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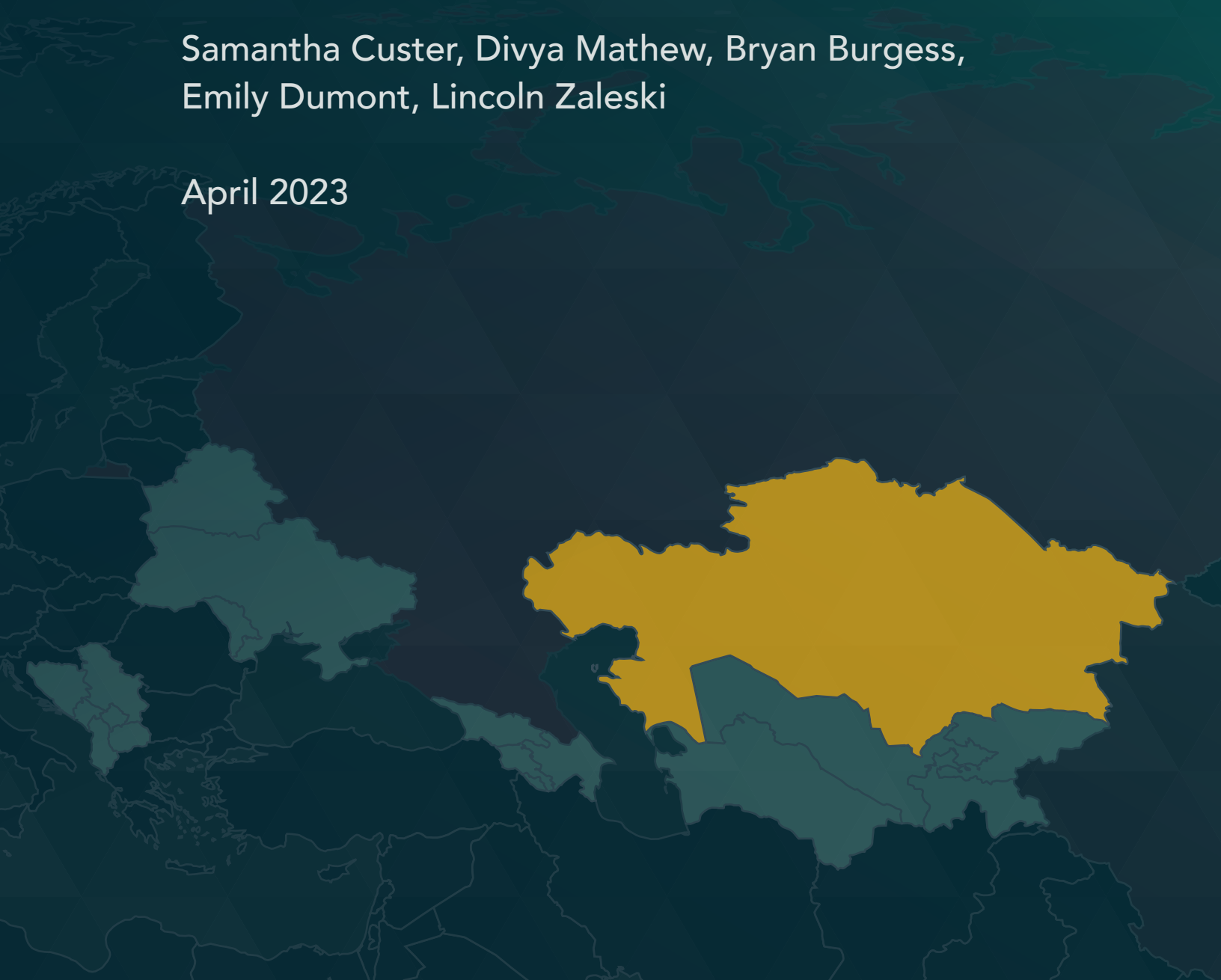
A Research Lab at William & Mary

Civic Space Country Report

**Kazakhstan:** Measuring civic space  
risk, resilience, and Russian influence

Samantha Custer, Divya Mathew, Bryan Burgess,  
Emily Dumont, Lincoln Zaleski

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# Executive Summary

This report surfaces insights about the health of Kazakhstan's civic space and vulnerability to malign foreign influence in the lead up to Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Research included extensive original data collection to track Russian state-backed financing and in-kind assistance to civil society groups and regulators, media coverage targeting foreign publics, and indicators to assess domestic attitudes to civic participation and restrictions of civic space actors. Crucially, this report underscores that the Kremlin's influence operations were not limited to Ukraine alone and illustrates its use of civilian tools in Kazakhstan to co-opt support and deter resistance to its regional ambitions.

The analysis was part of a broader three-year initiative by AidData—a research lab at William & Mary's Global Research Institute—to produce quantifiable indicators to monitor civic space resilience in the face of Kremlin influence operations over time (from 2010 to 2021) and across 17 countries and 7 occupied or autonomous territories in Eastern Europe and Eurasia (E&E). Below we summarize the top-line findings from our indicators on the domestic enabling environment for civic space in Kazakhstan, as well as channels of Russian malign influence operations:

- **Restrictions of Civic Actors:** Kazakh civic space actors were the targets of 706 restrictions between January 2017 and March 2021. Sixty-one percent of these restrictions involved harassment or violence, followed by state-backed legal cases (35 percent), and restrictive legislation (4 percent). One-third of restrictions were concentrated around anti-government protests in 2020. Political opposition members were most often targeted (44 percent), and the Kazakh government the primary initiator. Four restrictions involved foreign governments (Kyrgyz Republic, Ukraine, UAE, UK) working at the behest of Kazakh authorities. Three were related to Russia in the city of Baikonur.
- **Attitudes Towards Civic Participation:** Kazakh citizens' interest in politics held steady between 2011 and 2018 at over 40 percent, and they reported higher levels of trust in institutions than regional peers (+25

percentage points). Although few engaged in political activism, Kazakhs were more open to less political forms of participation. Labor unions, sport and recreational organizations, and art groups attracted double-digit membership rates by 2018. In 2021, 47 percent of Kazakh citizens helped a stranger, 39 percent donated to charities, and 16 percent volunteered.

- **Russian-backed Civic Space Projects:** The Kremlin supported 150 Kazakh civic organizations via 249 projects between January 2015 and August 2021. Projects emphasized youth education, promotion of Russian linguistic and cultural ties, and commemorations of “The Great Patriotic War.” Metropolitan areas including Oral, Nur-Sultan, and Almaty attracted the lion’s share (76 percent) of the Kremlin’s attention. Formal Kazakh civil society organizations, most notably compatriot organizations, received most of the Kremlin’s support (92 percent). Although 34 Kremlin-affiliated agencies were involved, Rossotrudnichestvo was most prolific, supporting 126 organizations via 167 projects.
- **Russian Media:** Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News referenced Kazakh civic actors 85 times from January 2015 to March 2021. Media outlets and community organizations were most frequently mentioned domestic actors. The tone of Russian state media coverage about Kazakhstan’s civic space varied depending upon whether Russia (positive), the U.S. (negative), or neither (neutral) is involved. Kazakh NGOs funded by the U.S. attracted criticism from Russian state media for promoting nationalism and provoking inter-ethnic conflict. More broadly, the Kremlin used its state media to position the U.S. (and its allies) as a troublemaker and Russia as a problem-solver.

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# A Note on Vocabulary

The authors recognize the challenge of writing about contexts with ongoing hot and/or frozen conflicts. Nevertheless, it is necessary to consistently label groups of people and places for the sake of data collection and analysis. We acknowledge that terminology is political, but our use of terms should not be construed to mean support for one faction over another. For example, when we talk about an occupied territory, we do so recognizing that there are de facto authorities in the territory who are not aligned with the government in the capital. Or, when we analyze the de facto authorities' use of legislation or the courts to restrict civic action, it is not to grant legitimacy to the laws or courts of separatists, but rather to glean meaningful insights about the ways in which institutions are co-opted or employed to constrain civic freedoms.

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# 1. Introduction

How strong or weak is the domestic enabling environment for civic space in Kazakhstan? To what extent do we see Russia attempting to shape civic space attitudes and constraints in Kazakhstan to advance its broader regional ambitions? Over the last three years, AidData—a research lab at William & Mary’s Global Research Institute—has collected and analyzed vast amounts of historical data on civic space and Russian influence across 17 countries in Eastern Europe and Eurasia (E&E).<sup>1</sup> In this country report, we present top-line findings specific to Kazakhstan from a novel dataset which monitors four barometers of civic space in the E&E region from 2010 to 2021 (Table 1).<sup>2</sup>

For the purpose of this project, we define civic space as: the formal laws, informal norms, and societal attitudes which enable individuals and organizations to assemble peacefully, express their views, and take collective action without fear of retribution or restriction.<sup>3</sup> Here we provide only a brief introduction to the indicators monitored in this and other country reports. However, a more extensive methodology document is available via [aiddata.org](http://aiddata.org) which includes greater detail about how we conceptualized civic space and operationalized the collection of indicators by country and year.

Civic space is a dynamic rather than static concept. The ability of individuals and organizations to assemble, speak, and act is vulnerable to changes in the formal laws, informal norms, and broader societal attitudes that can facilitate an opening or closing of the practical space in which they have to maneuver. To assess the enabling environment for Kazakh civic space, we examined two indicators: restrictions of civic space actors (section 2.1) and citizen attitudes towards civic space (section 2.2). Because the health of civic space is not strictly

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<sup>1</sup> The 17 countries include Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

<sup>2</sup> The specific time period varies by year, country, and indicator, based upon data availability.

<sup>3</sup> This definition includes formal civil society organizations and a broader set of informal civic actors, such as political opposition, media, other community groups (e.g., religious groups, trade unions, rights-based groups), and individual activists or advocates. Given the difficulty to register and operate as official civil society organizations in many countries, this definition allows us to capture and report on a greater diversity of activity that better reflects the environment for civic space. We include all these actors in our indicators, disaggregating results when possible.

a function of domestic dynamics alone, we also examined two channels by which the Kremlin could exert external influence to dilute democratic norms or otherwise skew civic space throughout the E&E region. These channels are Russian state-backed financing and in-kind support to government regulators or pro-Kremlin civic space actors (section 3.1) and Russian state-run media mentions related to civic space actors or democracy (section 3.2).

Since restrictions can take various forms, we focus here on three common channels which can effectively deter or penalize civic participation: (i) harassment or violence initiated by state or non-state actors; (ii) the proposal or passage of restrictive legislation or executive branch policies; and (iii) state-backed legal cases brought against civic actors. Citizen attitudes towards political and apolitical forms of participation provide another important barometer of the practical room that people feel they have to engage in collective action related to common causes and interests or express views publicly. In this research, we monitored responses to citizen surveys related to: (i) interest in politics; (ii) past participation and future openness to political action (e.g., petitions, boycotts, strikes, protests); (iii) trust or confidence in public institutions; (iv) membership in voluntary organizations; and (v) past participation in less political forms of civic action (e.g., donating, volunteering, helping strangers).

In this project, we also tracked financing and in-kind support from Kremlin-affiliated agencies to: (i) build the capacity of those that regulate the activities of civic space actors (e.g., government entities at national or local levels, as well as in occupied or autonomous territories ); and (ii) co-opt the activities of civil society actors within E&E countries in ways that seek to promote or legitimize Russian policies abroad. Since E&E countries are exposed to a high concentration of Russian state-run media, we analyzed how the Kremlin may use its coverage to influence public attitudes about civic space actors (formal organizations and informal groups), as well as public discourse pertaining to democratic norms or rivals in the eyes of citizens.

Although Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine February 2022 undeniably altered the civic space landscape in Kazakhstan and the broader E&E region for years to come, the historical information in this report is still useful in three respects. By taking the long view, this report sheds light on the Kremlin's patient investment



in hybrid tactics to foment unrest, co-opt narratives, demonize opponents, and cultivate sympathizers in target populations as a pretext or enabler for military action. Second, the comparative nature of these indicators lends itself to assessing similarities and differences in how the Kremlin operates across countries in the region. Third, by examining domestic and external factors in tandem, this report provides a holistic view of how to support resilient societies in the face of autocratizing forces at home and malign influence from abroad.

Table 1. Quantifying Civic Space Attitudes and Constraints Over Time

Civic Space Barometer	Supporting Indicators
Restrictions of civic space actors (January 2017–March 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Number of instances of harassment or violence (physical or verbal) initiated against civic space actors</li> <li>● Number of instances of legislation and policies (newly proposed or passed) that include measures to further limit the ability of civic space actors to form, operate or speak freely and without retribution</li> <li>● Number of instances of state-backed legal action brought against civic space actors in an effort to intimidate citizens from assembly, speech or activism</li> </ul>
Citizen attitudes toward civic space (July 2010–July 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they are interested in politics</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they have previously engaged in civic actions (e.g., petitions, boycotts, strikes, protests)</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they might be willing to engage in civic actions (e.g., petitions, boycotts, strikes, protests) in future versus those who say they would never do so</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they engaged in apolitical civic engagement (e.g., donating to charities, volunteering for organizations, helping strangers)</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens who reported trust/confidence in their public institutions</li> </ul>
Russian projectized support relevant to civic space (January 2015–August 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Number of projects directed by the Russian government to institutional development, governance, or civilian law enforcement in the target country</li> <li>● Number of projects directed by the Russian government to support formal civil society organizations or informal civic groups within the target country</li> </ul>

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Russian state media mentions of civic space actors  
(January 2015–March 2021)

- Frequency of mentions of civic space actors operating in Kazakhstan by Russian state-owned media
- Sentiment of mentions of civic space actors operating in Kazakhstan by Russian state-owned media
- Frequency of mentions of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United States, and the European Union, as well as the terms “democracy” and “West,” in Kazakhstan by Russian state-owned media
- Sentiment of mentions of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United States, and the European Union, as well as the terms “democracy” and “West,” in Kazakhstan by Russian state-owned media

*Notes: Table of indicators collected by AidData to assess the health of Kazakhstan’s domestic civic space and vulnerability to Kremlin influence. Indicators are categorized by barometer (i.e., dimension of interest) and specify the time period covered by the data in the subsequent analysis.*

## 2. Domestic Risk and Resilience: Restrictions and Attitudes Towards Civic Space in Kazakhstan

A healthy civic space is one in which individuals and groups can assemble peacefully, express views and opinions, and take collective action without fear of retribution or restriction. Laws, rules, and policies are critical to this space, in terms of rights on the books (*de jure*) and how these rights are safeguarded in practice (*de facto*). Informal norms and societal attitudes are also important, as countries with a deep cultural tradition that emphasizes civic participation can embolden civil society actors to operate even absent explicit legal protections. Finally, the ability of civil society actors to engage in activities without fear of retribution (e.g., loss of personal freedom, organizational position, and public status) or restriction (e.g., constraints on their ability to organize, resource, and operate) is critical to the practical room they have to conduct their activities. If fear of retribution and the likelihood of restriction are high, this has a chilling effect on the motivation of citizens to form and participate in civic groups.

In this section, we assess the health of civic space in Kazakhstan over time in two respects: the volume and nature of restrictions against civic space actors (section 2.1) and the degree to which Kazakhs engage in a range of political and apolitical forms of civic life (section 2.2).

### 2.1 Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Kazakhstan: Targets, Initiators, and Trends Over Time

Kazakh civic space actors experienced 706 known restrictions between January 2017 and March 2021 (see Table 2). These restrictions were weighted toward instances of harassment or violence (61 percent). There were fewer instances of state-backed legal cases (35 percent) and newly proposed or implemented restrictive legislation (4 percent); however, these instances can have a multiplier effect in creating a legal mandate for a government to pursue other forms of restriction. These imperfect estimates are based upon publicly available

information either reported by the targets of restrictions, documented by a third-party actor, or covered in the news (see Section 5).<sup>4</sup>

Table 2. Recorded Restrictions of Kazakh Civic Space Actors

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021-Q1	Total
Harassment/Violence	43	84	129	163	12	431
Restrictive Legislation	9	7	4	6	0	26
State-backed Legal Cases	41	36	64	98	10	249
Total	93	127	197	267	22	706

*Notes: Table of the number of restrictions initiated against civic space actors in Kazakhstan, disaggregated by type (i.e., harassment/violence, restrictive legislation or state-backed legal cases) and year. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Kazakhstan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

Instances of restrictions of Kazakh civic space actors were unevenly distributed across this time period and have been on the rise from 2017 to 2020 (Figure 1). Thirty-eight percent of cases were recorded in 2020 alone, coinciding with massive anti-government protests following the in-custody death of civic activist and human rights defender, Dulat Agadil, and leading up to the Parliamentary elections in January 2021. There were 22 restrictions recorded in the first quarter of 2021. Members and associates of the political opposition<sup>5</sup> were the most frequent targets of violence and harassment, accounting for 44 percent of all recorded instances (Figure 2), followed by journalists and members of the media.

The Kazakh government was the most prolific initiator of restrictions of civic space actors, accounting for 380 recorded mentions. The majority of restrictions involved police actions to detain political opposition or arrest them preemptively before planned protests (Figure 3). Domestic non-governmental actors were

<sup>4</sup> Much like with other cases of abuse, assault, and violence against individuals, where victims may fear retribution or embarrassment, we anticipate that this number may understate the true extent of restrictions.

<sup>5</sup> Every instance of restriction targeted at political opposition involved political parties that were denied registration, and therefore not allowed to participate in elections. *The Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan* (DVK) and the Street Party were mentioned most frequently. They are denied opportunities for legitimate opposition and labeled “extremists.”

identified as initiators in 21 restrictions and there was a large number of incidents involving unidentified assailants (45 mentions). By virtue of the way that the indicator was defined, the initiators of state-backed legal cases are either explicitly government agencies and government officials or clearly associated with these actors (e.g., the spouse or immediate family member of a sitting official).

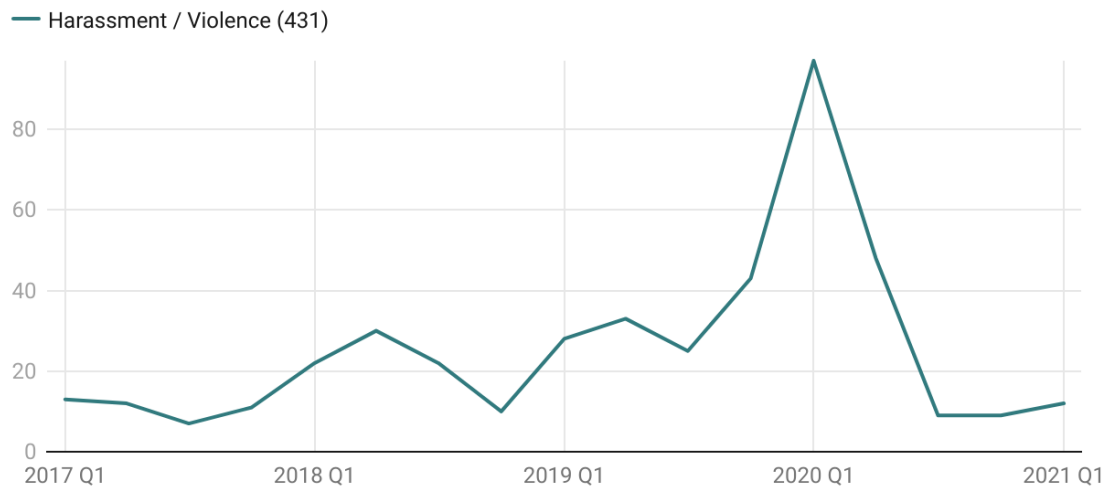
There were seven recorded instances of restrictions of civic space actors during this period involving foreign governments:

- Marat Dauletbayev, who heads the organization *Baikonor for Civil Rights*, was harassed multiple times beginning at least as early as January 2017. His apartment was searched, and he had defamation charges leveled against him for being vocal about corruption and trying to organize peaceful protests through social media. The city of Baikonur, which houses the Cosmodrome, is leased to Russia as an enclave, and this creates a unique administrative situation. While Russian police carried out the intimidation, Kazakh courts tried and convicted Dauletbayev of defamation, offering a glimpse into the unusual balance of power in Baikonur.
- In four of these instances, foreign governments harassed Kazakh citizens at the behest of the government of Kazakhstan. The Ukrainian government detained Zhanara Akhmetova, who wrote articles and social media posts critical of the Kazakh authorities, in October 2017 based on a warrant issued by Kazakhstan through Interpol. Kyrgyz authorities extradited dissident blogger and Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DVK) supporter, Marat Tungishbaev, at the request of the Kazakh government. The United Arab Emirates extradited Rustam Ibragimov, an associate of Mukhtar Ablyazov—founder of the DVK party. Bulat Utemuratov, a close associate of former President Nazarbayev, was also caught up in the government's battle with Mukhtar Ablyazov. His assets were frozen by a civil court in the UK, based on a petition from Kazakhstan.

Figure 1. Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Kazakhstan

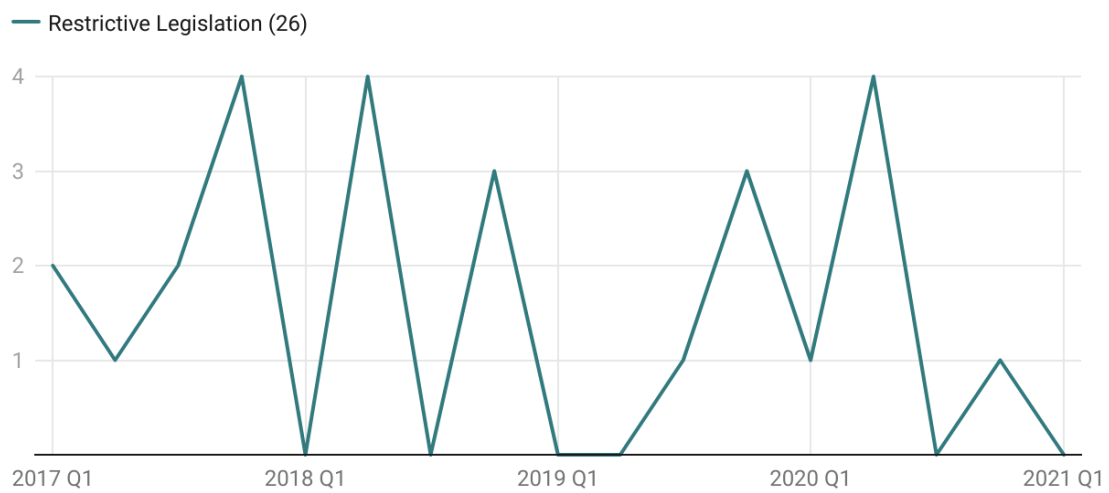
Number of Instances Recorded

*Harassment/Violence*



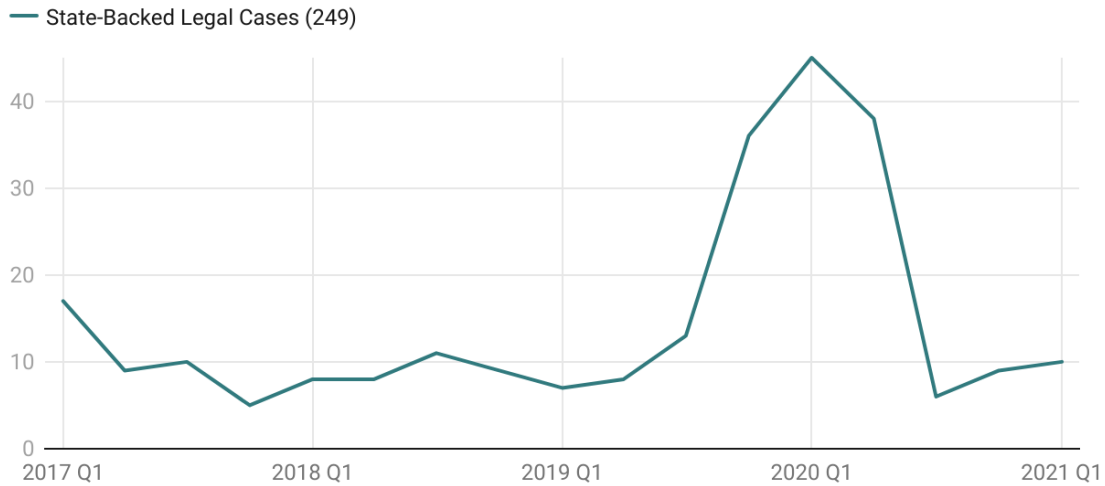
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*Restrictive Legislation*



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## State-backed Legal Cases



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## Key Events Relevant to Civic Space in Kazakhstan

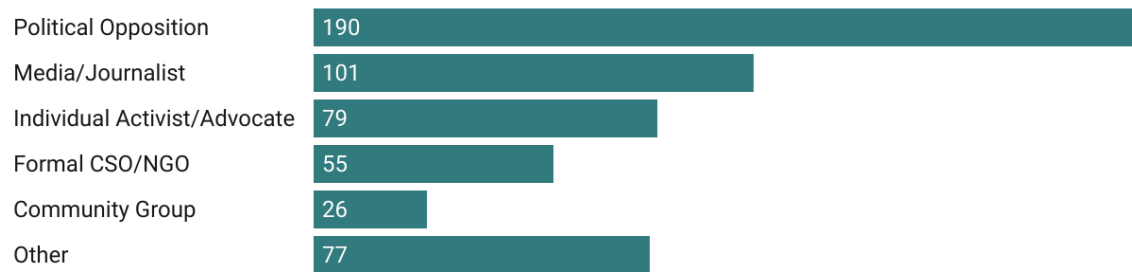
January 2017	President Nursultan Nazarbayev gives the green light for constitutional reforms that dilute the sweeping powers of the president and force his eventual successor to share power with other institutions.
October 2017	President Nazarbayev orders his office to prepare for a switch to a Latin-based alphabet from a Cyrillic one, distancing itself from Russian influence. Kazakh used to be written in Arabic script until the 1920s, when the Soviet Union briefly introduced a Latin alphabet for it. This was later replaced by a Cyrillic one in 1940.
February 2018	A ban on speaking Russian in cabinet meetings takes effect, despite many ministers favoring the language over their native Kazakh.
May 2018	Parliament appoints President Nazarbayev chairman for life of a newly-strengthened Security Council, preparing the stage for his post-presidential role.
March 2019	Chairman of the Kazakh Senate, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev becomes acting President on Nazarbayev's resignation.
June 2019	Snap presidential elections are held. Protesters call for a boycott as they consider the results unfair. Over several days, police detain thousands of peaceful protesters, often using excessive force. 677 people were sentenced to administrative arrests and 305 fined.
October 2019	President Tokayev states that Kazakhstan should move towards using the face-recognition technology employed in China, and claims benefits to gathering personal data on citizens.
February 2020	Around 200 people are detained as two opposition groups call for anti-government protests.

May 2020	Authorities in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan evacuate thousands from the Syr Darya river basin after the Sardoba dam on the Uzbek side burst, causing floods. Six people are killed and over 100,000 displaced. Damages are estimated at \$1 billion.
January 2021	Parliamentary elections are held. Despite at least nine attempts since the 2016 parliamentary elections, no new parties have been registered, firmly shutting the opposition out of the political arena.

*Notes: These charts visualize instances of civic space restrictions in Kazakhstan, categorized as: harassment/violence, restrictive legislation, or state-backed legal cases. Instances are disaggregated by quarter and accompanied by a timeline of events in the political and civic space of Kazakhstan from January 2017 through March 2021. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Kazakhstan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

## Figure 2. Harassment or Violence by Targeted Group in Kazakhstan

Number of Instances Recorded, January 2017–March 2021



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*Notes: This figure shows the number of instances of harassment/violence initiated against civic space actors in Kazakhstan disaggregated by the group targeted (i.e., political opposition, individual activist/advocate, media/journalist, other community group, formal CSO/NGO or other). Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Kazakhstan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

## Table 3. State-Backed Legal Cases by Targeted Group in Kazakhstan

Number of Instances Recorded, January 2017–March 2021

Defendant Category	Number of Cases
Media/Journalist	36
Political Opposition	89
Formal CSO/NGO	25

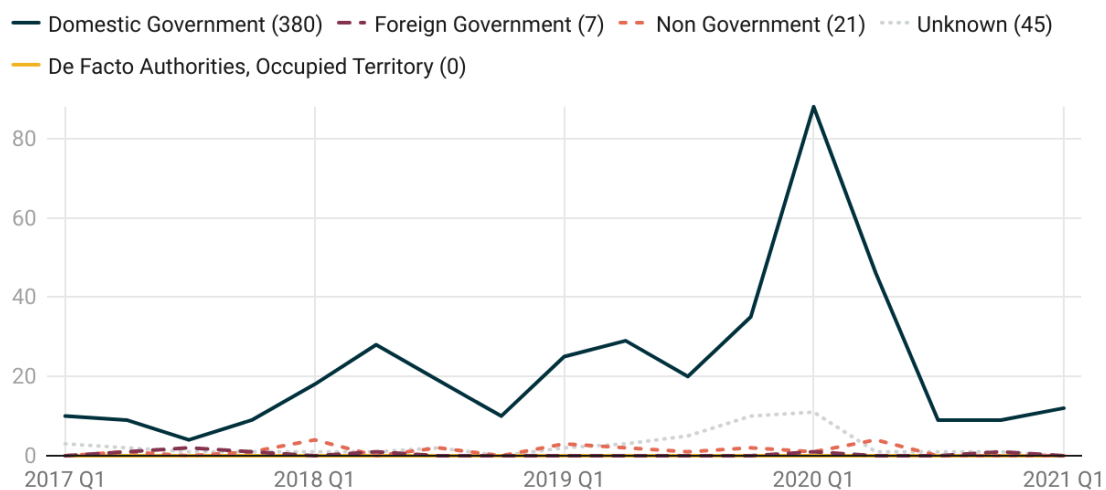


Individual Activist/Advocate	67
Other Community Group	21
Other	27

Notes: This table shows the number of state-backed legal cases against civic space actors in Kazakhstan disaggregated by the group targeted (i.e., political opposition, individual activist/advocate, media/journalist, other community group, formal CSO/NGO or other).

Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Kazakhstan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

Figure 3. Number of Recorded Restrictions in Kazakhstan by Initiator  
Number of Instances Recorded



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Notes: The figure visualizes recorded instances of restrictions of civic space actors in Kazakhstan, categorized by the initiator: domestic government, non-government, foreign government, and unknown. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Kazakhstan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

### 2.1.1 Nature of Restrictions of Civic Space Actors

Instances of harassment (11 threatened, 366 acted upon) towards civic space actors were more common than episodes of outright physical harm (7 threatened, 47 acted upon) during the period. The vast majority of these restrictions (96 percent) were acted on, rather than merely threatened. However,

since this data is collected on the basis of reported incidents, this likely understates threats which are less visible (see Figure 4). Of the 431 instances of harassment and violence, acted-on harassment accounted for the largest percentage (85 percent).

Recorded instances of restrictive legislation (26) in Kazakhstan are important to capture as they give government actors a mandate to constrain civic space with long-term cascading effects. This indicator is limited to a subset of parliamentary laws, chief executive decrees or other formal executive branch policies and rules that may have a deleterious effect on civic space actors, either subgroups or in general. Both proposed and passed restrictions qualify for inclusion, but we focus exclusively on new and negative developments in laws or rules affecting civic space actors. We exclude discussion of pre-existing laws and rules or those that constitute an improvement for civic space.

A close look at instances of restrictive legislation in Kazakhstan highlights two themes of regulation: (i) increased control over the media; and (ii) greater restrictions of the freedom of assembly. In May 2017, the government approved a draft bill introducing new requirements for journalists to verify the accuracy of information they publish. The same bill also stipulates that state bodies, with whom the journalists are supposed to confirm the reliability of their reporting, may take up to 15 days to respond to inquiries from the media. Additionally, the bill requires journalists to obtain consent for the publication of private or commercial secrets, without a clear definition of what constitutes secrets. It also specifies that Kazakh journalists working with foreign media must be accredited by the foreign ministry, similar to foreign journalists.

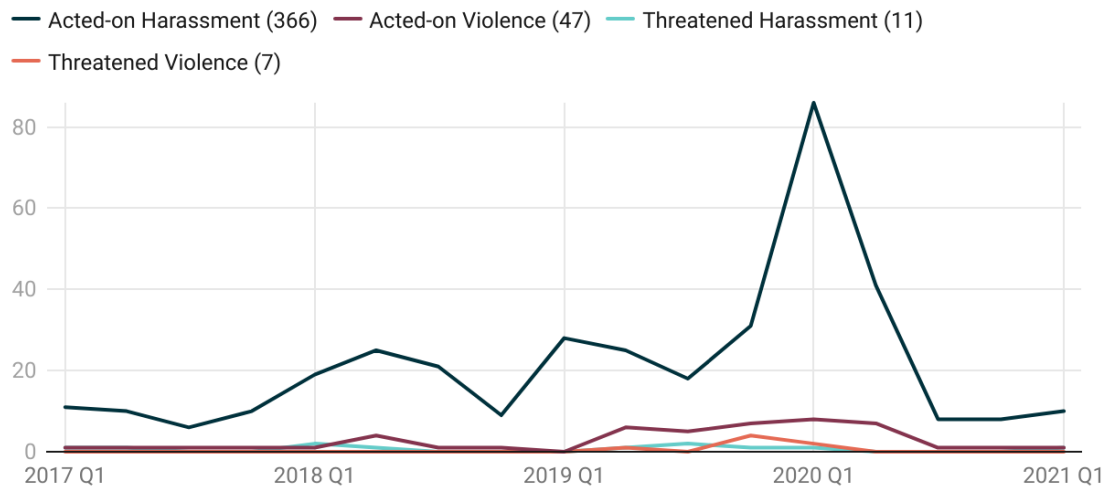
Beginning in September 2019, Kazakh civic space actors were introduced to new rally organization procedures. In November of the same year, a law prohibiting children from attending rallies came into effect. In February 2020, another bill with restrictions to assembly was being deliberated. This time the constraints included limits on venues for peaceful protests, a requirement to give the authorities a 15-day window to review applications for a demonstration, and restrictions of who had the right to protest peacefully—foreigners, including refugees and stateless persons, were no longer allowed to participate in

protests. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev signed this bill into effect in May 2020.

Civic space actors were the targets of 249 recorded instances of state-backed legal cases between January 2017 and March 2021. The highest concentration of these cases (98) occurred in 2020. Most frequently Kazakh authorities pursued cases against members of the political opposition.<sup>6</sup> As shown in Figure 5, charges in these cases were most often directly (78 percent) tied to fundamental freedoms (e.g., freedom of speech, assembly.) There were fewer indirect nuisance charges (22 percent), such as fraud, embezzlement and tax evasion, intended to discredit the reputations of civic space actors.

Figure 4. Threatened versus Acted-on Harassment or Violence Against Civic Space Actors in Kazakhstan

Number of Instances Recorded



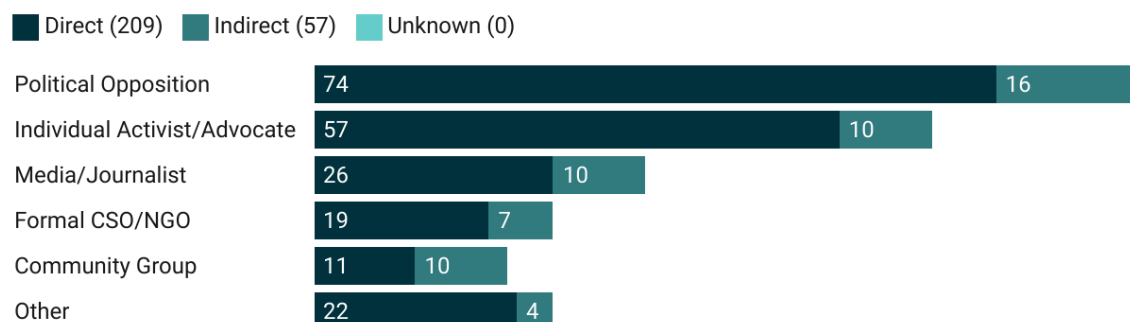
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*Notes: This figure visualizes instances of harassment of or violence against civic space actors in Kazakhstan, categorized by the type of harassment or violence and year. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Kazakhstan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

<sup>6</sup> See footnote 4

## Figure 5. Direct versus Indirect State-backed Legal Cases by Targeted Group in Kazakhstan

Number of Instances Recorded, January 2017–March 2021



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*Notes: This figure shows the number of state-backed legal cases brought against civic space actors in Kazakhstan, disaggregated by the group targeted (i.e., political opposition, individual activist/advocate, media/journalist, other community group, formal CSO/NGO or other) and the nature of the charge (i.e., direct or indirect). Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Kazakhstan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

## 2.2 Attitudes Toward Civic Space in Kazakhstan

Kazakh citizens' membership interest in politics held steady between 2011 and 2018, though willingness to engage in overt political action was extremely low, in comparison to other E&E countries. Confidence and membership rates in voluntary organizations, particularly labor unions, saw gains. Citizens also demonstrated a revealed preference for sport and art associations as an outlet for civic engagement. In this section, we take a closer look at Kazakh citizens' interest in politics, participation in political action or voluntary organizations, and confidence in institutions. We also examine how Kazakh involvement in less political forms of civic engagement—donating to charities, volunteering for organizations, helping strangers—has evolved over time.

## 2.2.1 Interest in Politics and Willingness to Act as Barometers of Kazakh Civic Space

Just under half of Kazakh respondents to the 2011 World Values Survey (WVS) expressed an interest in politics (44 percent), on par with the regional average<sup>7</sup> (Figure 6). However, far fewer Kazakh citizens were willing to engage in political action: the majority of respondents reported that they “would never” take part in petitions, boycotts, demonstrations, or strikes (Figure 7). Of these four forms of political action, Kazakh respondents most frequently reported having engaged in demonstrations (6 percent)<sup>8</sup> (Figure 7) and 18 percent said they would consider doing so in future. Comparatively, a mere 1-2 percent of Kazakh respondents reported engaging in petitions, boycotts, or strikes previously and were fairly hesitant to get involved in these actions in future.

Membership in voluntary organizations was similarly muted in 2011 (Figure 9). Only 7 percent of Kazakh respondents to the 2011 WVS were members of each category of voluntary organization, on average, though this was still on par with regional peers.<sup>9</sup> The most popular organizations—sports or recreational associations, associations related to art, music or education, and labor unions—counted between 9 and 12 percent of Kazakh respondents among their members (Table 4). Environmental and consumer organizations were the least popular avenues for civic engagement: fewer than five percent of respondents reported membership in each class of organization.

Despite low levels of political activity and organization membership, Kazakh citizens’ trust in institutions was relatively high in 2011 (Table 5). Over half of Kazakh respondents to the WVS said they were confident in their country’s institutions, giving high marks to the military (72 percent), parliament (67 percent) and civil service (67 percent).<sup>10</sup> Labor unions were an interesting case:

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<sup>7</sup> Within the reported 2.6 percent error rate. The WVS 6 regional means are calculated from the seven E&E region countries included in the WVS Wave 6 (2010–2014), which were Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, and Ukraine.

<sup>8</sup> A rate that was two percentage points below the regional mean but within the margin of error. See Figure 8.

<sup>9</sup> Kazakh participation in voluntary organizations were on par with their regional peers except for labor unions (-4 percentage points).

<sup>10</sup> The World Values Survey confidence question includes a general option for “government” in addition to specific branches such as the civil service, courts, parliament, etc. This option led all others in 2011, with three-quarters of Kazakh respondents reporting confidence in the government overall.

Kazaks were somewhat more confident in labor unions (44 percent) than their regional peers (+3 percentage points) and yet their membership in these institutions trailed other countries by 4 percentage points.

By November 2018, interest in politics across the E&E region had tapered off somewhat (-6 percentage points from 2011), though Kazakh respondents<sup>11</sup> saw less of a decline (-2 percentage points from 2011) (Figure 6) and actually led the region in 2018.<sup>12</sup> In terms of political activity, the majority of citizens still reported that they would never engage in petitions, boycotts, demonstrations, or strikes (Figure 7). Although other E&E countries saw double-digit increases between 2011 and 2018 in citizens' signing petitions (+13 percentage points on average), there was only a modest 3 percentage point increase among Kazakh respondents who reported that they had, or would, sign petitions in future. The level of Kazakh participation in demonstrations declined relative to 2011 (-3 percentage points), while fewer than 1 percent of respondents each said they joined strikes and boycotts<sup>13</sup> (Figure 7).

Kazakh membership in voluntary organizations also remained fairly stable, increasing to an average of 9 percent (+2 percentage points) on average in 2018 (Figure 9). Kazakh respondents to the 2018 WVS were most likely to be members of labor unions (16 percent), sport and recreational organizations (15 percent) and art groups (14 percent).<sup>14</sup> All three organization types grew their numbers by 5 percentage points each between 2011 and 2018. Church and religious organization membership held steady at 8 percent during the period but trailed regional peers by four percentage points in 2018 (Figure 9).

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<sup>11</sup> Note that the 2018 WVS wave here and throughout the profile refers to the Joint European Values Study and World Values Survey Wave 2017–2021 (EVS/WVS Wave 2017–2021) which is the most recent wave of WVS data. For more information, see Section 5.

<sup>12</sup> The Joint EVS/WVS regional means are calculated from the seven E&E region countries included in the WVS Wave 6 (2017–2021), which were Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, and Ukraine.

<sup>13</sup> This is likely influenced by the continued restriction of assemblies in Kazakhstan and dissolution of the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (KNPRK).

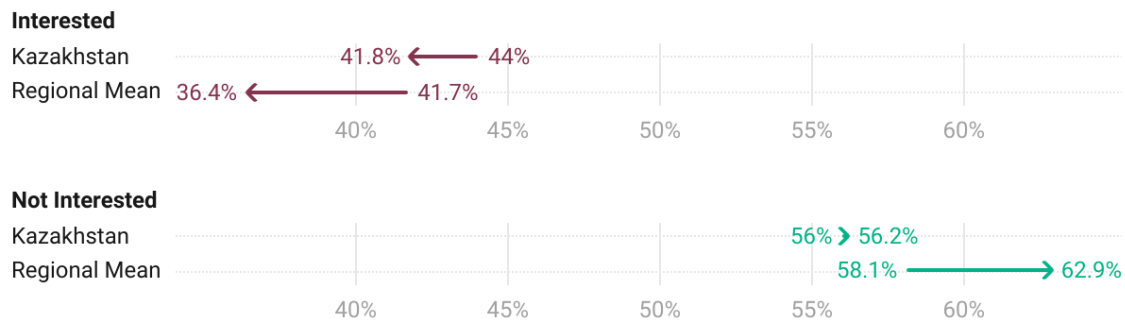
<https://freedomhouse.org/country/kazakhstan/freedom-world/2019>

<sup>14</sup> Curiously, this jump occurred the year after the government dissolved Kazakhstan's independent trade union, the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (KNPRK).

<https://freedomhouse.org/country/kazakhstan/freedom-world/2019>

Kazakh trust in many institutions improved in 2018. Four-fifths of respondents were confident in their military and religious organizations, an increase of 9 and 17 percentage points, respectively since 2011 (Table 4). Over half of Kazakh respondents on the WVS expressed confidence in their domestic media, holding relatively steady from 2011 (53 percent) to 2018 (56 percent), though additional surveys conducted in the region indicate that the level of public trust can vary by media modality.<sup>15</sup> Kazakh confidence in their parliament (-3 percentage points) and the government overall (-6 percentage points) tapered off slightly from 2011, but not dramatically. Meanwhile, Kazakh citizens' confidence in their political institutions overall far exceeded their regional peers by an average of 25 percentage points in 2018, with political parties faring especially well (+32 percentage points compared to the regional average). This high confidence in political parties is curious, as it runs counter to the reality that there are no real Kazakh opposition parties to challenge the ruling Nur Otan party.<sup>16</sup>

Figure 6. Interest in Politics: Kazakh Citizens versus Regional Peers, 2011 and 2018



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Kazakh respondents that were interested or not interested in politics in 2011 and 2018, as compared to the regional average. Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

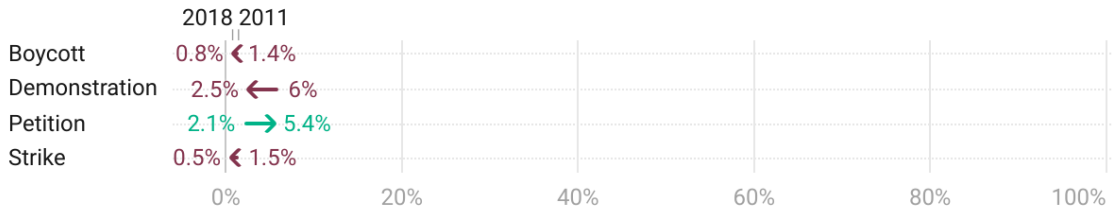
<sup>15</sup> The Central Asia Barometer, waves 2 through 5, conducted between December 2017 and June 2019, highlights that approximately 80 percent of Kazakh citizens trusted information from television, compared to 57 percent for radio, and 61 percent for newspapers.

<sup>16</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/country/kazakhstan/freedom-world/2021>

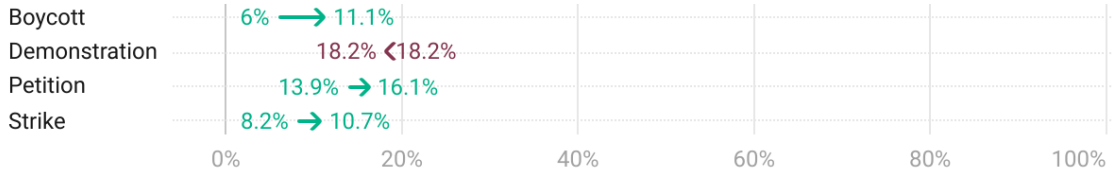
Figure 7. Political Action: Kazakh Citizens' Willingness to Participate, 2011 versus 2018

Percentage of Respondents

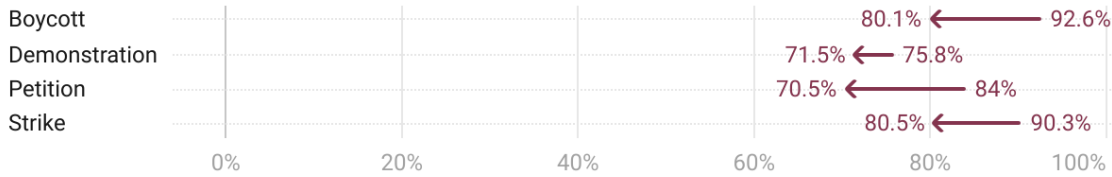
**Have done**



**Might do**



**Would never do**



Created with Datawrapper

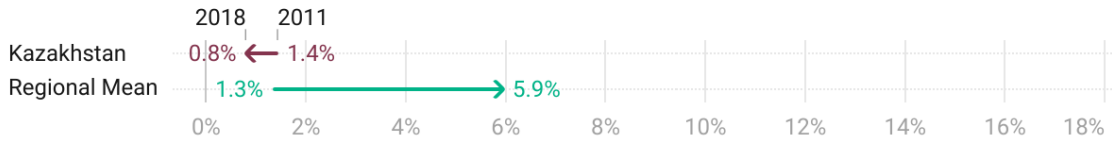
Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Kazakh respondents reported past participation in each of four types of political action—petition, boycott, demonstration, and strike—as well as their future willingness to do so. Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.



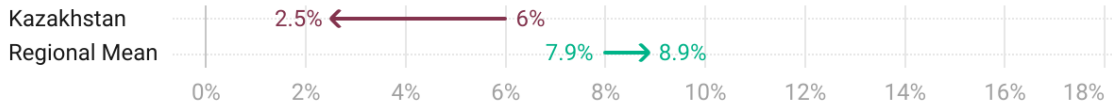
Figure 8. Political Action: Participation by Kazakh Citizens versus Regional Peers, 2011 and 2018

Percentage of Respondents Reporting “Have Done”

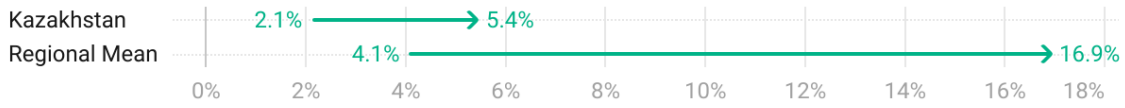
**Boycott**



**Demonstration**



**Petition**



**Strike**

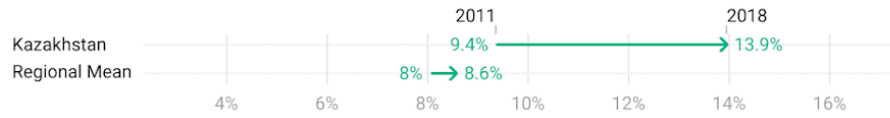


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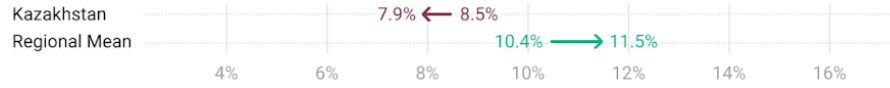
Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Kazakh respondents that reported past participation in each of four types of political action in 2011 and 2018, as compared to the regional average. Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

Figure 9. Voluntary Organization Membership: Kazakh Citizens versus Regional Peers, 2011 and 2018

**Art, Music or Educational Organization**



**Church or Religious Organization**



**Consumer Organization**



**Environmental Organization**



**Humanitarian or Charitable organization**



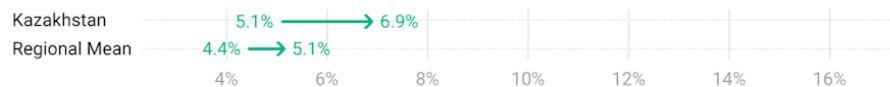
**Labor Union**



**Political Party**



**Professional Association**



**Self-Help Group or Mutual Aid Organization**



**Sport or Recreational Organization**



**Other (Unspecified) Organizations**



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This graph highlights membership in a selection of key organization types for Kazakhstan. "Other community group" is the mean of responses for the following responses: "Art, music or educational organization," "Labor Union," "Environmental organization," "Professional association," "Humanitarian or charitable organization," "Consumer organization," "Self-help group, mutual aid group," "Other organization." Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

Table 4. Kazakh Citizens' Membership in Voluntary Organizations by Type, 2011 and 2018

Voluntary Organization	Membership, 2011	Membership, 2018	Percentage Point Change
Church or Religious Organization	8%	8%	-0.6
Sport or Recreational Organization	12%	15%	+3.6
Art, Music or Educational Organization	9%	14%	+4.6
Labor Union	9%	16%	+7.0
Political Party	8%	11%	+2.5
Environmental Organization	4%	4%	-0.5
Professional Association	5%	7%	+1.8
Humanitarian or Charitable Organization	5%	9%	+3.9
Consumer Organization	5%	6%	+1.3
Self-Help Group, Mutual Aid Group	5%	5%	-0.2
Other Organization	4%	4%	-0.3

Notes: This table shows the percentage of Kazakh respondents that reported membership in various categories of voluntary organizations in 2011 and 2020. Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

Table 5. Kazakh Citizens' Confidence in Key Institutions versus Regional Peers, 2011 and 2018

Institution	Confidence, 2011	Confidence, 2018	Percentage Point Change
Church or Religious Organization	62%	79%	+17.1%
Military	72%	81%	+8.9%
Press	53%	59%	+6.4%

Labor Unions	44%	54%	+10.0
Police	50%	65%	+14.8%
Courts	51%	63%	+12.4%
Government	75%	69%	-6.2%
Political Parties	55%	57%	+2.2%
Parliament	67%	65%	-.2.5%
Civil Service	67%	66%	-1.1%
Environmental Organizations	58%	57%	-0.5%

*Notes: This table shows the percentage of Kazakh respondents that reported confidence in various categories of institutions in 2011 and 2018. Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.*

## 2.2.2 Apolitical Participation

The Gallup World Poll’s (GWP) Civic Engagement Index affords an additional perspective on Kazakh citizens’ attitudes towards less political forms of participation between 2010 and 2021. This index measures the proportion of citizens that reported giving money to charity, volunteering at organizations, and helping a stranger on a scale of 0 to 100.<sup>17</sup> Overall, Kazakhstan charted the highest civic engagement scores on the index in 2012, 2014, and 2021, with corresponding lows in 2011 and 2018.

Even with its high volatility in scores, Kazakhstan averaged about the same level of civic engagement as its regional peers between 2010 and 2020—28 versus 29 points, respectively (Figure 10). During this ten-year period, 24 percent of Kazakh respondents, on average, reportedly gave money to charity, 18 percent volunteered at an organization, and 40 percent helped a stranger.<sup>18</sup> Kazakhstan’s civic engagement scores jumped in 2021, in line with regional trends which began in 2020.<sup>19</sup> By 2021, Kazakh citizens reported helping a stranger (47

<sup>17</sup> The GWP Civic Engagement Index is calculated at an individual level, with 33% given for each of three civic-related activities (Have you: Donated money to charity? Volunteered your time to an organization in the past month? Helped a stranger or someone you didn't know in the past month?) that received a “yes” answer. The country values are then calculated from the weighted average of these individual Civic Engagement Index scores.

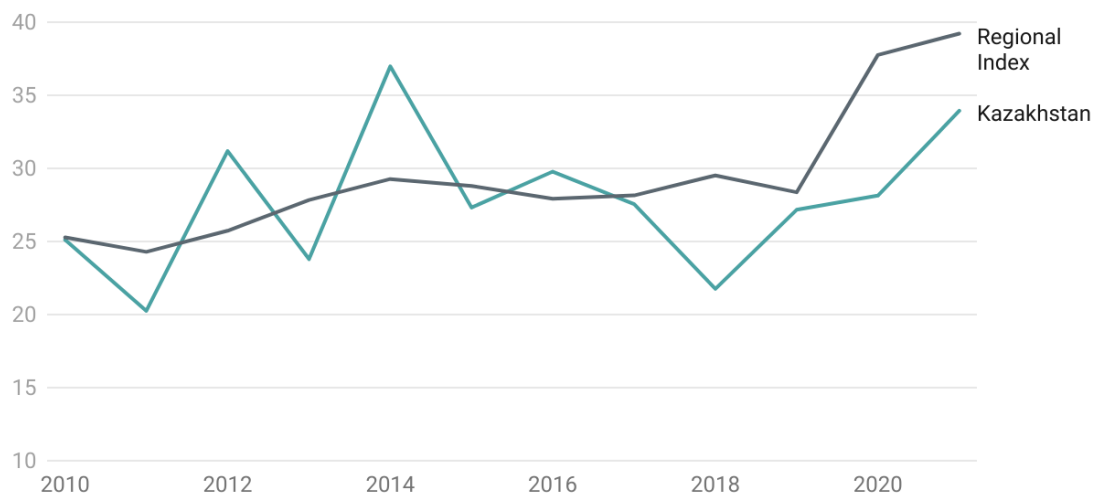
<sup>18</sup> Kazakhstan was roughly equal with the regional mean for charity and volunteering (25 and 17 percent, respectively) between 2010–2020, but trailed the regional mean for helping strangers by an average of 3 percent.

<sup>19</sup> The 2021 wave of the GWP in Kazakhstan between September and October.

percent), donating to charity (39 percent), and volunteering (16 percent) at higher levels than previously.

Donating to charity and helping strangers were the two key index components driving this variability,<sup>20</sup> and charity appeared to be positively correlated with the overall performance of the economy.<sup>21</sup> When the economy performed better, Kazakh citizens may have had more money to donate to charitable causes and felt more secure in supporting their neighbors with their time and effort. The exception to this rule may have been the COVID-19 crisis which saw a sizable increase (+10 percentage points between 2020 and 2021) in Kazakh citizens donating to charities, even in the face of the pandemic-induced economic stress.

Figure 10. Civic Engagement Index: Kazakhstan versus Regional Peers



Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: This graph shows how scores for Kazakhstan varied on the Gallup World Poll Index of Civic Participation between 2010 and 2021, as compared to the regional mean of E&E countries.*

*Sources: Gallup World Poll, 2010-2021*

<sup>20</sup> Helping strangers has a correlation value of 0.919\*\*\* at  $\alpha=0.000$ , and charity correlates with the index overall with 0.794\* at  $p=0.025$ , while volunteering moves apart from these two, 0.145 at  $p=1.000$ .

<sup>21</sup> Charity correlates with GDP (constant Kazakhstan Tenge) at 0.850\*\*,  $p = 0.008$ .

### 3. External Channels of Influence: Kremlin Civic Space Projects and Russian State-Run Media in Kazakhstan

Foreign governments can wield civilian tools of influence such as money, in-kind support, and state-run media in various ways that disrupt societies far beyond their borders. They may work with the local authorities who design and enforce the prevailing rules of the game that determine the degree to which citizens can organize themselves, give voice to their concerns, and take collective action. Alternatively, they may appeal to popular opinion by promoting narratives that cultivate sympathizers, vilify opponents, or otherwise foment societal unrest. In this section, we analyze data on Kremlin financing and in-kind support to civic space actors or regulators in Kazakhstan (section 3.1), as well as Russian state media mentions related to civic space, including specific actors and broader rhetoric about democratic norms and rivals (section 3.2).

#### 3.1 Russian State-Backed Support to Kazakhstan's Civic Space

The Kremlin supported 150 known Kazakh civic organizations via 249 civic space-relevant projects in Kazakhstan during the period of January 2015 to August 2021. Moscow prefers to directly engage and build relationships with individual civic actors, as opposed to investing in broader-based institutional development, which accounted for roughly two percent of its overtures in Kazakhstan. The country attracted the largest volume of Russian civic space activities, receiving 84 more projects than the Kyrgyz Republic, which attracted the second-largest volume of activities in the E&E region.<sup>22</sup>

In line with its strategy elsewhere, the Kremlin emphasized promoting Russian cultural ties, outreach to youth organizations, and commemorations of “The Great Patriotic War” (World War II). There was a steadily increasing

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<sup>22</sup> Together, Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic received over 400 Kremlin-backed civic space projects over the past six years.

concentration activity from 2015 through 2019, before a sharp downturn in 2021, likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Russian Projects Supporting Kazakh Civic Space Actors by Type

Number of Projects Recorded, January 2015–August 2021

Year	CSO Support (244)	Institutional Development (5)
2015	2	0
2016	9	2
2017	37	1
2018	54	2
2019	72	0
2020	63	0
2021	7	0

Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: This figure shows the number of projects directed by the Russian government to either civic society actors or government regulators of this civic space between January 2015 and August 2021. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

The Kremlin routed its engagement in Kazakhstan through 34 different channels (Figure 12), including government ministries, language and culture-focused funds, charitable foundations, territorial directorates, and Russian consular offices. The stated missions of these Russian government entities tend to emphasize themes such as education and culture promotion, public diplomacy, and outreach to compatriots living abroad. However, not all of these Russian state organs were equally important. Rossotrudnichestvo<sup>23</sup>—an autonomous agency under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a mandate to promote political

<sup>23</sup> Rossotrudnichestvo, or the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation, is an autonomous agency under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that holds the mandate for promoting political and economic cooperation with Russia.

and economic cooperation abroad—supplied over 67 percent of all known Kremlin-backed support (126 organizations via 167 projects).

Russia’s consular bodies were the other main conduit for projects, with the Embassy in Nur-Sultan and the Consulate Generals in Almaty, Oral, and Ostmen collectively involved in 133 different projects. Often, these projects involved Rossotrudnichestvo as the primary organizer, with consular bodies serving a secondary role. The Consulate General in Oral was the one exception to this rule as it only coordinated one-third of its projects (33) with Rossotrudnichestvo and independently initiated the remaining 66 projects.<sup>24</sup> Rossotrudnichestvo also brought in a wider array of partner organizations to conduct one-off activities than elsewhere in the region, including the Moscow Center for International Cooperation, Roscosmos, Russian Writers’ Union, and the State Memorial Museum of Defense and the Siege of Leningrad.

Often on the forefront of the Kremlin’s engagement in other countries, the Gorchakov Fund<sup>25</sup> was less prolific in Kazakhstan, supporting only two events. The first was an October 2017 youth conference, “The Role of Soft Power and Public Diplomacy in the Youth Dialogue,” which brought together student leaders and youth members of NGOs to improve cooperation with Russia.<sup>26</sup> The second event was a December 2019 forum: “International Forum of Leaders of and Youth Organizations ‘Cooperation without Borders’” held jointly in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. This youth conference partnered with the Graduates of Access Program in Shymkent (ASSA) and other youth leaders to improve “interstate relations” and “international youth cooperation.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The Consulate in Oral was also independently involved with two projects supported by the Representative Office of the Republic of Tatarstan.

<sup>25</sup> Formally The Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, founded in 2010 as a soft power instrument to promote Russian culture abroad and provide funding to CSOs/NGOs. Although the Gorchakov Fund is frequently on par with Rossotrudnichestvo in both number of civic space-relevant projects and partner organizations in other E&E countries, its engagement in Uzbekistan was far more limited.

<sup>26</sup>

<https://www.gorchakovfund.ru/news/the-gorchakov-fund-has-sponsored-the-international-youth-camp-in-kazakhstan/>

<sup>27</sup>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20201021064642/https://www.gorchakovfund.ru/news/view/sotrudnichestvo-bez-granits-obedinilo-molodykh-liderov-semi-gosudarstv/>



Kremlin affiliated entities such as Russia’s Ombudsman for Human Rights, the National Audit Office, the State Duma, the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation also directly interacted with Kazakhstan’s civic space regulators. Tatyana Moskalkova, the Russian Ombudsman for Human Rights, met with her Kazakh counterpart in November 2016 s to discuss “interaction with government bodies and civil society, as well as international and regional human rights cooperation.”<sup>28</sup> In April 2018, delegates from the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation and the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan signed a cooperation agreement to increase coordination and share experience investigating crimes.<sup>29</sup> Other instances of Russian support to civic space regulators included efforts to improve parliamentary integration between the Russian Duma and Kazakhstan's Mazhilis, audit cooperation, and joint border training activities.

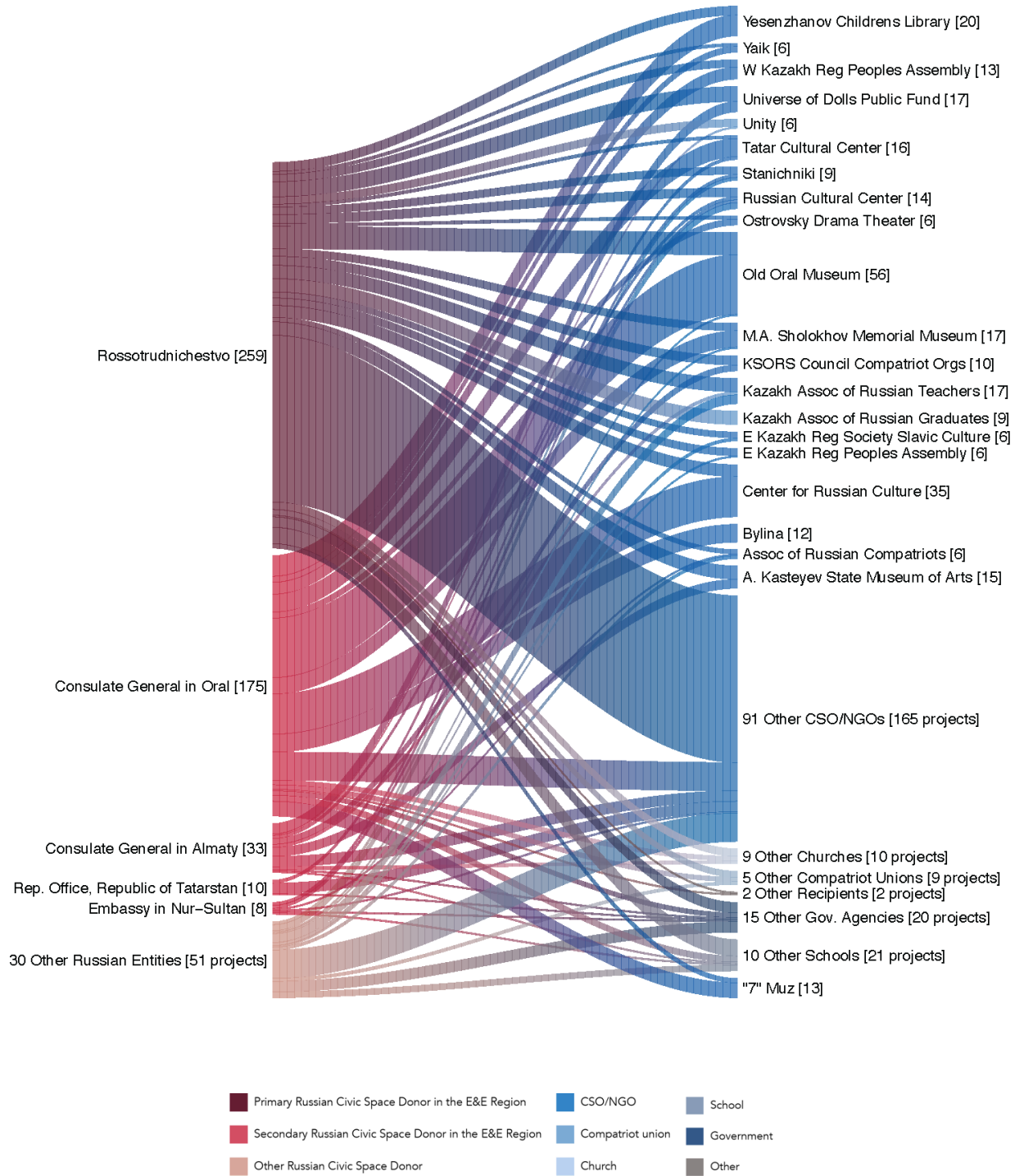
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<sup>28</sup> This meeting was part of a series of meetings the Russian human rights ombuds had around Central Asia in 2016 and 2017, with the Ombuds office holding similar meetings in Uzbekistan and the Kyrgyz Republic. <https://ria.ru/20161107/1480806501.html>

<sup>29</sup> [https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc\\_id=33045063](https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=33045063)

Figure 12. Kremlin-affiliated Support to Kazakh Civic Space

Number of Projects, 2015–2021



Notes: This figure shows which Kremlin-affiliated agencies (left-hand side) were involved in directing financial or in-kind support to which civil society actors or regulators (right-hand side) between January 2015 and August 2021. Lines are weighted to represent counts of projects

such that thicker lines represent a larger volume of projects and thinner lines a smaller volume. The total weight of lines may exceed the total number of projects, due to many projects involving multiple donors and/or recipients. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

The following 30 Russian entities were consolidated into "Other Russian Organizations" because they had fewer than 5 projects. Number of projects for each source is indicated in brackets if greater than one. National Audit Office, Open Youth University of the city of Tomsk [2], Russian Writers' Union [3], Embassy in Nut-Sultan [5], Law enforcement - unspecified, State Memorial Museum of Defense and the Siege of Leningrad. [4], Consulate General in Ostmen [3], Altai Territory Directorate [2], Moscow Government, Commonwealth of Peoples of Eurasia, Information and Analytical Center "Eurasia - Volga Region," Moscow State University [2], Orenburg State University, Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, Gorchakov Fund [2], Assoc of Teachers of Russian Language and Higher School Literature, Ministry of Education and Science [4], Mordovian State Pedagogical Institute named after V.I. M.E. Evseyeva, Russian Committee of the UNESCO Information for All Program [3], Russian Humanitarian Mission, St. Petersburg House of Music [2], Center for Modern Educational Technologies, Roscomos, Council of Young Scientists of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Southwestern State University, Ombudsman for Human Rights, State Duma, Moscow House of Compatriots, Moscow Center for International Cooperation.

The following 91 CSOs & NGOs were consolidated into "Other CSO/NGO" because they had fewer than 5 projects. Number of projects for each source is indicated in brackets if greater than one. Abay Opera House, Akbuzat [3], Aktobe Regional Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan, Alliance Creative Assoc., Almaty Regional Peoples Assembly of Kazakhstan [2], Almaty Regional Russian Center, Almaty Regional Slavic Youth Movement (AOSMD) [2], Almaty branch of the Vladimir Vysotsky Memorial Fund, Arna Women's Union of the Bayterek District [3], Art School-UNESCO Club of the Schoolchildren Palace of Petropavl, Artists Union of Astana, Assoc of Non-Profit Organizations in Semey, Assoc of Russian Slavic Cossack Organizations [3], Assoc of Tatar-Bashkir and Tatar Societies and Cultural Centers of Kazakhstan, Astana Opera [4], Atamnyn Amanaty, Avangard, Balbulak-Rodnik Public Fund [3], Centralized Library System of Almaty, City Council of World War II Veterans, and Military Service and Home Front Workers, Commission for Women's Affairs of the Akimat of Almaty, Compatriot NGO, Constellation ANDRES, Council of Veterans of the Saryarka Region of Astana, Creative Assoc. "Turkestan," Dobrynya Children's Education Center [2], Duslyk [5], E Kazakh Drama Theater, Eastern-Kazakhstan Regional Architectural, Ethnographic and Natural Landscape Museum-Reserve, EsilArt Public Fund, Eurasian Cultural Fund [3], Eurasian Monitoring [5], Graduates of Access Program in Shymkent (ASSA) [2], International Constellations of Nazib Zhiganov [4], June 24 Gallery [2], K.I. Satpayev Memorial Museum, Kazakh Assoc of Germans "Renaissance" [2], Kurmangaliyev Regional Philharmonic Society [2], Link of Altai Literary Assoc., M. Auezov Central Youth and Children Library [2], M. Gorky State Academic Drama Theater, M. Mametove Memorial House-Museum [2], Maidan Zholy, N Kazakhstan Regal Museum Assoc., N

*Kazakhstan Regal Museum of Fine Arts, N Kazakhstan Regal Peoples Assembly of Kazakhstan [2], N.G. Zhiganov Kazan State Conservatory [2], National Museum of the Kazakhstan [3], Nuclear Society of Kazakhstan [3], Nur-Sultan City Peoples Assembly of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev Foundation [4], Orlyonok Children's Camp, Ostrovsky Academic Drama Theater [2], Pavel Vasiliev House-Museum, Pavlodar Regional Peoples Assembly of Kazakhstan, Pilgrim Student Theater, Pushkin Library [4], Radonezh Charitable Corporate Foundation [2], Republican Slavic Movement "Lad" [3], Russian Community of Akmola Region, Russian Community of Kazakhstan, Russian Community of the N Kazakhstan Reg [2], Russian Ethnocultural Center of the Almaty Region, Russian-Kazakh Experts' IQ Club, S. Mukanov Regional Universal Scientific Library, Schoolchildren's Palace in Nur-Sultan [2], Scientific and Expert Council of the People's Assembly of Kazakhstan, Semey House of Friendship, Shymkent City Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan, Slavic Center [4], Slavic Cultural Center [2], Slavyane [4], Sovremennik People's Youth Theater, Station of Young Naturalists of Almaty, Tatar-Bashkir National Cultural Center "Tan" [2], Tatulyk, Theater for Children and Youth named after Natalia Sats [3], Three Chords, Tonika Bard Song club, Union of Cossacks of the Steppe Territory [4], Union of Orthodox Citizens of Kazakhstan [4], Verkhne-Irtysh Russian Cossack community, Veterans of the Armed Forces of the Kazakhstan [2], W Kazakh Regional Society of Disabled and Veterans of the War in Afghanistan [2], W Kazakh Universal Scientific Library named after Zh. Moldagaliyev, World Women's Friendship Center [4], Yaitsky [2], Zhaikhun, Zhambyl Daryny [2], Zhambyl Regional Russian Drama Theater, Zhas Otan.*

*The following 15 Government Agencies were consolidated into "Other Government" because they had fewer than 5 projects. Number of projects for each source is indicated in brackets if greater than one. Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic, Accounts Committee for Control over Execution of the Republican Budget, Akimat of Nur-Sultan, Almaty Ed. Dept. [2], Border Service of the NSC, Ed. Dept. of the N Kazakhstan Reg [2], General Prosecutor's Office of Kazakhstan, N Kazakhstan Regal Akimat, Ombudsman for Human Rights in Kazakhstan, Oral City Department of Education [2], Parliament of Kazakhstan, Peoples Assembly of Kazakhstan, Semey Akimat, Semey Department of Culture and Language Development, W Kazakh Regional Akimat [3].*

*The following 9 churches were consolidated into "Other Churches" because they had fewer than 5 projects. Number of projects for each source is indicated in brackets if greater than one. Aktobe Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church, Almaty Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church, Almaty Theological Seminary, Bulayevo Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church, Church of the Resurrection of Christ, Oral Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church, Petropavl Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church, Social Service of the Holy Ascension Cathedral, Ural Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church [2].*

*The following 5 compatriot unions were consolidated into "Other Compatriot Unions" because they had fewer than 5 projects. Number of projects for each source is indicated in brackets if greater than one. Russian Compatriots of Aktobe [2], Russian Compatriots of Mangystau [2],*

*Russian Compatriots of W Kazakh [2], Semirechenskoe Cossack Host, Youth Council of Russian Compatriots of Kazakhstan [2].*

*The following 10 schools were consolidated into "Other Schools" because they had fewer than 5 projects. Number of projects for each source is indicated in brackets if greater than one.*

*Children's Music School No. 1 named after D. Nurpeisova [3], College of Management, Business and Education, Hall of Military Glory at Atyrau Oil and Gas University, Kazakh National University of Arts [3], Kazakh-Russian Gymnasium No. 54 of Almaty [2], Kazakhstan branch of the Moscow State University named after M.V. Lomonosov [3], Linguistic Gymnasium No. 35 in Almaty [4], North Kazakhstan State University, Pavlodar State Pedagogical University, Secondary School in the village of Makarovo [2].*

*The following 2 recipients were consolidated into "Other Recipients" because they had fewer than 5 projects. Number of projects for each source is indicated in brackets if greater than one. Other/unspecified, Veteran organizations - unspecified.*

### 3.1.1 The Recipients of Russian State-Backed Support to Kazakhstan's Civic Space

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are not the only type of civic space actors in Kazakhstan, but they were the most common beneficiaries of Russian state-backed overtures, named in 92 percent of identified projects (229 projects). Other non-governmental recipients of the Kremlin's attention included churches and compatriot unions for the Russian diaspora. The profile of compatriot organizations in Kazakhstan is somewhat distinct as compared to elsewhere in the region. A number of Kazakh compatriot unions were formally registered organizations and less reliant on Kremlin funding or Embassy coordination than their regional peers. This was similar to the Kyrgyz Republic, though with a much lower total number of these organizations. For this reason, we recorded several Kazakh compatriot organizations as formalized CSOs, regardless of the frequent use of "compatriot union" in their names.<sup>30</sup>

No single organization accounted for the majority of Russian projects, though several organizations were frequent recipients of Kremlin support, namely: the Old Oral Museum<sup>31</sup> (40 projects), the Russian Cultural Center CSO (28

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<sup>30</sup> These included the Association of Russian Compatriots, the Association of Russian Slavic Organizations, the NGO "Compatriot", and the Slavic Center.

<sup>31</sup> Also referred to as the Old Uralsk Folk Museum of Local Lore or the Cultural and Educational Foundation "Old Uralsk".

projects),<sup>32</sup> and the Yesenzhanov Regional Library for Children and Youth<sup>33</sup> (15 projects). All three of these organizations received support from the Russian Consulate General and Rossotrudnichestvo to host events celebrating Russian history and shared cultural ties, sometimes in the context of a broader activity. For example, the January 2020 commemoration of the siege of Leningrad “Memory Road” was organized by the Yesenzhanov library and Old Oral Museum with support from the consulate and Rossotrudnichestvo. The Kremlin also partnered with a wider range of museums, theaters, and other cultural centers to host events, albeit at a lower level of support.<sup>34</sup>

The Coordinating Council of Organizations of Russian Compatriots of the Republic of Kazakhstan (KSORS), founded in 2007, was another important conduit in Russian support to civic space actors. KSORS directly participated in six projects between 2015 and 2019,<sup>35</sup> but this compatriot union also served as an umbrella organization for CSOs promoting Russian, Slavic, and Tatar ethnic identity. Many of its member organizations were themselves direct recipients of Kremlin aid, suggesting that the KSORS facilitated the initial contact between Russian agencies and Kazakh CSOs.<sup>36</sup>

Kazakhstan’s Regional Assemblies of Peoples were also important civic space partners for Kremlin activity.<sup>37</sup> Nursultan Nazarbaev established the central Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan in 1995, which includes representatives from numerous ethnic groups and associations and mirrors the KSORS as an umbrella organization attempting to co-opt and influence smaller ethnic organizations. The national-level Assembly of Peoples was only involved in a

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<sup>32</sup> Also referred to as the Public Association “Center of Russian Culture of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan of the West Kazakhstan region (WKO)”

<sup>33</sup> Also known as the Regional Library for Children and Youth named after V.I. H. Yesenzhanov

<sup>34</sup> The next most-frequent recipients were the ethnocultural Public Association Bylina in Atyrau (12 projects); the Tatar Cultural Center in Oral (12 projects); M.A. Sholokhov Memorial Museum in Dar’inskoye (11 projects); 7 MUZ in Oral (10 projects); and the Universe of Dolls Public Fund in Almaty (10 projects).

<sup>35</sup> Two-thirds of which were the annual youth summer camp “Russian Summer” in coordination with the Consulate General in Almaty and Rossotrudnichestvo.

<sup>36</sup> These Regional Assemblies have been criticized as a strategy of Kazakh national political leaders to sideline ethnic minorities in a way that is “ideologically consistent with the Soviet legacy of keeping minorities distinct and formally equal, without providing them with a proper institutional framework for their representation and integration.” For further information, and a list of partner organizations, see: <https://ksors.kz/>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/minorities/docs/WP5.doc>

Kremlin-supported June 2017 celebration of the Tatar holiday Sabantuy.<sup>38</sup> However, regional and subsidiary CSOs that sent representatives to the national Assembly of Peoples were partners with Russian agencies on an additional 20 projects.<sup>39</sup>

Several additional Kazakh government bodies, beyond the civic space regulators discussed previously, conducted civic space-relevant projects with Kremlin support. These agencies included the Almaty Education Department, the Oral City Department of Education, the Akimat of Nur-Sultan, and the North Kazakhstan Regional Akimat. Partnerships focused on cultural events and festivals open to the public, such as the February 2017 pancake and folk concert festival hosted by the Embassy in Nur-Sultan, the Akimat of Nur-Sultan, the Association of Russian Compatriots, and the Russian Cultural Center public association. These activities were one-off cultural events, not open-ended commitments.

The largest number of Russian projects were directed to Oral, which accounted for 33 percent of all Kremlin activity (81 projects). This was followed by the capital of Nur-Sultan (23 percent, 58 projects), and Almaty (20 percent, 51 projects). The high volume of projects directed to the West Kazakhstan Region also included additional projects that took place in areas close to the administrative center of Oral (see Figure 13), including Dar'inskoye, Makarovo, and the Bayterek District at large. This appears to be the result of a very active Consulate General in the city, as well as the relative proximity to Russian borders. The Kremlin's preference for concentrating activity in populous urban areas is consistent with its approach elsewhere; however, there appears to be less of an outsized emphasis on the capital of Nur-Sultan or specific enclaves of ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan, as compared to other countries.

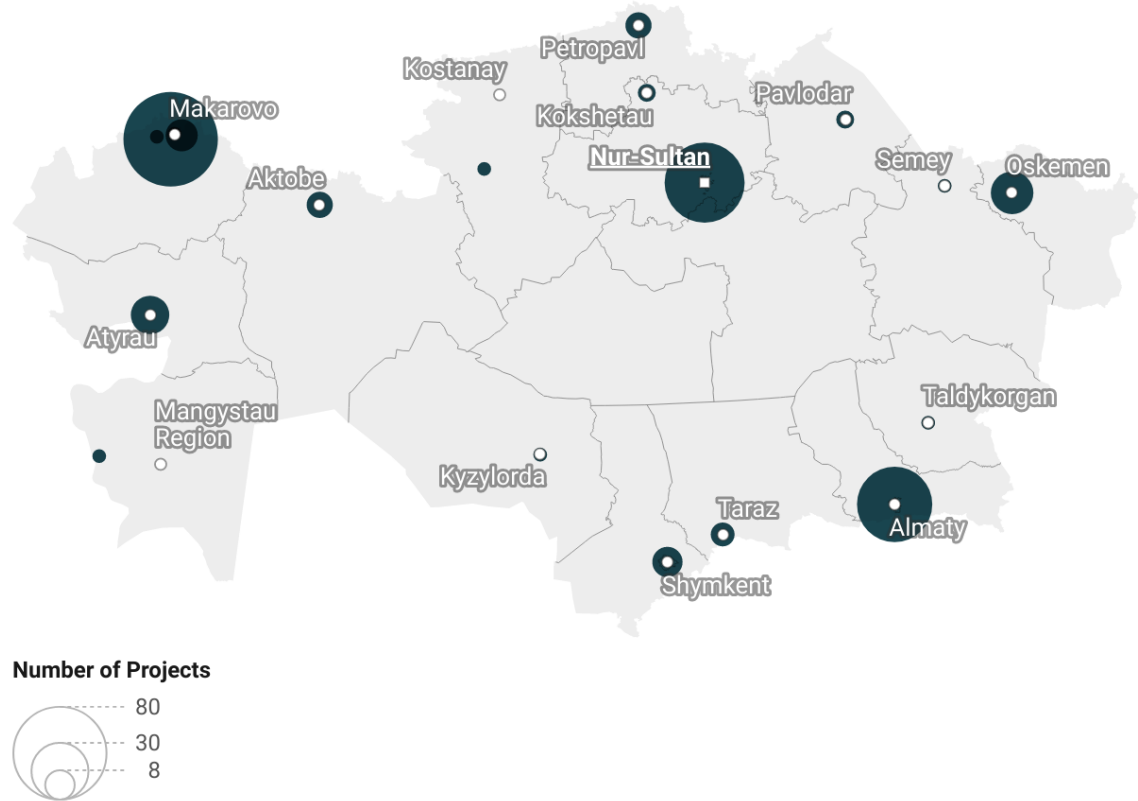
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<sup>38</sup> <https://kaz.rs.gov.ru/ru/news/14844>

<sup>39</sup> These regional bodies were the West Kazakhstan Regional Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan (8 projects); the East Kazakhstan Regional Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan (6 projects); the Almaty Regional Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan (2 projects); the North Kazakhstan Regional Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan (1 project); the Nur-Sultan City Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan (1 project); the Pavlodar Regional Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan (1 project); and the Scientific and Expert Council of the Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan (1 project).

Figure 13. Locations of Russian Support to Kazakh Civic Space

Number of Projects, 2015–2021



Map data: © OSM • Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: This map visualizes the geographic distribution of Kremlin-backed support to civic space actors in Kazakhstan. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

### 3.1.2 Focus of Russian State-Backed Support to Kazakhstan's Civic Space

The vast majority of Russian state-backed projects to Kazakhstan's civic space promoted education and culture, with several key themes within that programming. These included projects partnering with Kazakh CSOs for youth engagement, projects with Russian, Tatar, and Cossack and Tatar unions promoting their distinct cultures, and an emphasis on “The Great Patriotic War.”

Projects specifically focused on youth made up 29 percent of the total Russian engagement with Kazakh civic space (73 projects). Many of these events were



educational quiz evenings, such as the March 2018 "Sixth International Youth Festival 'Digital Boom'" hosted by Rossotrudnichestvo, the Open Youth University of Tomsk, the Almaty Education Department, and the Kazakh-Russian Gymnasium No. 54 in Almaty. This festival brought together 300 youth participants from Russia and Kazakhstan to discuss the newest IT technologies and practice doing activities like robotics.<sup>40</sup> Other events focused on Russian historical or literary figures, like the September 2020 recitation competition of Sergei Yesenin's poetry, which was hosted by the Consulate General in Oral, Rossotrudnichestvo, the Old Oral Museum, and the Yesenzhanov Regional Library for Children and Youth.<sup>41</sup>

The Consulate General of Oral, Rossotrudnichestvo, and the Representative Office of the Republic of Tatarstan supported various projects with Tatar and Cossack groups. These Kremlin-affiliated agencies partnered with five Tatar organizations between 2015 and 2021: the Tatar Cultural Center,<sup>42</sup> the Tatar Educational Cultural Center "Duslyk," Tatulyk,<sup>43</sup> the Tatar-Bashkir Cultural Center "TAN," and the Association of Tatar-Bashkir and Tatar Societies and Cultural Centers of Kazakhstan. Twelve projects emphasized a unique Tatar identity, while others were general literary or Russian language evenings.

Similarly, Rossotrudnichestvo partnered with five Cossack organizations<sup>44</sup> to host events like the October 2019 festival of traditional songs "Cossack Brotherhood" with the East Kazakhstan Regional Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan and the Verkhne-Irtysh Russian Cossack community. Four of thirteen events were focused specifically on Cossack culture and the remainder promoted connections to Russia. Crucially, it is worth noting that Russia appears to view both the Tatars and Cossacks as a category of Russian compatriots, as seven of these ten partner organizations are also members of the Coordinating

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<sup>40</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20180402093246/https://kaz.rs.gov.ru/ru/news/26670>

<sup>41</sup> <https://kaz.rs.gov.ru/ru/news/76158>

<sup>42</sup> Also known as the Association of Tatar and Tatar-Bashkir Public and Cultural Centers "Idel"

<sup>43</sup> Also known as the Tatar-Bashkir Ethnocultural Association "Tatulyk"

<sup>44</sup> These organizations were The Union of Cossacks of the Steppe Territory; the Association of Russian Slavic Cossack Organizations; the Semirechenskoe Cossack Host; the Verkhne-Irtysh Russian Cossack community; and Stanichniki, also known as the public association Cossack cultural center "Stanichniki" in Astana.

Council of Organizations of Russian Compatriots of the Republic of Kazakhstan (KSORS).<sup>45</sup>

The Kremlin funded 18 projects (7 percent of the total) with religious themes and/or co-hosted with religious organizations spread across cities such as Aktobe, Almaty, Atyrau, Kokshetau, Oral, and Petropavl. Nevertheless, religion was still relatively less prominent in the Kremlin's civic space outreach as compared to other E&E countries. Instead of long-term relationships such as those cultivated with Kazakh museums and cultural centers, the Kremlin has instead tended to provide only one-off project support to regional dioceses and individual Russian Orthodox churches in Kazakhstan. Moscow's more episodic support to local Russian Orthodox churches—holiday celebrations or donations of religious icons<sup>46</sup>—may be a reaction to the scrutiny the Kazakh government applies to religious organizations.<sup>47</sup>

This stronger emphasis in Kazakhstan on youth, shared history, and Cossack and Tatar identity over religion is similar to the Kremlin's tactics in Belarus and the Kyrgyz Republic. Although they are not monolithic—one is majority Eastern Orthodox and two majority Sunni Muslim—the Kremlin appears to use a consistent approach to its civic space engagements with these three countries. One commonality between the countries is the widespread use of Russian language, which may plausibly shift the focus of Kremlin support from basic language lessons to activities which blend language promotion and emphasizing historical ties.

"The Great Patriotic War"—a common feature in many of the Kremlin's civic space engagements in other E&E countries—was also present in Kazakhstan, though to a lesser degree. WWII commemoration was a theme in 30 (12 percent of the total) of the Kremlin's civic space projects in Kazakhstan, which primarily targeted youth via roundtables, wreath-laying at monuments, but also concerts or language programs. The Kremlin's efforts to portray its enemies as contemporary Nazis creates a pretext for future Russian intervention.

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<sup>45</sup> <https://ksors.kz/%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%be%d0%b5%d0%ba%d1%82%d1%8b/regiony/>

<sup>46</sup> Such as Rossotrudnichestvo's May 2019 donation of religious icons to the Church of the Resurrection of Christ in Kokshetau.  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20190515020428/https://kaz.rs.gov.ru/ru/news/47378>

<sup>47</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/country/kazakhstan/freedom-world/2021>

Celebrating the heroism of Soviet forces against Nazi Germany primes counterpart audiences to accept that anti-Kremlin forces are fascists and cultivate public sympathy for future Russian actions. Other youth-oriented military or patriotic events included training secondary school students on terrorism prevention and support to military Suvorov schools.

Comparatively few of Russia's projects sought to foster a broader sense of Eurasian integration, despite Kazakhstan being a full member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Indeed, the only project to explicitly mention "Eurasianism"<sup>48</sup> was the December 2019 compatriot conference "The Idea of Eurasianism in World Culture."

### 3.2 Russian Media Mentions of Civic Space Actors

Two state-owned media outlets, the Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News, referenced Kazakh civic actors a total of 85 times from January 2015 to March 2021. The majority of these mentions (62 instances) were of foreign and intergovernmental civic space actors, while the remaining portion (23 instances) consisted of mentions of domestic actors. Russian state media covered a broad swath of civic actors, mentioning 21 organizations by name as well as 21 informal groups operating in the Kazakh civic space. In an effort to understand how Russian state media may seek to undermine democratic norms or rival powers in the eyes of Kazakh citizens, we also analyzed 188 mentions of five keywords in conjunction with the Kyrgyz Republic: North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO, the United States, the European Union, democracy, and the West.

In this section, we examine Russian state media coverage of domestic and external civic space actors, how this has evolved over time, and the portrayal of democratic institutions and Western powers to Kazakh audiences.

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<sup>48</sup> Notes: This count does not include projects directed by the Kazakh CSOs Eurasian Monitoring or the Eurasian Cultural Fund, which instead included concerts celebrating the end of WWII, events encouraging students to study in Russia, and a 2017 conference to study prospects for civic space cooperation between Russian and Kazakh CSOs.

### 3.2.1 Russian State Media's Characterization of Domestic Kazakh Civic Space Actors

Roughly one-third (39 percent) of Russian media mentions pertaining to domestic actors in Kazakhstan's civic space referred to specific groups by name. The 7 named domestic actors represent a diverse cross-section of organization types—from community organizations to media outlets. Media organizations (5 mentions) and community organizations (3 mentions) were the most frequently mentioned types. Media organizations were most often referenced as domestic sources for major news events. Other community organizations, such as the Trade Union Federation (2 mentions) were referenced in relation to support for candidates for the 2015 and 2019 Kazakh Presidential elections.

Russian state media mentions of specific Kazakh civic space actors were neutral (100 percent) in tone. Kazakh domestic civic actors were rarely mentioned in Russian state media on the whole, and when they were it was in the context of reporting news events, particularly elections, rather than in-depth analysis. All 5 mentions of domestic media outlets were citations, such as "according to Khabar Agency."

Aside from these named organizations, TASS and Sputnik made 14 generalized mentions of 12 informal groups, local media, educational institutions, and political parties. The majority of this coverage of informal domestic actors was neutral (57 percent). Russian state media sought to portray the Kremlin as seeking to support Kazakhstan's civic space and the relationship between Moscow and Nur-Sultan as strong in a series of 4 "somewhat positive" mentions. A 2021 TASS article is illustrative, stating, "In my opinion, we have got so used to the closeness between Russians and Kazakhs that, at some point, we stopped paying proper attention to cooperation in the civil society field. And it must be developed, ties must increase between non-governmental foundations and organizations, youth and veteran unions, volunteer movements, as well as representatives of mass media and the blogosphere."

Comparatively, protestors and NGOs financed by the U.S. were covered more negatively by Russian state media. Protesters were portrayed as being detained by local authorities for their participation in unauthorized rallies. Kazakh NGOs

funded by the U.S. attracted criticism from Russian state media for promoting nationalism and provoking inter-ethnic conflict.<sup>49</sup> Notably, the tone of coverage about Kazakhstan’s civic space varies substantially depending upon whether Russia (positive), the U.S. (negative), or neither (neutral) is involved.

Table 6. Most-Mentioned Domestic Civic Space Actors in Kazakhstan by Sentiment

Domestic Civic Actor	Extremely Negative	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Somewhat Positive	Extremely Positive	Grand Total
Kazinform International Agency	0	0	2	0	0	2
Trade Union Federation	0	0	2	0	0	2
Journalists	0	0	2	0	0	2
Non-Governmental Organizations	1	0	0	1	0	2

*Notes: This table shows the breakdown of the domestic civic space actors most frequently mentioned by the Russian state media (TASS and Sputnik) between January 2015 to March 2021 and the tone of that coverage by individual mention. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

### 3.2.2 Russian State Media’s Characterization of External Actors in Kazakh Civic Space

Russian state media dedicated the remaining mentions (62 instances) to external actors operating in the Kazakh civic space. TASS and Sputnik mentioned 7 intergovernmental organizations (37 mentions) and 7 foreign organizations (12 mentions) by name, as well as 9 general foreign actors (13 mentions).

Intergovernmental organizations monitoring elections in Kazakhstan and foreign media outlets reporting on the election dominated the external mentions. This included self-mentions of TASS related to interviewing people on the ground in

<sup>49</sup> This quote from a 2020 TASS article is illustrative of this extremely negative coverage: “Non-governmental organizations financed by U.S. funds are promoting the policy aimed at encouraging nationalist trends of [Kazakhstan]. Such actions contribute to maintaining ‘the conflict potential’ between various ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan...”

Kazakhstan and references to Kremlin-led inter-governmental organizations (i.e., CSTO, CIS, SCO).

Table 7. Most-Mentioned External Civic Space Actors in Kazakhstan by Sentiment

External Civic Actor	Extremely Negative	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Somewhat Positive	Extremely Positive	Grand Total
OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)	0	0	14	0	0	14
Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)	0	0	9	0	0	9
Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)	0	0	6	1	0	7
TASS	0	0	5	0	0	5
Common Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)	0	0	3	0	0	3
International Organizations	0	0	3	0	0	3

*Notes: This table shows the breakdown of the external civic space actors most frequently mentioned by the Russian state media (TASS and Sputnik) in relation to Kazakhstan between January 2015 to March 2021 and the tone of that coverage by individual mention. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

Russian state media mentions of external actors, both named and unnamed, were highly neutral (90 percent) in tone. Kremlin-affiliated organizations, such as the Shanghai Cooperation (1 positive mention) and Russian non-profit organizations (1 positive mention) attracted more positive coverage. There was only one “somewhat negative” mention.

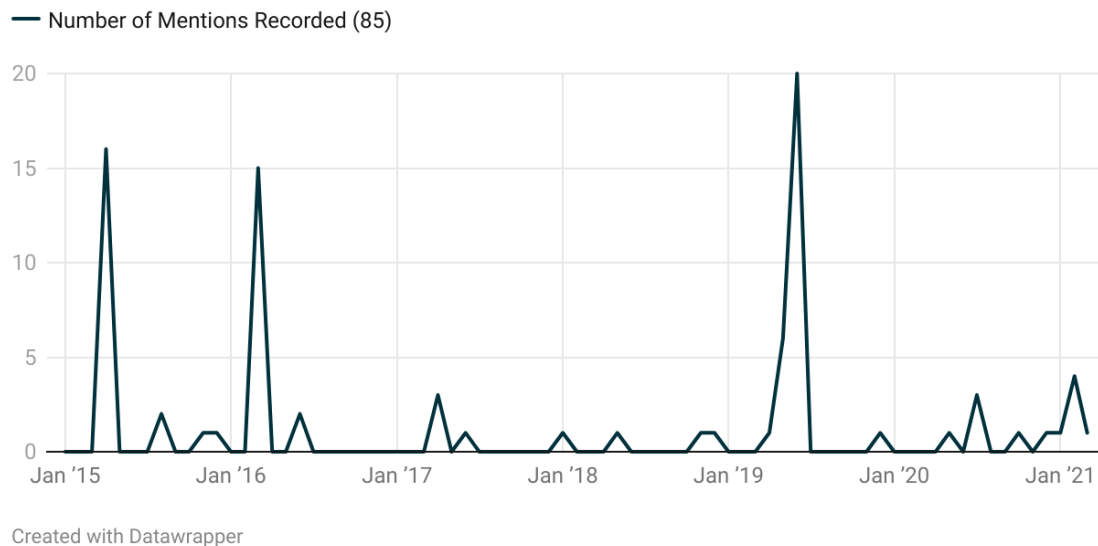
### 3.2.3 Russian State Media’s Focus on Kazakhstan’s Civic Space over Time

Elsewhere in the region, Russian state media mentions of civic space actors spike around major events and tend to show up in clusters. This general trend appears to hold true in Kazakhstan, as the preponderance of media mentions (61 percent) spike around three events: the Kazakh presidential elections in April 2015 and June 2019, and the Kazakh parliamentary elections in March 2016.

These three events received overwhelmingly neutral coverage (93 percent neutral mentions) by Russian media.

Figure 14. Russian State Media Mentions of Kazakh Civic Space Actors

Number of Mentions Recorded



*Notes: This figure shows the distribution and concentration of Russian state media mentions of Kazakh civic space actors between January 2015 and March 2021. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

In sum, Russian state media coverage of Kazakh civic space actors was mostly neutral or positive, possibly due to the close relationship between Kazakhstan and Russia. However, civic actors that could potentially change the political status quo in Kazakhstan, such as protesters or U.S.-backed NGOs, attracted more negative coverage from Russian state media.

### 3.2.4 Russian State Media Coverage of Western Institutions and Democratic Norms

In an effort to understand how Russian state media may seek to undermine democratic norms or rival powers in the eyes of Kazakh citizens, we analyzed the

frequency and sentiment of coverage related to five keywords in conjunction with Kazakhstan.<sup>50</sup> Between January 2015 and March 2021, two state-owned media outlets, the Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News, referenced the keywords a total of 188 times with reference to Kazakhstan: North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (25 instances), the European Union (24 instances), the United States (111 instances), democracy (3 instances), and the “West” (25 instances).

Table 8. Breakdown of Sentiment of Keyword Mentions by Russian State-Owned Media

Keyword	Extremely negative	Somewhat negative	Neutral	Somewhat positive	Extremely Positive	Grand Total
NATO	1	4	20	0	0	25
European Union	2	3	17	1	1	24
United States	14	25	62	8	2	111
Democracy	0	0	1	1	1	3
West	12	9	3	1	0	25

*Notes: This table shows the frequency and tone of mentions by Russian state media (TASS and Sputnik) related to five key words—NATO, the European Union, the United States, Democracy, and the West—between January 2015 and March 2021 in articles related to Kazakhstan. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

NATO and the European Union received largely neutral coverage—80 and 71 percent of mentions, respectively—from Russian state media. Negative coverage of NATO (5 mentions) was primarily commentary from Kazakh politicians and observers, criticizing NATO for its “anti-Russian” rhetoric. For example, one article quoted former President Nursultan Nazarbayev comparing NATO’s rhetoric and offensive weapon deployments on Russia’s borders to a modern-day “Cuban Missile Crisis.”<sup>51</sup> Coverage of the EU was split between negative portrayals of EU negotiations over conflicts in Syria and its sanctions against the Kremlin (5 mentions). Comparatively, Russian state media was more

<sup>50</sup> These keywords included North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO, the United States, the European Union, democracy, and the West

<sup>51</sup> “Current situation in NATO-Russia relations resembles the Cuban Missile Crisis, says the Kazakh leader.” ITAR-TASS. Published November 13, 2018.



positive about the EU's trade and relations with Kazakhstan which attracted either neutral or positive coverage (2 mentions).

Russian state media mentioned the United States most frequently of the five keywords. The majority of this coverage was neutral (56 percent), though somewhat more negative than the EU or NATO. Thirty-five percent of mentions of the U.S. were negative versus 9 percent positive. Negative portrayals of the U.S. tended to follow two narratives—one specific and one general. First, Russian state media claimed that the U.S. was undermining the peace process during negotiations in Astana over the Syria conflict.<sup>52</sup> Second, Russian state media asserted that the U.S. did not have Kazakhstan's best interests in mind and reinforcing Kazakhstan's membership in the Eurasian Economic Union.<sup>53</sup> Taken together, the Kremlin uses its state media to position the U.S. as a troublemaker and Russia as a problem-solver.

The West was the keyword that attracted the most negative coverage (84 percent of mentions) from Russian state media, which railed against "the West" for sanctions against Russia, undermining the Syria negotiations, and stoking general anti-Russian sentiment. Russian state media mentioned democracy only in regard to local Kazakh elections and coverage was either positive or neutral in promoting a narrative of "transparent and democratic" elections in Kazakhstan.<sup>54</sup> Russian state media's use of "democracy" to portray the Kremlin's allies in a favorable light, regardless of actual democratic practices on the ground, is consistent with its approach throughout the E&E region of using coverage to support and amplify the preferred narratives of aligned governments.

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<sup>52</sup> One TASS article stated that, "Russia sees intentions of the U.S. and the West in general to impede the Astana process for the Syrian settlement. "Russia sees U.S. bid to impede Astana process on Syria, says Lavrov." ITAR-TASS. Published August 14, 2018.

<sup>53</sup> One Sputnik article emphasized, "Kazakhstan is a country that is part of the Eurasian Economic Union, so it is obvious that Kazakhstan's leadership will always maintain prioritized relations with Russia, and not with the United States. "Kazakh President Says Upcoming Talks With Putin to Focus on Boosting Alliance With Russia." Sputnik News Service. Published April 29, 2019.

<sup>54</sup> "Russian Parliament Sees Kazakh Elections as Democratic, Transparent - Upper House Speaker" Sputnik News Service. Published June 11, 2019.

## 4. Conclusion

The data and analysis in this report reinforces a sobering truth: Russia's appetite for exerting malign foreign influence abroad is not limited to Ukraine, and its civilian influence tactics are already observable in Kazakhstan and elsewhere across the E&E region. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see clearly how the Kremlin invested its media, money, and in-kind support to promote pro-Russian sentiment within Kazakhstan and discredit voices wary of its regional ambitions.

The Kremlin was adept in deploying multiple tools of influence in mutually reinforcing ways to amplify the appeal of closer integration with Russia, raise doubts about the motives of the U.S., as well as legitimize its actions as necessary to protect the region's security from the disruptive forces of democracy. Kazakhstan attracted a noticeably large concentration of the Kremlin's cultural and language programming to bolster ties with Russian compatriots and promote its role in the "Great Patriotic War." In parallel, Russian state media sought to accuse Kazakh NGOs funded by the U.S. of provoking inter-ethnic conflict, while positioning the Kremlin as a problem-solver in contrast to the depiction of the U.S. as a troublemaker.

Taken together, it is more critical than ever to have better information at our fingertips to monitor the health of civic space across countries and over time, reinforce sources of societal resilience, and mitigate risks from autocratizing governments at home and malign influence from abroad. We hope that the country reports, regional synthesis, and supporting dataset of civic space indicators produced by this multi-year project is a foundation for future efforts to build upon and incrementally close this critical evidence gap.

## 5. Annex — Data and Methods in Brief

In this section, we provide a brief overview of the data and methods used in the creation of this country report and the underlying data collection upon which these insights are based. More in-depth information on the data sources, coding, and classification processes for these indicators is available in our full technical methodology available on [aiddata.org](http://aiddata.org)

### 5.1 Restrictions of Civic Space Actors

AidData collected and classified unstructured information on instances of harassment or violence, restrictive legislation, and state-backed legal cases from two primary sources: (i) CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Kazakhstan; and (ii) Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. AidData supplemented this data with country-specific information sources from media associations and civil society organizations who report on such restrictions.

Restrictions that took place prior to January 1, 2017 or after March 31, 2021 were excluded from data collection. It should be noted that there may be delays in reporting of civic space restrictions. More information on the coding and classification process is available in the full technical methodology documentation.

### 5.2 Citizen Perceptions of Civic Space

These survey data were collected from four sources: the World Values Survey (WVS) Wave 6, the Joint European Values Study and World Values Survey Wave 2017/2020, the Gallup World Poll, and the Central Asia Barometer Waves 2 through 5. These surveys capture information across a wide range of social and political indicators. The coverage of the three surveys and exact questions asked in each country vary slightly, but the overall quality and comparability of the datasets remains high.

The fieldwork for WVS Wave 6 in Kazakhstan was conducted in Kazakh and Russian languages between September and December 2011 with a nationally representative sample of 1500 randomly selected adults residing in private homes, regardless of nationality or language.<sup>55</sup> Research team provided an estimated error rate of 2.6%. This weight is provided as a standard version for consistency with previous releases."<sup>56</sup> The E&E region countries included in WVS Wave 6, which were harmonized and designed for interoperable analysis, were Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Ukraine. Regional means for the question "How interested you have been in politics over the last 2 years?" were first collapsed from "Very interested," "Somewhat interested," "Not very interested," and "Not at all interested" into the two categories: "Interested" and "Not interested." Averages for the region were then calculated using the weighted averages from the seven countries.

Regional means for the WVS Wave 6 question "Now I'd like you to look at this card. I'm going to read out some different forms of political action that people can take, and I'd like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never, under any circumstances, do it: Signing a petition; Joining in boycotts; Attending lawful demonstrations; Joining unofficial strikes" were calculated using the weighted averages from the seven E&E countries as well.

The membership indicator uses responses to a WVS Wave 6 question which lists several voluntary organizations (e.g., church or religious organization, political party, environmental group). Respondents to WVS 6 could select whether they were an "Active member," "Inactive member," or "Don't belong." The values included in the profile are weighted in accordance with WVS recommendations. The regional mean values were calculated using the weighted averages from the seven countries included in a given survey wave. The values for membership in political parties, humanitarian or charitable organizations, and labor unions are provided without any further calculation, and the "Other community group" cluster was calculated from the mean of membership values in "Art, music or educational organizations," "Environmental organizations," "Professional

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<https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/methodology-data-documentation/survey-2017/methodology/>  
<sup>56</sup> European Values Study (EVS). (2020). European Values Study (EVS) 2017: Methodological Guidelines. (GESIS Papers, 2020/13). Köln. <https://doi.org/10.21241/ssoar.70110>

associations," "Church or other religious organizations," "Consumer organizations," "Sport or recreational associations," "Self-help or mutual aid groups," and "Other organizations."

The confidence indicator uses responses to an WVS Wave 6 question which lists several institutions (e.g., church or religious organization, parliament, the courts and the judiciary, the civil service). Respondents to WVS 6 surveys could select how much confidence they had in each institution from the following choices: "A great deal," "Quite a lot," "Not very much," or "None at all." The "A great deal" and "Quite a lot" options were collapsed into a binary "Confident" indicator, while "Not very much" and "None at all" options were collapsed into a "Not confident" indicator.<sup>57</sup>

The fieldwork for WVS Wave 7 in Kazakhstan was conducted in Kazakh and Russian languages between January and November 2018 with a nationally representative sample of 1276 randomly selected adults residing in private homes, regardless of nationality or language.<sup>58</sup> The research team did not provide an estimated error rate for the survey data after applying a weighting variable "computed using the marginal distribution of age, sex, educational attainment, and region. This weight is provided as a standard version for consistency with previous releases."<sup>59</sup>

The E&E region countries included in EVS Wave 5 and WVS Wave 7, which were harmonized and designed for interoperable analysis, were Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, and Ukraine. Regional means for the question "How interested you have been in politics over the last 2 years?" were first collapsed from "Very interested," "Somewhat interested," "Not very interested," and "Not at all interested" into the two categories: "Interested" and "Not interested." Averages for the region were then calculated using the weighted averages from all thirteen countries.

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<sup>57</sup> For full documentation of the questions, see doi:10.4232/1.13560, pp. 293-294  
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<https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/methodology-data-documentation/survey-2017/methodology/>

<sup>59</sup> European Values Study (EVS). (2020). European Values Study (EVS) 2017: *Methodological Guidelines*. (GESIS Papers, 2020/13). Köln. <https://doi.org/10.21241/ssoar.70110>

Regional means for the EVS Wave 5 and WVS Wave 7 question “Now I’d like you to look at this card. I’m going to read out some different forms of political action that people can take, and I’d like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never, under any circumstances, do it: Signing a petition; Joining in boycotts; Attending lawful demonstrations; Joining unofficial strikes” were calculated using the weighted averages from all thirteen E&E countries as well.

The membership indicator uses responses to a EVS Wave 5 and WVS Wave 7 question which lists several voluntary organizations (e.g., church or religious organization, political party, environmental group). Respondents to WVS 7 could select whether they were an “Active member,” “Inactive member,” or “Don’t belong.” The EVS 5 survey only recorded a binary indicator of whether the respondent belonged to or did not belong to an organization. We collapsed the “Active member” and “Inactive member” categories into a single “Member” category, with “Don’t belong” coded to “Not member.” The values included in the profile are weighted in accordance with WVS and EVS recommendations. The regional mean values were calculated using the weighted averages from all thirteen countries included in a given survey wave. The values for membership in political parties, humanitarian or charitable organizations, and labor unions are provided without any further calculation, and the “Other community group” cluster was calculated from the mean of membership values in “Art, music or educational organizations,” “Environmental organizations,” “Professional associations,” “Church or other religious organizations,” “Consumer organizations,” “Sport or recreational associations,” “Self-help or mutual aid groups,” and “Other organizations.”

The confidence indicator uses responses to an EVS Wave 5 and WVS Wave 7 question which lists several institutions (e.g., church or religious organization, parliament, the courts and the judiciary, the civil service). Respondents to EVS 5 and WVS 7 surveys could select how much confidence they had in each institution from the following choices: “A great deal,” “Quite a lot,” “Not very much,” or “None at all.” The “A great deal” and “Quite a lot” options were

collapsed into a binary “Confident” indicator, while “Not very much” and “None at all” options were collapsed into a “Not confident” indicator.<sup>60</sup>

The Central Asia Barometer Wave 2 was conducted in Kazakhstan between November and December 2017, with 1500 random, nationally representative respondents aged 18 and up. Central Asia Barometer Wave 5 was conducted in Kazakhstan between April and June 2019, with 1500 random, nationally representative respondents aged 18 and up. The Central Asia Barometer trust indicator uses the question “In general, how strongly do you trust or distrust (Insert Item) media? Would you say you...” with respondents provided the following choices: “Strongly trust,” “Trust somewhat,” “Distrust somewhat,” “Strongly distrust,” “Refused,” and “Don’t Know/Not sure” for Television, Newspaper, and the Radio<sup>61</sup>.

The Gallup World Poll was conducted annually in each of the E&E region countries from 2009-2021, except for the countries that did not complete fieldwork due to the coronavirus pandemic. Each country sample includes at least 1,000 adults and is stratified by population size and/or geography with clustering via one or more stages of sampling. The data are weighted to be nationally representative. The survey in Kazakhstan was conducted in Kazakh and Russian.

The Civic Engagement Index is an estimate of citizens’ willingness to support others in their community. It is calculated from positive answers to three questions: Have you done any of the following in the past month? How about donated money to a charity? How about volunteered your time to an organization? How about helped a stranger or someone you didn’t know who needed help? The engagement index is then calculated at the individual level, giving 33% to each of the answers that received a positive response. Kazakhstan’s country values are then calculated from the weighted average of each of these individual Civic Engagement Index scores. The regional mean is similarly calculated from the weighted average of each of those Civic Engagement Index scores, taking the average across all 17 E&E countries: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia,

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<sup>60</sup> For full documentation of the questions, see doi:10.4232/1.13560, pp. 293-294

<sup>61</sup> For full documentation of Central Asia Barometer survey waves, see: <https://ca-barometer.org/en/cab-database>

Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyz Republic, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. The regional means for 2020 and 2021 are the exception. Gallup World Poll fieldwork in 2020 was not conducted for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Turkmenistan. Gallup World Poll fieldwork in 2021 was not conducted for Azerbaijan, Belarus, Montenegro, and Turkmenistan.

### 5.3 Russian Projectized Support to Civic Space Actors or Regulators

AidData collected and classified unstructured information on instances of Russian financing and assistance to civic space identified in articles from the Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones between January 1, 2015 and August 31, 2021. Queries for Factiva Analytics pull together a collection of terms related to mechanisms of support (e.g., grants, joint training), recipient organizations, and concrete links to Russian government or government-backed organizations. In addition to the global news, we reviewed a number of sources specific to each of the 17 target countries to broaden our search and, where possible, confirm reports from news sources.

While many instances of Russian support to civic society or institutional development are reported with monetary values, a greater portion of instances only identified support provided in-kind, through modes of cooperation, or through technical assistance (e.g., training, capacity building activities). These were recorded as such without a monetary valuation. More information on the coding and classification process is available in the full technical methodology documentation.

### 5.4 Russian Media Mentions of Civic Space Actors

AidData developed queries to isolate and classify articles from three Russian state-owned media outlets (TASS, Russia Today, and Sputnik) using the Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Articles published prior to January 1, 2015 or after March 31, 2021 were excluded from data collection. These queries identified articles relevant to civic space, from which AidData, during an initial round of pilot coding, was able to record



mentions of formal or informal civic space actors operating in Kazakhstan. It should be noted that there may be delays in reporting of relevant news.

Each identified mention of a civic space actor was assigned a sentiment according to a five-point scale: extremely negative, somewhat negative, neutral, somewhat positive, and extremely positive. More information on the coding and classification process is available in the full technical methodology documentation.