

Abstract

How can political stability be secured in a non-democratic, multiethnic state in which power is monopolised by a particular ethnic group? If minorities residing in a host state have ethnic kin states abroad, do these international ethnic links pose a threat to the security and territorial integrity of the host state? This study asks these questions by examining the case of Post-Soviet Kazakhstan, a state which has often been viewed as ethnically fragile due to a substantial presence of ethnic ‘others’—primarily Russians—in the country.

This study provides an empirically grounded account of how and why ethnicity failed to emerge as an arena of conflict in Kazakhstan. It identifies a government strategy designed to manage ethnic diversity—based both on repression and co-optation, which it examines in the context of the complex international environment after the collapse of the Soviet Union. By comparing the four major transnational ethnic communities in Kazakhstan (Russians, Uzbeks, Uighurs, and Koreans), this study provides an in-depth analysis of *triadic nexuses*—the dynamic interaction between the government of Kazakhstan, minorities residing in that state, and the ethnic homelands of those minorities. The main method of inquiry employed is intensive, individual interviewing with ethnic movement leaders.

The findings of this study suggest that control—a strategy that uses coercive methods as well as minority elite co-optation to render ethnic contestation difficult or impossible—is an effective means by which to manage ethnic divisions under authoritarian rule, as it simultaneously serves to de-politicise ethnicity and also maintain the regime. It also demonstrates that President Nazarbaev established cross-ethnic coalition of loyal elites, and skilfully exploited the logic of ethnic representation to bolster the legitimacy of his rule. On an international front, this study shows the limits of the power of ethnic linkages between minorities and their kin states as a means to promote ethno-mobilisation.