

Foreign Policy Through the Prism of Domestic Policy : Kazakhstan's Aspiration to Become An ODA Donor

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Why did Kazakhstan, as an authoritarian post-Soviet state with moderate economic performance, become an Official Development Assistance (ODA) donor? In this article, we argue that state identity has a causal and constitutive effect on Kazakhstan's foreign policy through discursive development encounters between Kazakhstani state actors and representatives of the international development community. The research questions are addressed by applying discourse analysis to official documents and media articles from Kazakhstan and international sources, along with the ODA dataset collected during fieldwork, focusing on 2013-2019. The article concludes by stating that Kazakhstan's decision to become an ODA donor is primarily motivated by the political elite's desire to boost national prestige and patriotic spirit among the population through the implementation of the domestic development program "Kazakhstan 2050," which would include the country on a list of 30 developed countries, the condition of which is to provide and institutionalize ODA.

Keywords: ODA, Kazakhstan, KazAID, identity theory, political elite, social constructivism, non-DAC donor]

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INTRODUCTION

Why did Kazakhstan decide to provide ODA despite an economic challenge within the state? Why was the political elite willing to take risks when making foreign policy decisions to create ODA? How is development represented, negotiated, and contested by the actors involved? Kazakhstan, as a case, is explained by the fact that Kazakhstan, unlike other countries of emerging donors in the category of non-DAC Donors, started providing ODA relatively recently. Although many researchers acknowledge the importance of Central Asian studies, finding ways of keeping the field alive and turning it into a prospering research area remains a substantial obstacle. Second, Kazakhstan is the only country on the list of non-DAC countries that is described as a middle-income with a moderate autocracy political regime within the state, which can provide a specific theoretical basis for further research for other emerging donors. The historical, ideological, state identity, and socio-economic characteristics of Kazakhstan and the post-Soviet states of Central Asia should be considered in the literature on international assistance.

In April 2013, Kazakhstan presented the ODA Concept of the Republic of Kazakhstan—the document ought to set the roadmap of the state's development aid initiative. The following year, in December 2014, the country

launched its development aid program—the Kazakhstan Agency for International Development (KazAID), which officially made it the first foreign aid donor country from the Central Asian region. The Foreign policy concept, which was created in line with the Address of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev, emphasized the state's aspiration to contribute to the development of the international community through various cooperative efforts. Even though this event is historic for Kazakhstan's development, the phenomenon remains largely understudied. Moreover, international experts have often described Kazakhstan as a state struggling with a high level of internal corruption. Transparency International (2016)¹ put Kazakhstan on the list of the top 50 most corrupt countries globally; therefore, some could argue that Kazakhstan may not be the perfect fit for advising its partners on eliminating or reducing domestic corruption. In contrast, the other two suggestions (the inclusion of “improvement of business climate” and “land use and natural resource management” to the list of sectoral priorities of the national aid) have received favourable consideration and eventually appeared in the Official Law on ODA. Both revolve around economic development, not political transformations, which could explain why the government ultimately approved these less politically sensitive proposals. In addition, the critical difference between Kazakhstan's ODA and that of advanced democracies lies in its political neutrality: the country does not consider democracy, human rights, and other issues when aiding the recipient country, and it lacks the resources to challenge the international system and advance the liberal democratic order. So why was the political elite willing to take risks when making foreign policy decisions to create ODA? This is one of the critical issues that we address in this work.

Although the intention to create KazAID was initiated back in 2016, and the draft government resolution was opened for public discussion in 2018, the public reacted negatively to this news. The reason was that the internal development of Kazakhstan, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, calls into question the relevance of the initiative to help others when the country itself needs to maintain its socio-economic conditions. Despite this, the Foreign Ministry believes that the pandemic, on the other hand, has demonstrated the need for international cooperation, so the agency is expected to become one of the key instruments of Kazakhstan's foreign policy. In this regard, the article analyses Kazakhstan's assistance mechanisms and the goals set as the basis of this initiative. We conclude that the main reason that prompted the political elite of Kazakhstan to become a donor to the ODA was the New Strategy aimed at including Kazakhstan in the top 30 developed countries of the world by 2050. The slogan “Let's bring Kazakhstan into the ranks of 30 developed countries” clearly calls for increasing national prestige and raising the patriotic spirit among the population. However, according to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the main requirement to qualify for inclusion in the list of developed countries is the provision and institutionalization of ODA². Although Kazakhstan has been cooperating with the OECD since the early 1990s, its efforts to strengthen its cooperation have intensified, especially since 2013, not least through the implementation of the “Kazakhstan-2050” domestic development program. Thus, from 2012 to 2016, Kazakhstan was a co-chair of the ETUC Central Asian Initiative. It also joined the Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes, became a member of the Committee on Industry, Innovation and Entrepreneurship in 2013, a member of the Development Center in 2015, and Project Shifting (BEPS) in 2016. These latest developments take place against the backdrop of the Kazakhstan-2050 country program launched in December 2012.

¹ Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI 2016), <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2016> (Search date: 2023-3-20)

² United Nations Development Programme, https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/Towards_SustainingMDGProgress_Ch5.pdf (Search date: 2023-4-14)

LITERATURE REVIEW

We elaborate on the existing literature on non-DAC countries' motivations for providing foreign aid. Going beyond the generally accepted typology of donor countries, we argue that Kazakhstan represents an interesting new type of foreign aid - neither 'emerging,' what was generalized by non-DAC donors, nor 'traditional,' which was explained mostly by a rationalist view. The emergence of 'new' or so-called non-DAC donors has changed the international foreign aid landscape (Manning, 2006). For instance, some scholars argue that an increasing heterogeneity of the global aid regime with the emergence of new providers is evident (Woods, 2008). Others describe traditional donors as declining powers and suggest that the effectiveness of the efforts led by the OECD has declined, with non-DAC donors gaining increasing prominence in the global foreign aid arena (Lancaster, 2007). Studies on Kazakhstan's emergence as a single donor of development aid in Central Asia, a region frequently given increasing strategic importance in international politics, are lacking (Blank, 2008). The fact that Kazakhstan uses foreign aid as an instrument of foreign policy to further its economic, political, and diplomatic objectives is a recurring theme in the study that has been done so far on Kazakh aid to establish a "belt of good neighborliness" along its borders, it is widely assumed that Kazakhstan attempts to help stabilize the socioeconomic and political situation of partner nations by offering foreign assistance (Kuramayeva & Sailler, 2020). Thus, Malyshev and Bainazarova (2016) aimed to shed light on the motives behind the creation of KazAID and argue that the reason for the creation of the national ODA system is not limited to material interests, and there is also a soft power aspect to it (Malyshev & Bainazarova, 2016). They conceptualize foreign aid "as solidarity," arguing that "with economic development and the growth of the country's international prestige, Kazakhstan's responsibility for ensuring international and regional security and stability increases." A similar point of view is indicated in another work by Degterev (2013), which analyzes the place of Kazakhstan in international aid programs and notes the importance of political and economic priorities in choosing the directions of its provision and the establishment of a "belt of good neighborliness" along the perimeter of the borders without imposing on the recipient countries their point of view on the best way to use aid (Degterev, 2013). One explanation for Kazakhstan's desire to assist its neighbors is that by reducing and eradicating the issues caused by underdevelopment in those nations (such as illegal migration, drug trafficking, and other types of crime, including terrorism and extremism), Kazakhstan hopes to stop those issues from spreading to its state (Mirzayan, 2014). In addition, it has been argued that Kazakhstan's ODA is ultimately linked to a growing 'redefinition of the balance of power and spheres of influence' in the region (De Cordier, 2014). In other words, Kazakhstan, which holds the official position of a donor state, can utilize its ODA to exert 'hard' power ('economic and political influence') during negotiations with neighbor states (i.e., potential, or actual beneficiaries of aid from Kazakhstan). In other words, because it is based on practical economic and geostrategic calculations, help is evaluated from this perspective as an investment to produce future income.

However, we found that the long-term economic perspective could not explain Kazakhstan's motivation to provide ODA. It should also be mentioned that the law was established under the heading "On Official Development Assistance" rather than under the term "official development assistance." The term "official development assistance" was used in UN General Assembly Resolution No. 51/240 "Agenda for Development" on June 20, 1997. The Republic of Kazakhstan adopted the Law of December 10, 2014, "On Official Development Assistance," which defines official development assistance as assistance given by the Republic of Kazakhstan to a partner country without charge or on a preferential basis to advance that partner country's socioeconomic development and enhance the welfare of its citizens.

For instance, despite the possible political benefits of creating KazAID, it also may present an economic challenge for Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan's economy has suffered greatly over the past few years because of a

worsening financial crisis (Kapparov, 2016). The economic situation threatens the legitimacy of the regime. The argument of strengthening "soft power" or "gaining external legitimacy as a cooperative, developed, and credible player in the international arena" makes sense but also cannot fully explain Kazakhstan's foreign aid policy. For years, the current regime's legitimacy has been based on a hierarchy of priorities between political power and the population: state sovereignty, social stability, and economic development (Laruelle, M., 2013).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The article contributes to the theory of social constructivism (Akpan et al., 2020) and assigns a leading role in determining the state's identity to representatives of its foreign policy decisions. According to Foreign Policy Analysis (Korany & Fattah, 2008; Ramazani, 1992), governments' political systems and foreign policy make them structurally committed to offering an ODA. Advocates of this explanation suggest that Kazakhstan's foreign policy decisions, such as providing an ODA, are concentrated in the hands of the President and close associates in the elite court. In the context of foreign policy, this leads to the assumption that foreign policy problems are not objective facts, but rather "social constructions forged by state officials in the course of producing and reproducing state identity" (Weldes et al., 1999:219).

Our methodological choice rests on three key steps. First, we addressed the in-depth study of a single case to justify what the state thinks of its role in world politics, what it stands for regarding ideas and values, what norms it subscribes to, and—more importantly—how it perceives itself and others. Hence, state identity becomes an important symbol of what the state is about and what it means to the outside world, and this is manifested in a state's foreign policy. Second, we used archival analysis to examine important documents and remarks that are thought to be crucial in creating and expressing state identity, such as speeches made by political leaders. Documents are of great importance, such as the "Kazakhstan – 2030", "Kazakhstan – 2050", and "Green Economy 2020", as well as the decree of the president of the Republic of Kazakhstan on approval of the main directions of the state policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the field of official development assistance and other archival materials such as the memoirs of Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev. Finally, we use process tracing to trace the within-case observable manifestations of processes to qualify the process of change in state identity. Applying process tracing in combination with archival analysis, we develop a causal mechanism through which a change in states' identity political elite groups have managed to influence the ODA creation.

All main International Relations theories can be viewed as traditional state-centric perspectives because they ultimately focus their analyses on the state as a rational actor and national interest as a motivation for development aid, even though realism, liberalism, and Marxism all bring different perspectives leading to different explanations regarding development aid by donor countries. Contrary to these conventional viewpoints, many new theories—particularly those associated with post-positivism—seek fresh explanations for development aid. The social constructivist approach of IR sees national interest as a social construct that can change over time and space. Anarchy, as a defining principle of the international system for Realists and Liberals, is "what states make of it" for Constructivists (Wendt, 1992). Norms, identities, interests, and behaviors of political agents are socially constructed in international society (Onuf, 1989; Adler, 1997). Like other socially constructed norms in international relations that affect state behavior, foreign aid motivation of donors can result from an international norm that emerged in the last half-century. As Lancaster (2007) states, "History reflects the development of an international norm that the governments of rich countries should provide public, concessional resources to improve the human condition in poor countries" (Lancaster, 2007).

For a long while, no logical connection was developed between the major IR theories and the study of foreign policy analysis, with some studying FPA within a liberal discourse of IR and others approaching it as a realist subject

of inquiry, for which reasons Houghton calls FPA studies “a kind of free-floating enterprise,” arguing that for the FPA agenda to be revitalized and reinvigorated, “it must hitch its wagon to some of the critical substantive debates going on in IR theory today” (Houghton, 2007). For Houghton, “the most logical base” from which FPA can be approached and on which it can feed and rebuild itself is provided by “social constructivism” that has a significant bearing particularly upon “the cognitive psychological approach to the study of foreign policy.” Katzenstein argues that political identity is a social and at the same time, it is a historical construct. As a social construct, it reflects the institutional nature of the political community and as a historical construct, its emergence and consolidation are bound up with historical contingencies. He continues that there is a significant functional element to political identity, and it plays an essential role in sustaining citizens’ allegiance and loyalty to their political community (Katzenstein, 2009, pp. 29-30). What mechanism governs the interaction between state identity and foreign policy brought up by this? Despite scholarly disagreements, there are some commonalities in how state identity develops and what drives change or transformation. In international politics, norms determine state identity; hence it is crucial to understand how norms are established and made universal.

According to three major theories, state identity influences foreign policy decisions in one of three ways: there is a causal relationship, identity mediates between the domestic and international realms, or the relationship is both causal and constitutive. The first is the hypothesis that it is causal in determining the state's ontological position in international politics. According to the second explanation, state identity might just be a deciding factor in foreign policy, standing between an external threat and internal mobilization. Advocates of a third theory contend that state identity influences foreign policy in both a causal and constitutive manner. (Klotz & Smith 2007; Telhami & Barnett 2002) Following this justification, Mattern (2001) and Kappen (1996) have used the Suez Crisis as a case study of how state identity affected Britain's foreign policy during the Suez Crisis of 1956 in both a causal and constitutive way, contending that Britain was in the process of redefining its state identity from being an imperial power to being a central state. Additionally, Hopf's study from 2002 emphasizes the internal development of state identity by connecting broad Russian social discourses with the decisions made by Soviet foreign policymakers. Switzerland's state identity is used as an example of how four distinct political cantons, each with their own unique political institutions and social histories, can interact with each other over time to construct a shared national identity in Cederman's (2001) theory of the formation of state identity in Europe. In the US, Nau (2002) shows how the debate over the proper state identity for US foreign policy, between isolationists and internationalists, affected the use of military force and the success or failure of long-term US relationships. Using cognitive mapping, Johnston (1995) presents various possibly opposing views of China's strategic culture that current and former Chinese leaders hold.

Understanding the Term of Emerging Donor: Recognition with Aid

In this article, we follow the argument that state identity plays a causal and constitutive effect on foreign policy. However, we will avoid seeking a particular framework to explain foreign policy decision-making. This is primarily because we argue that state identity—and perhaps identity in general—is temporal and because we believe that assigning a particular framework model of explanation to a specific foreign policy limits our understanding of changes in state identity itself. Arguing that state identity is temporal means that it changes over time and that foreign policy and state identity both affect each other correspondently. Therefore, if one manufactures the other, it is empirically — and perhaps methodologically—biased. It is true that state identity profoundly guided Kazakhstan following the developed countries; nevertheless, changes in foreign policy practices may have a significant effect on state identity itself.

The variety amongst the emerging donors that make up a generic group is clear (OECD,2019)³: it includes countries that have previously been recipients of aid (such as Kazakhstan) and those that still are (such as Nigeria); countries that respond to disasters domestically (such as India or Turkey); those that host a growing number

of refugees (such as Syria); as well as countries that have been contributing to and supporting international development programs and systems for several decades (such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE)), and some of which have been doing so for longer and with larger aid budgets than DAC donors. Non-DAC countries differ in their political structure, the size of their income, and the date of commencement of their activities as donors. It should be mentioned that many emerging aid providers have had track records of rendering assistance long before obtaining the official status of a “development aid donor country.” The term Nationally determined contributions (NDCs) reflects these obligations and new donors’ heterogeneity, particularly those who do not identify with the Southern label, such as Arab and Central and East European countries. Kazakhstan, unlike other countries of emerging donors in the category of non-DAC donors, started providing ODA relatively recently since it remains the only state that decided to provide ODA in Central Asia. It is also one of the youngest nations in the world, less than 30 years old. Implementing aid generosity norms and spending targets such as the 0.7% target⁴ have been limited, particularly in NDCs. Only Liechtenstein and Turkey reached this level among all NDC (non-DAC) donors. By comparison, five DAC donors (Netherlands, Denmark, Luxembourg, Norway, and Sweden) had a median aid spending level exceeding 0.7% from 2010 to 2019. Interestingly, NDCs show a much narrower range of aid levels over the period than the established DAC donors. This implies that – apart from a few countries like Turkey and the UAE – NDCs have consistently provided the same level of ODA over the five years. Kazakhstan ranks last among all the above countries.

Power and the Political Elite’s Role in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan has been identified by Edward Schatz (2009) as an example of “soft authoritarianism”—compared to the “harder” regimes of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and now Tajikistan. Soft authoritarianism relies more on means of persuasion than on means of coercion, although coercion remains part of the ruling elite's arsenal» (Edward Schatz, 2008). According to Schatz, the regime can control large segments of the populace through blackmail (the threat of losing acquired wealth and stability) and temptation (a tangible increase in living standards), periodic harassment of opposition groups, selective coercion of these groups, and management of information networks by anticipating the rise of other narratives. Nursultan Nazarbayev led the fate of Kazakhstan for almost thirty years, from April 1990, a year and a half before the country gained independence, until March 2019. Thus, he joined a long list of non-royal autocratic leaders, such as Omar al-Bashir, Hafez al-Assad, and Hosni Mubarak, who have been in power for about 30 years. However, Kazakhstan does not belong to this list of dictatorships where the president has held power for too long through state violence and complete isolation from the rest of the world or by turning his country into a Kafkaesque kingdom. Kazakhstan was lucky: the absence of an alternative to the president did not prevent the nation from integrating into the international arena. The regime remained what Edward Schatz describes as “mildly authoritarian,” avoiding mass repression, taking targeted action against a few key figures, co-opting citizens, offering economic prosperity and stability, and (to the extent possible) controlling the ideological agenda proactively rather than coercively (Edward Schatz, 2009).

Akulov (2019), Kudaibergenova (2015), and Omelicheva (2016) define the power of a regime as the ruler’s capacity to uphold and strengthen his legitimacy as a popular and independent mediator as well as an inter-elite mediator and the final decision-maker. According to this definition, authority is a symbolic discursive tool used to persuade people to obey their leaders and believe in their promises and official propaganda. Naturally, the effectiveness of the government and the state of the economy also matters, but even in bad economic times, people are willing to put up

³ List of OECD Member countries - Ratification of the Convention on the OECD, <https://www.oecd.org/about/document/ratification-oecd-convention.htm> (Search date: 2023-4-8)

⁴ The best-known target in international aid proposes to raise official development assistance (ODA) to 0.7% of donors' national income

with dictatorships (Du Boulay, Sofya, & Rico Isaacs, 2019). Thus, in his research work, Akulov (2019) determines that the legitimacy of power in Kazakhstan is conceptualized as a convincing discourse of the future. The capital Nur-Sultan (formerly Astana) represents this idea. According to his argument, Nazarbayev won widespread popular support by promising to turn Kazakhstan into Astana, a futuristic capital built from scratch that looks like Dubai or Abu Dhabi. Others have equated power with performative indicators and development discourse, drawing attention to government programs and inclusive civic nation-building strategies (Kudaibergenova, 2015). These indicators enhance the legitimacy of the ruler, making him indispensable for the stability and security of the country. Laskowski (2011) defines this phenomenon as "magical authoritarianism" and finds out that the capital distribution owners – so-called business conglomerates/family offices – hold a significant share of common stock (Laskowski, 2011). Thus, according to Credit Suisse data⁵, the top 50 wealthiest businesspersons in Kazakhstan own 42% of the total wealth of the adult population or 16% of the nominal GDP. A nonuniform distribution of wealth can be seen in several post-Soviet states due to various factors, including the fact that private property has existed for a relatively short period.

Elite Groups of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Peculiarities of Making Strategic Political Decisions

An analysis of the Kazakh model of political decision-making will provide an additional explanation. Firstly, political decision-making is associated with the distribution or redistribution of resources and access to them, i.e., so-called transit rent (Simonov, A., & Inozemtsev, E., 2021).). This characteristic feature can be described using the theory of rent-seeking behaviour of bureaucracy (rent-seeking), indicated in the works of G. Tullock (2005), F.K. Wallison (1996). Political rent-seeking refers to the desire of actors to maximize profits through the political process. Accordingly, the search for rent involves obtaining monopoly rights to resources or other assets. Secondly, hierarchy. In other words, each of the actors, based on their instrumental weight and resource potential, has certain opportunities for making political decisions or influencing this process (Osinina, 2021). Moreover, these opportunities are strictly limited by status in the hierarchy of power.

We need to start with the structure itself, which reflects the second characteristic of political decision-making: hierarchy. This structure is a pyramid. At its top, there was one person - Nursultan Nazarbayev. So, let's look directly at the Kazakhstani model of political decision-making. We need to start with the structure itself, which reflects the second characteristic feature of political decision-making - hierarchy. This structure is a pyramid. However, if previously there was one person at its top, N. Nazarbayev, now the situation has changed. The transition of power that started in March 2019 and the election of K.J. Tokayev as a successor, even if only temporarily, led to the latter's rise and advancement of his position within the hierarchy of power. Such a change in the status of K.J. Tokayev is explained by the peculiarities of the system itself: the vertical of power built by N. Nazarbayev is characterized by the position of presidential (personalism of power). In other words, a person who occupies the highest position in the country, even in the presence of a mechanism of "checks and balances," will receive leverage over political and economic decision-making. Especially in the case of support from pressure groups of the first and second levels (see Figure 1). The first-level influence groups include members of N. Nazarbayev's family and his immediate circle, the team of K.J. Tokayev, as well as representatives of the "old guard", who were always considered to be especially trusted by N. Nazarbayev. The second-level influence groups include Elbasy's relatives. The weakest in terms of ability to influence political decision-making are the third-level groups, which include the regional elite and representatives of the political and business establishment unaffiliated with Elbasy. It is they who, in the context of the restructuring of the system and the emergence of a second "top" person in the hierarchy of power, are the object of expanding the influence of higher groups. But what are the features of political decision-making

⁵ Data of Credit Suisse Research Institute: «Global Wealth Report 2018», Forbes, KPMG analysis. (Search date: 2023-5-1)

in the Republic of Kazakhstan? What exactly is the combination of formal and informal practices? The answer to this question has two aspects. The first aspect reflects the institutional outline of the political system, the so-called “rules of the game.” The “pyramid of power” presented in the figure demonstrates that modern Kazakhstan is a state with a clearly structured patron-client system, for which neo-patrimonial practices and informal institutions of power are predominant. It is the predominance of neo-patrimonial practices and informal institutions of power that determines the presence of a second, informal hierarchy, which is formed from the most influential and high-status representatives of the Kazakh elite (see Figure 1). Not all of them have official political status; the activities of many are concentrated in business. However, their influence and capabilities determine their positions in the “pyramid of power.” For example, since May 2020, Dariga Nazarbayeva has ceased to be the Chairman of the Senate of the Republic of Kazakhstan (the second highest-ranking position in the formal hierarchy of power according to the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan)⁶, but she has not lost her personal positions due to her economic resource. Thus, in addition to the information resource and media empire “Khabar”, Dariga Nazarbayeva, through K. Sharipbayev, oversees the oil and gas industry, which has traditionally been the sphere of interest of T. Kulibayev, Elbasy’s middle son-in-law. Moreover, Dariga Nazarbayeva, as a deputy of the Mazhilis, is increasingly taking part in the formation of the “rules of the game” in the energy market of the Republic of Kazakhstan. In September 2021, she proposed increasing investment in the oil and gas industry, as well as expanding investor rights. Thus, the range of possibilities of N. Nazarbayev and K.J. Tokaev covers functions from mediation and maintaining the intra-elite balance of power to the distribution of resource rent, and character. relationships within the pyramidal-hierarchical system of power can be defined as “patron-social groups,” which is characteristic of clientelism.

The second aspect is related to the formation of the hierarchy of power itself, the period of which occurred in the second half of the 1990s. Building a rigid vertical of power against the backdrop of a complete victory over the opposition in the person of O. Suleymanov allowed N. Nazarbayev to actively promote representatives of his family, as well as close relatives and childhood friends, to the highest echelons, who themselves, having strengthened and increased their material and hardware base, were able to build around themselves as personal clients. The personnel rotation that occurred in 2019 affected all levels of government but retained the general principles of the functioning of the system, as well as the informal status of key representatives of the elite community of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Thus, the main marker for determining status in the hierarchy of power can be considered “access to the body,” i.e., to the first person. The same factor determines the actor’s ability to influence the adoption of strategic, political, and economic decisions.

State Identity and Political Elites’ Role in the Foreign Policy

Kazakhstan’s political elites are developing a special way of communicating with external actors, allowing them to take the expected form and create common discursive spaces with their main partners. Some cultural borrowings fit easily into their concepts, while others look more artificial. Thus, Kazakhstan reinforces its discourse on the Islamic threat by appealing to Russian rhetoric on the subject, which came into use with the outbreak of the second Chechen war in 1999, and uses each new terrorist attack in Russia to highlight its vulnerability. Since 9/11, this discourse has become even more powerful by borrowing from the United States the theme of the “war on terrorism” to justify repressive measures against anyone seen as a threat to the existing order (Naumkin V., 2005). In addition, polite elites quickly picked up the Chinese rhetoric about the fight against the “three evils” - separatism, extremism, and fundamentalism - which became the slogan of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and which was originally directed against the actions of the Uyghurs (Cooley A., 2012). These three borrowings - the “Islamic threat” from Russia, the “war on terror” from the United States, and the fight against the “three evils” from China

⁶ Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, http://www.akorda.kz/ru/official_documents/constitution (Search date: 2023-2-28)

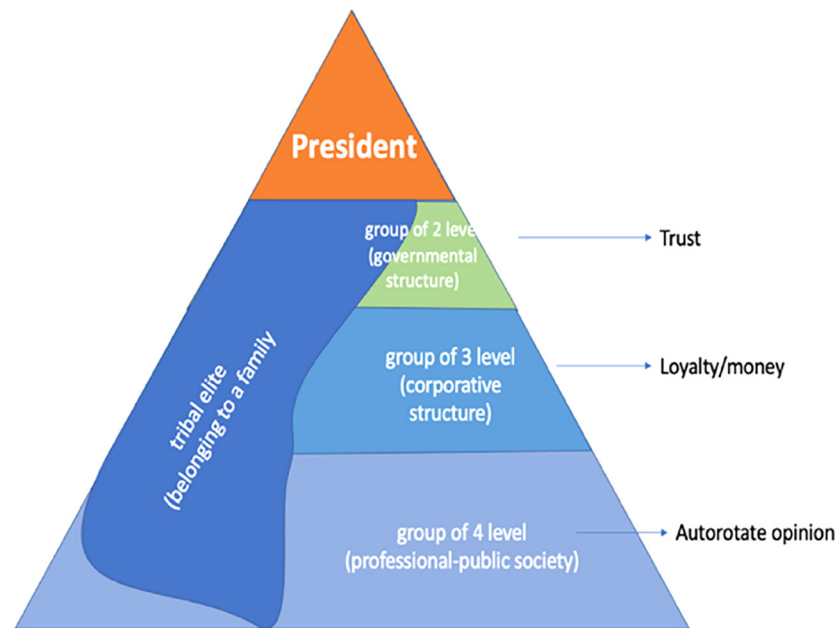


Fig. 1. Floors of Power in Kazakhstan. Source: compiled by the authors

- reveal Kazakhstan's obvious desire to suppress any branch of Islam that they consider incompatible with the secular nature of the state and potentially threatening the existing regime. At the same time, in relations with other Muslim states, Kazakhstan as a state emphasizes its Muslim identity, noting that it belongs to the Organization of the Islamic Conference and recalls that they are on the way to joining the Ummah regarding Islamic education and ritual practices. This appearance gives Kazakhstan access to financial assistance from the Islamic Development Bank, as well as various sovereign funds in the United Arab Emirates, both for the development of infrastructure and for the implementation of Islamic banking projects (Cordier B. De, 2014). As a Turkic-speaking country, it also points to its linguistic affinity with the Turkish authorities and organizations such as TURKSOY⁷. In relations with the countries of South and East Asia, Kazakhstan emphasizes other identity elements, using, for example, historical references to the Great Silk Road, along which people, goods, and ideas moved from East to West over the centuries. At the same time, political elites seek to downplay their Muslim identity by appealing to the values (mythologized) of pre-Islamic eras. He also insists on his desire to embrace contemporary Asian models. In the early years of independence, the President of Kazakhstan referred to the so-called "Asian model" with increasing approval, emphasizing the economic dynamics of Asian countries while defending their political regimes and their alleged non-Western cultural identity. Later, at the turn of the 1990-2000s, Kazakhstan, in its rhetoric, somewhat transformed the symbolism of the "Asian dragons" (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan) and "Asian tigers" (Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam), becoming the "snow leopard" (Yue, C., 2005). The heightened focus on South and Southeast Asia was strongest in the first half of the 1990s, but with the return of Russian influence and the rise of China, it gradually waned. However, in the late 2000s, it increased again, and this time with a more tangible economic component, where the prospects for the development of the high-tech sector are most realistic, and the geopolitical orientation towards the Asia-Pacific region is more pronounced (Laruelle M. & Peyrouse S., 2015). Different generic historical references are used depending on the nationality of the country one must deal with. For instance, Central Asia's importance in transmitting Buddhism from India to East Asia to

⁷ International Organization of Turkic Culture

Japan is highlighted. It is contended that the Buddhist roots of Japanese culture may be traced to the Central Asian region (Laruelle M., & Peyrouse S., 2015). Kazakhstan views itself in its relations with South Korea as a potential linguistic and ethnic cradle from which Koreans have sprung, and it helps the Korean minority, which is particularly well-integrated and can indeed be seen as a sign of social achievement in any way it can (Yefremov Y., 2021). As for India, the emphasis here is on the Mughal Empire and its brilliant universal culture, as well as several rulers like Sultan Baibars, who had Kazakh roots and is a real pearl in several historical arguments that further emphasize the significance of centuries-old bilateral ties with India (Ariel Cohen A., 2008). For China, the history of the Great Silk Road is presented in its Sino-centric version, which allows us to keep silent about centuries of mutual neglect or mutual tension and focus on more ancient times when China played a key role in the Central Asian region (Millward J. A., 2009). In negotiations with Moscow and Beijing, the Central Asian states do not hide the authoritarian nature of their decisions. However, during meetings with Europeans and Americans, they show concern for democratization and good governance, emphasizing their Soviet past and the fact that they are in transition to the standards of a Western market economy and democracy, indicating that they need a longer time to implement the necessary changes and expressing their desire to improve the quality of management (Laruelle M., & Peyrouse S., 2015). In summary, it can be concluded that in countries characterized exclusively by presidential and personalized power, the leader's legitimacy is partly based on the instrumentalism of foreign policy. Thus, official visits, during which the leader of Kazakhstan is received by the leaders of large countries of the West or Asia, are widely covered in the local media. The concept that power in authoritarian regimes is unidirectional and exerted from the top down is challenged by this facet of power. Instead, it expands upon a concept created by rational choice scholars who view the interaction between the government and bureaucracy through the prism of the principal-agent issue (Hopenhayn & Lohmann, 1996; Tamm and Snidal, 2013). The strong personality cult around President Nazarbayev enabled bureaucrats to demonstrate their unwavering devotion to him and gain more trust by transferring accountability for reform from their institutions to the leader. A sophisticated cult of personality makes officials look modest and insignificant compared to the president. To further increase the distance, officials were engaged in assigning various titles to Nazarbayev, such as “Leader of the Nation” (Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2000) - *Elbasy* in the Kazakh language. “The world recognizes the nation through great leaders, and the Kazakh nation has received worldwide recognition thanks to President Nazarbayev. A nation that has a son like Nazarbayev will never live in misery,” said Majles deputy Rozakul Khalmuradov (Kovalenko, 2010). It is difficult to resist the cult of personality, since officials publicly reproduce the cult, posing as representatives of the ruler, and the ruler does not have reliable information from the field. The ruler ultimately bears personal responsibility in an environment of information asymmetry, responsible for all good and all bad results such as the creation of KazAid despite the difficult economic times for the country and the risks associated with negative public support.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Our investigation of the relationship between state identity and FPA uses a case study of Kazakhstan's motivation to promote ODA to examine how state identity can influence foreign policy dynamics. We illustrate this mechanism by analysing two critical domestic issues that shaped the motivation of Kazakhstan's political elites to provide and institutionalize ODA. First, we found that state identity in Kazakhstan has suffered from a problem faced by most nations that experience great upheavals—such as economic crisis—which is how to transform from an economic crisis into a functioning state. Furthermore, the issue of legitimacy has not been destroyed. It has not eliminated historical family ties, informal bureaucratic practices, or nationalistic sentiments ingrained in state institutions over the years. Development strategies such as OECD cooperation continued to be seen as valuable means but not as ends in themselves. The first large-scale protest mood of the population of Kazakhstan towards the political elite

began in 2013 against several government economic decisions. Disappointment with the economic situation is directly caused by the low legitimacy of power, corruption, and a sharp decline in the country's economic indicators. The real GDP growth rate dropped from 10.7% in 2006 to 4.8% in 2012. This sets the checkpoint as a lost state that was much better before than the current one. Adopting a pragmatic foreign policy to achieve Kazakhstan's long-term strategic preferences could reassure the population. The new strategy aims to enter Kazakhstan in the top 30 developed countries of the world by 2050 and join the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Second, Kazakhstan falls under the category of less significant and less democratic foreign aid contributors⁸. Therefore, it does not challenge the world order or promote liberal democratic values. This explains first that collective identity provides policy elites with a shared worldview through which the international environment is collectively interpreted, and this, in turn, presents them with a set of images that define viable actions. The political elite's reproduction of the Kazakhstan government's foreign policy otherness is no exception. This also highlights the importance of social comparison as a motive for foreign policy. Political elites compare their state's achievements and qualities to those of a reference state. The selection of a reference group is crucial in shaping state policy. Small and middle-income states, for example, may choose Western liberal democracies or non-liberal states such as Russia and China as reference groups. Kazakhstan yearns for symbolic recognition as a young state that has recently joined the world arena because of a powerful wave of decolonization (Laruelle M., 2013). At the same time, its ruling elite is interested in managing the country's internal affairs independently, trying in every possible way not to deal with any new potential "big brothers" who, perhaps, would willingly take on the role that Moscow previously played. This "duality" causes tension and controversy in the development of strategies. In short, foreign policy is by no means divorced from domestic realities: in many cases, the foreign policy choice is determined mainly by domestic reasons, especially in young states that need to gain double legitimacy - both international with the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and domestic with the Strategy of Kazakhstan - 2050.

CONCLUSION

We emphasize external recognition by the international development community and/or organizations as a significant determinant of a state's public satisfaction with the internal system. Rising and resurgent powers wish to be recognized as equal to the dominant states. Summarizing the hypothesis of this research, we suggest that the decision to become an ODA donor can be treated as a variable that affects the country's international status, which then affects political elites and state identity. The state identity approach used throughout this thesis has proven its theoretical use and empirical importance in studying states' foreign policy. We have argued that the domestic political situation in 2013 has been significant—though not exclusively—influenced by changes in state identity in Kazakhstan. We argue that rising and resurgent powers wish to be recognized as equal to the dominant states, especially in young states that lack the resources to challenge the international system and advance the domestic order.

We believe this framework can be extended to examine further foreign policy analysis in Kazakhstan and/or study similar regional cases in Central Asia. We consider these limitations and the heterogeneity of new donors, especially those who do not identify with the southern label, such as Central Asia, Arab countries, and Eastern Europe. The limitations of ideological theories are that they can explain Kazakhstan's motives for providing ODA with a more

⁸ Development Co-operation Profiles – Kazakhstan, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/7da178e1-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/7da178e1-en> (Search date: 2023-3-15)

complex single case study but not universal predictions and conclusions, making it difficult to generalize the results. However, new donors can become an existential challenge for existing literature. Indeed, new archival material might soon be available to test some of this study's findings and measure whether state identity played the role we presented here.

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