous peoples across the globe (Busdachin 2015). Of them, two are in Azerbaijan. That is telling.

In June 1993, during heightened military tensions Azerbaijan, a small military unit leader in southern Azerbaijan proclaimed himself leader of a so-called "Talysh-Mugan Republic" and immediately ordered to break-away and establish a distinct republic of seven districts in south-east Azerbaijan, which is also known as Talyshstan

(Gerber 2007). The local population, however, did not support him. His plan to take advantage of the general political turmoil was miscalculated, and his uprising was easily crushed by the regime of Heidar Aliyev. Most Azerbaijanis agreed this ‘coup’ was orchestrated by the Russian KGB, to keep the Caucasus under its control.”

Still today the dilemma of an accurate census of the Talysh community is yet to be resolved. “The suppression of Talysh identity and their inability to disseminate their culture and language during the Soviet period has left its traces.” There is a constant paranoia of being accused of colluding with Armenia or Russia. This causes a fear of expressing any kind of national expressions. Official statistics indicate the population at 76,800 people. In sharp contrast, Talysh activists claim a figure upwards of a million Talysh living in Azerbaijan. Some Talysh wish for integration, others demand rights, and another group wants secession (Gerber 2007). Talysh identity is tenuous. It is practically impossible to gauge support for Talysh grievances. This is likely due to Azerbaijan’s descent into a police state. Talysh activists are worried about the fate of the Talysh culture, history and language. The primary claims of the Talysh people are to establish a faculty for the Talysh language in the Lenkeran State University; to broadcast Talysh-language television programs on state TV for numerous hours a week, and to get receive state funds for the establishment and upkeep of important Talysh cultural activities and traditions, like for example folkloric dance. Talysh activists went further to state they would like for Talysh to be an officially recognized state language, among others. Some of the Talysh activists we met went as far as saying that Azerbaijani language developed out of the Talysh language. In February 2007, Novruzali Mammadov, head of the Talysh Cultural Center was arrested in Baku and indicted on charges of “high treason” (Gerber



2007).

### Lezgins

The Lezgin are the second minority group in Azerbaijan and may perhaps pose the greatest dilemma for future Azerbaijani minority policy. The Lezgins are descendants of the Caucasian people who inhabited Southern Dagestan and Northern Azerbaijan. The Lezgins were subsequently divided in 1860 when Tsarist Russia split their community between the Russian Federation in Dagestan and Azerbaijan. The first wave of protest took place on 5 December 1921 to accelerate the settlement of the problem on the borders with Azerbaijan, and including in Dagestan the disputed Azerbaijani areas, which were part of Azerbaijan (Mateeva 1997).

As reported in the 1989 Soviet census, 466,833 Lezgins were registered in the Soviet Union. The numbers of Lezgins presently living in Dagestan and Azerbaijan are subject to dispute, and estimates are often used in political debates. According to official Soviet census figures (1989), there were 171,395 in Azerbaijan (about 3% of the population) and 204,370 in Dagestan (about 12% of the republic's population). Lezgins generally dispute the official 1989 population figures for Azerbaijani Lezgins across the political spectrum. Their estimates vary from twice the official figure to 1 million. A Lezgin diaspora also currently exists in Turkey (Mateeva 1997).

It is argued that the Lezgin population in Azerbaijan has not risen over the last half-century at the expected rate. Thus it is believed that a significant proportion of the Lezgin population has been registered as another ethnic group. One possible explanation

for this phenomenon is that Azerbaijani policy in the 1950s only granted free education to children registered as Azeri, and there was a strong incentive to claim Azeri ethnicity in official records. The low number of Lezgin registrants might also be an indication of the impression that Lezgins are considered to be second-class citizens. In addition to mountainous regions, the areas inhabited by Lezgins are comprised of productive agricultural lands. The main sources of employment in the Lezgin areas are agriculture. A number of agricultural produce factories are also located in these areas.

The main language of instruction in schools in Azerbaijan is either Azerbaijani or Russian. There is a high degree of inter-marriage between Lezgins and Azeris, and relations between the two groups in general remain stable. Moreover, most Lezgins in Azerbaijan have a good command over the Azeri language. Yet with the rise of ethnic nationalism under President Elchibei, the Lezgins, as well as other minorities, felt as if they were being treated as second-class citizens. The attempt to draft 1,500 Lezgins into the Azerbaijani army in March 1993 led to violent clashes between Azeri police and 70,000 Lezgin protesters. (Mateeva 1997). Episodes of interethnic tensions first appeared in 1992, and the Popular Front government began to make arrests at the end of that year. After Pan-Turkism became a dominant ideology in Azerbaijan, Lezgin separatism was more active, aggravated by a number of aspects of the transition from the Soviet system, including the border closure. Usually the Lezgin protest rallies would begin in Azerbaijan and be replicated in Dagestan. In March 1993, twelve Lezgins trafficking in illegal arms were arrested and later released. In 1994 a prominent Lezgin activist was arrested and convicted to four years imprisonment with no right of appeal. Two SADVAL protest incidents & mass riots ensued.

Grievances from the Lezgin emanate from their linguistic, representative but also their military rights. Essentially the border between Azerbaijan & Russia acts as a buffer zone where Lezgins are often subject to armed attacks and preventative measures against unification and national liberation.

In addition to claiming that Lezgins have a full and equal place in Azerbaijani society, alleged indicators of Lezgin dissatisfaction are discounted or explained away by the authorities. In some cases, they are refuted despite the fact that some incidents had been widely reported. It is explained that in the first years of the new state, there were many things about which the population as a whole was unhappy; thus any opposition by the Lezgins had to be put into that context. For example, since the reported refusal of Lezgins to serve in the army between 1993-1994 was a common occurrence among the population in general, it did not reflect a lack of identification with the new state by Lezgins. It was acknowledged that the process of transition was a difficult period for all citizens due to the lack of resources and the breakdown of services.

The Lezgin National Movement, otherwise known as SADVAL, which was founded in June 1990 is the main political representative of the Lezgin people. Its primary political objective was to unite all Lezgins in a sovereign state of Lezgins, or as an entity within the Russian Federation or Azerbaijan. An official declaration on statehood and a resolution on changes in the border between Dagestan and Azerbaijan were issued at the second SADVAL Congress in September 1991. The organization also demanded proportionate representation of Lezgins in the parliaments of the Russian Federation and Azerbaijan.

It is doubtful whether SADVAL has a mass appeal in the Lezgin areas, or any meaningful grass-roots support. The majority of ordinary Lezgins do not share the radical demands of the activists, but fear of assimilation of their ethnic kin in Azerbaijan by what is regarded as Turkish nationalistic policies (Mateeva 1997).

Although SADVAL is not a strong or popular movement, it comprises a number of extremely vocal individuals whose behavior and statements are held suspect by authorities in Azerbaijan (Mateeva 1997). The Azerbaijani government seems to be worried over the possibility that the demands of minorities could be given credibility or their organizations legitimacy locally and internationally.

As previously mentioned, a clause was included in the law on political parties forbidding parties that represent specific ethnic groups to be established. Thus the proposed Lezgin Democratic Party was not allowed to register or enroll its leader in the 1995 Parliamentary elections as an independent candidate.

The situation of the Lezgin people is of great concern to the government since they might become subject to outside manipulation and could therefore be used to create difficulties. The general view of the central government is that any attempt to express minority grievances or to raise the question of autonomy is a threat to the security of the state. Still, the Azerbaijani government does not envisage a popular base for massive unrest by the Lezgin community and seeks to avoid any impression that there are problems associated with the Lezgin community. A member of the opposition stated that they agree with the government's claim that there is no specific discrimination against Lezgins. Where the opposition differed from the government was in their concern over

abuses of human rights in the country, which affected Lezgins as well as all other citizens, regardless of ethnicity. The opposition wanted these abuses ended for both the Lezgin and Azerbaijani community in general (Mateeva 1997).

Azerbaijani policy makes it difficult to put any specific minority issues, such as cultural recognition or community division, on the governmental agenda. This, to an extent, resembles the pattern of the Soviet nationalities' policy, which officially did not recognize ethnicity as a significant affiliation that affected social opportunities, but in reality supported cultural identities and also used ethnicity for political purposes. As noted earlier, the opposition shares a generally modernist stance, which supports an approach based on universal human rights and the equality of all individuals. Yet the opposition does not support the more suppressive features of the state's position, which indicate ethnocentric and authoritarian tendencies (Mateeva 1997).

There are other current developments, which have a differential effect on ethnic communities, the border being an important example. There is no suggestion that the central government is satisfied with the present arrangements or that policy is motivated by ethnic considerations. Nonetheless, the current situation does affect Lezgins more than any other group. Therefore the central government is vulnerable to charges made by separatist forces that their management of problems is negligent, and that the government would have adopted a different attitude if Azeris were affected. Such an argument might not be accurate, but it could touch a sensitive chord in the Lezgin community if the level of harm was sufficiently high.

Azerbaijan has a system, which is based on the individual without reference to

ethnic identity. It is therefore likely that Lezgins will make a comparison between the effects of these different policy stances on their welfare. For example, each of these entities have taken different approaches to the language question in schools. Lezgin was the language of instruction in national schools until 1972, and there could be resentment over the choice not to use Lezgin as the language of instruction for Lezgin children in Azerbaijan (Mateeva 1997).

The population of Lezgins in Azerbaijan is between 650,000-800,000. They have their own language. They are predominantly Sunni Muslims, unlike their Talysh Shia counterparts. Since both groups are discriminated against regardless of their sect, this suggests religion plays little role in determining ethnic policies of the state.

In Azerbaijan, a stubborn centralized ethnonationalist government that is authoritarian towards its subjects and dictatorial towards minorities shapes the political culture. This is a cognitive, conscious choice; a reflection of political culture in Azerbaijan, whereas in Kazakhstan, the culture is more bent towards tolerance and harmony and thus sees a less authoritarian involvement in the suppression of minority languages and politics.

The Lezgins were upset over underrepresentation in the Azerbaijani *Majlis* (parliament) after a change in political structure, a shift away from proportional representation in the parliamentary elections of November 2005. The Lezgins previously had two representatives in parliament but now numbers only one.

It is important to note that, much like many ethnic dilemmas, particularly in the post-Soviet regions, irredentism is a common case, with ethnic groups divided along “artificial” national borders. For example, the state border between the Russian

Federation and the Republic of Azerbaijan divides a single, compact area of settlement of the Lezgins. This is comparable to the Kurdish problem in the Middle East. Lezgistan is essentially Russian Dagestan & Northern Azerbaijan. Before the Russian Revolution, "Lezgin" was a term used to describe all ethnic groups living in present-day Russian Republic of Dagestan.

SADVAL was created to unite Dagestan & Azerbaijani's Lezgin nations, considered a terrorist organization by Azerbaijan, it has the main aims of advancing the status of Lezgins in the region. In 1994, a terrorist attack in Baku was attributed to SADVAL & the Lezgin movement. This might be in response to suppression of linguistic disbursement and absence of legislative representation.

Lezgins mainly express concern over underrepresentation in the Azerbaijani Parliament (Majlis) after a shift away from proportional representation in the parliamentary elections of November 2005. Lezgins had been represented by two members of parliament in the previous parliament, but are now represented by only one.

A research experiment on minorities in the Caucasus analyzes 43 news articles and opinion columns. Opinion columns appear less frequent than news articles. Furthermore, some of the analyzed media items placed in the opinion columns of the media outlets do not strictly fall into the category "opinion", as in several cases, they represent a reportage or simple coverage rather than analysis. Tackling the issue of these groups analytically or through individual opinion columns is uncommon. The media coverage is generally very low for all groups. Yet, the media coverage of the displaced persons is twice more than that of Lezgins.

Other common topics were related to the past and potential conflicts. The 1918

massacre in Guba, the attacks perpetrated by the SADVAL movement in 1994, the looming Islamist threats and increasing recruitment to ISIS in the neighboring Dagestan was mentioned often in relation with Lezgins. The media items quoted the President and Azerbaijani officials more often than Lezgins in the articles related to them

Generally, the media represents Lezgins and other minority groups positively as people loving their traditions and living in peace and harmony with the majority. In some instances, one could critically view the denotations of minorities as “numerically small people”, “national minorities living in our country”, or the interchangeable use of “ethnic group” and “nationality” to imply ethnicity, more characteristic of the Soviet “nationalities policy”.

It Has Been 22 Years Since the Baku Metro Bombings 2016. Few media items reflected the opinions and attitudes expressed by the minorities. The media items analyzed preferred to showcase opinions and views expressed by Azerbaijani officials and the President. One research study compared media coverage of the Lezgin minority compared to displaced persons and found that displaced persons were more likely to get coverage. This suggests that the media promotes the state’s agenda of avoiding acknowledgement of ethnic minorities. (Arslan et al).

The state’s view is that the Lezgin people do not exist in any form and denies constructive examination of the situation, “including dual citizenship, the establishment of a free economic zone or cultural autonomy”. It is as if the fulfillment of Lezgin rights present threats to Azerbaijani power — or rather the platform of the incumbent regime.

Dual citizenship for Lezgins is a contentious issue for Azerbaijan because ethnic



Russians in Azerbaijan could be encouraged to demand that same right. Avars, Tskhakurs, Kumyks, and Tatars (smaller minorities in Azerbaijan) might obtain the citizenship in Russia, which might dampen the loyalty of minorities in Azerbaijan.

Furthermore, the Azerbaijani regime is paranoid about creating a “free economic zone” for Lezgins because it could encourage better ties between the Lezgins in Azerbaijan and across the border in Dagestan, Russia. The elite in Azerbaijan are optimistic about the country’s future including that of its minorities such as the Lezgins. But the state depends on its oil industry for such appeasement.

These realities present numerous prospective dilemmas. The current minority rights conditions in Azerbaijan does affect Lezgins more than any other group. Lezgins see a distinction between different policy stances on their general welfare. In Dagestan, Lezgin was the language of instruction in national schools until 1972. Surely resentment has been built up over the years over the decision not to prohibit the use of Lezgin language of instruction for Lezgin children in Azerbaijan (Mateeva 1997).

A state in the situation of Azerbaijan has three options. It can treat ethnic diversity as a historical nuisance, which should not have any place in a modern state; decisions should be made on the basis of equity and fairness across the whole community, and the state should protect equality of all citizens. Mobilization in society should be based on merit. From this view, “ethnic identity should not be the basis for either decision making or the allocation of rights and privileges.” Recognizing ethnic differences might be harmful since they would encourage differences between members of society and cause divisive tensions. This would be troublesome, during this stage of development in

Azerbaijan, especially when efforts are focused on developing a homogenous identity loyal to the new state.

Adherents of the pluralism encourage the recognition of ethnic distinctions that might help reduce inequality. Centralists argue that the state should operate society and determine loyalty and identity, which tends towards authoritarianism and the end of opposition. It also encourages violence and dissent. The desire to preserve the unitary state raised suspicion of minorities (Mateeva 1997).

The Azerbaijani government is concerned over demands of minorities that could receive international credibility. Azerbaijan law forbids parties that represent and operate along ethnic lines. The Lezgin Democratic Party was not prohibited to compete in the 1995 Parliamentary elections. Azerbaijan insists that despite this reality, it promotes minority rights. It also claims the Lezgin community does pose any threat to society. Even though Lezgins in Azerbaijan may be loyal to the state, their disenfranchisement as true citizens with benefits therein could increase tensions and result in violence. It can be suggested that perceived Lezgin problems are more related to the overall issues of governance in Azerbaijan than to particular ethnic grievances.

On 12 September 1992, the government “Decree on National Minorities and Ethnic Groups” sought to distribute state assistance and to secure the right of cultural autonomy of minority/ethnic groups. In any event, the Popular Front party did not have the chance to implement this decree, as it lost power in mid-1993. Azerbaijan is a unitary state, which strongly rejects the autonomy arrangements for its indigenous minorities, particularly the Talysh and Lezgins. Power is increasingly concentrated in the hands of

the central government. The Lezgins constitute a greater proportion of the population in Azerbaijan than they do in the Russian Federation, the problems and concerns of the Lezgin people have a greater significance to the former.

Lezgin grievances are of great concern as they are vulnerable to outside manipulation and could therefore be used to create difficulties. The official position of the state is against the expression of minority grievances like autonomy because it is a “threat to national security”. The government does not approve of their grievances to avoid the impression that there are problems in Azerbaijan associated with the Lezgin community or any minority for that matter.

The Lezgin National Centre is a cultural center that was registered in Azerbaijan in January 1992, which then was transformed into a social and political organization. It focuses on language and the cultural rights of Lezgins and is affiliated with the Azerbaijani government.

The inability of SADVAL to get attention in Azerbaijan, has given them a bad reputation among the general public. Still many empathize and do not consider Lezgins as political prisoners. SADVAL appears more willing than ever to adopt a radical, violent approach.

The Lezgin Democratic Party was founded and registered in 1992, although its registration was withdrawn in 1995 on the grounds that ethnically based parties were prohibited by law in Azerbaijan, it was eventually allowed under President Aliyev, but are viewed with suspicion. Officials suspect activists of using the Lezgin issue to build a political platform for their personal gain.

Lezgins comprise the second largest group after the ethnic Azeris. They live in the northern part of the state along the border with Russia. According to the 1999 census, the Lezgin population is 178,000 and accounts for 2.2% of Azerbaijan's population. Azerbaijan's figures are often distorted for political purposes, and the figures are likely closer to 260,000. The Lezgins from Azerbaijan have close relations to Dagestan. Dagestan is part of the Russian Federation and is home to 260,000 Lezgins. Their connection influences their relation to their official nation-state Azerbaijan.

In the early 90s ethnic minorities like the Lezgins and Talysh considered themselves Azeri. Tensions between Lezgins and Azeris began in 1992, but reached a peak in mid-1994. The state policy of forcibly drafting Lezgins men into the army for deployment in the war in Karabakh resulted in a high backlash and mobilization of the Lezgins. During this time a strong sense of collective identity was forged. Mass demonstrations against the draft occurred, many of which turned violent.

"SADVAL" or Unity was founded in 1991. In 1994, the Azeri authorities banned SADVAL after accusing group members of carrying out bomb attack on the Baku metro. The largest grievance of the Lezgins people is the arbitrary carving up of their lands that occurred during soviet disintegration.

The growing strength of Azeri nationalism has disempowered secessionist or nationalist movements. Currently, Lezgins prioritize cultural protections rather than political autonomy, which might support the idea of the establishment of a legislative body for minority ethnic representation. This could reduce incentive of SADVAL. But it appears Aliyev's government prefers the benefits of exploiting ethnocentric policy.

In November 2005 parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan, the Lezgin language was reportedly the main electoral issue for candidates from Lezgin populated areas. The most frequent complaints by Azerbaijan's Lezgins include the negligence of Lezgin language education and Lezgin media (Clifton et 2005).

Government authorities often exploit fear tactics by associating any legitimate grievance of the Lezgin community with Armenian, Russian or even Islamist collusion.

### Kurds

The Kurdish community in Azerbaijan was nearly gone by 1920. Many moved to Armenia to establish villages. Kurds in Azerbaijan had their own region called Red Kurdistan in the Lachin region. In 1930 Red Kurdistan was abolished and Kurds were officially re-categorized as Azerbaijani. This would lead to the Soviet authorities deporting most of the Kurdish population of Azerbaijan and Armenia to Kazakhstan. That Kurds found refuge in Kazakhstan but not in Azerbaijan is of note (20).

The Kurdish history in Azerbaijan has been erased. In a 1979 census no Kurds were recorded. Turkey and Azerbaijan coordinated a policy against the Kurds, like "forced assimilation, manipulation of population figures, settlement of non-Kurds in areas predominantly Kurdish, and the suppression of publications and abolition of Kurdish as a medium of instruction in schools". Kurdish historical figures were required to be described as Azeris. Kurds who retained 'Kurdish' as their nationality on their passports as opposed to 'Azeri' were unable to find employment (Orson et al 1994).

In the 1990s, Kurdish organizations have repeatedly demanded the restoration of

‘Red Kurdistan’, and (in 1992) proclaimed a ‘Kurdish Republic’. ‘Red Kurdistan’ is currently occupied by Armenian troops. Whatever grievances the Kurds have against Baku, and they are surely many, including decades of forced assimilation. The Kurds of Azerbaijan were largely assimilated into Azerbaijani society, partly through the use of brutal means of repression. Eventually Azerbaijan would deport all of its Kurdish population to the chagrin of the USSR & Turkey all the way to Kazakhstan. But why Kazakhstan? Precisely because it is one of the few Turkic states where the Turkish lobby has little influence and faces little threat, due to proximity, and Kurds can enjoy the privileges of minority protections in Kazakhstan that do not exist in almost any of the post-Soviet states (Müller 2010).

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research is to demonstrate that ethnic inclusion leads to ethnic harmony and less conflict. This is because institutional representation of ethnic minorities addresses their grievances. As exhibited in Kazakhstan, proper measures to address ethnic minority rights can mitigate the possibility of conflict altogether. In sharp contrast, Azerbaijan has restricted minority rights, which has coincided with inter-ethnic war with Armenia, pogroms targeting Armenians, desecration of cemeteries, linguistic discrimination, deportation of Kurds, and the suppression of Lezgin & Talysh national movements. The presence of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan ensures harmony and representation between ethnic groups. Furthermore, it protects, promotes and encourages minority languages, enabling them to be taught in schools and used openly without discrimination. The APK in Kazakhstan serves as a model for other developing countries struggling with ethnic conflict. Better policies aimed at ethnic inclusion and accommodation will lead to more harmony. The research & data indicates that even powerful forces like the resource curse – that is, the abundance of oil, does not ensure a decrease in the risk of ethnic conflict. But even in the case of Azerbaijan, there is a clear absence of an apparatus, mechanism or provisional law that protects, represents and preserves the rights of ethnic minorities. It is no surprise that post-Soviet states have carried on authoritarian traditions, but some have clearly managed them better than others, albeit imperfectly. Beginning with the Nagorno-Karabakh war & the coup d'état, it became clear that Azerbaijan would take a much more radical course than its post-Soviet counterpart, Kazakhstan. Even Turkmenistan, rich with oil, exhibits high levels of stability despite the existence of minority ethnic groups. The ethnocentric character of

Azerbaijan's state is thus distinct. An ongoing war such as Nagorno-Karabakh, an imperial past such as the USSR's legacy, nor oil abundance (rentier state or resource curse), prove to be nearly as statistically significant as ethnic exclusion in determining the likelihood of ethnic violence, as demonstrated by Wimmer et al.

The persistence of SADVAL, listed as a terrorist organization by Azeri authorities; Lezgin & Talysh minority rights national liberation movements; as well as increases in political prisoners denote the ethnic inequality inherent in Azerbaijani society and state.

Just recently, Azerbaijan's neighbor and gravest threat, Armenia, also a new, post-Soviet republic, experienced a successful revolution that overthrew a democratically-elected-leader-turned-dictator. He was attempting to exploit the transition from presidential rule to parliamentary rule as ploy to extend or altogether abolish executive term limits as was done recently in Turkey – in that case, the head of state was shifting from parliamentary to presidential. These developments in nearby Armenia pose a threat to the durability of the authoritarian Azeri state. Furthermore, it gives legitimacy to minority grievances on an international level. If minority protections, provisions and rights existed for Armenian, Kurdish, Lezgin & Talysh communities, among others, Azerbaijan could have avoided a war over Nagorno-Karabakh, which is clearly Armenian by demography. Azerbaijan could have avoided marginalizing ethnic communities to such extents that they form nationalist movements demanding rights and in some cases territorial claims. Lastly ethnic minorities might not have suffered campaigns of violence, particularly the Armenian community, which today is practically nonexistent in Azerbaijan as a result of the infamous Baku Pogrom.



The ethnocentric and authoritarian character of the Azerbaijani state renders it vulnerable to the Turkish lobby, which regards the grievances of Kurds and Armenians equally threatening to its preeminence. The suggestion of a religious or territorial dimension to the tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenians carries little weight given the history & demography – Stalin made sure to create territorial problems for minorities across borders; Nagorno-Karabakh is 98% Armenian, and yet remains under the auspices of the Azerbaijani state.

The presence of Lezgins in the north, Talysh in the south, and Artsakh in the west presents Azerbaijan with an interestingly significant minority that could challenge the very ethnocentric character of the state. This would fundamentally reshape society and the power balance shared by Azerbaijani elites and minority ethnic groups. On the other hand, Kazakhstan, despite its democratic setbacks, stands a beacon of ethnic tolerance, inclusion and harmony. There is no active ethnic terror group; nor any record of an ethnic terrorist attack in the country's history. The Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan serves as a role model of ethnic inclusion for both developing and developed countries, including the United States and Turkey, both of which struggle with ethnic minority issues. Ultimately the dynamics in both the two Caspian states differ according to their degree of ethnic inclusion and accommodations for ethnic minorities.

This research posits that the establishment of a legislative body that proportionally represents and preserves the rights of ethnic minorities is necessary to function as a mechanism for inducing inter—ethnic harmony and national unity. Such provisions reduce the likelihood of ethnic conflict. It simultaneously increases regime durability and helps a state further along its path towards ethnic inclusion and harmony.



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