

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

The purpose of this study has been to explain political stability in post-Soviet Kazakhstan with a particular focus on the role of the Nazarbaev administration policies toward ethnic movements, and taking into consideration the international environment in which Kazakhstan found itself after Soviet collapse. This study has shown that a shrewd control strategy based both on repression and co-optation of key ethnic movement leaders largely prevented ethnic mobilisation in the post-Soviet period. It has also demonstrated that the presence of ethnic homelands for some of Kazakhstan's main minorities just across the border (and the existence of policies focused on diaspora communities in kin states, notably the Russian Federation) did not obstruct government control in Kazakhstan; if anything, they facilitated it.

This final chapter summarises the findings from the previous chapters, and discusses the broader implications of these findings for the control concept and the triadic nexus model as set out at the beginning of the study. Following a brief summary of post-2005 political developments, the chapter concludes with consideration of future prospects for managing ethnic differences in Kazakhstan.

7.1 Control as an Effective Strategy for Managing Ethnicity

The case of Kazakhstan examined here suggests that control is an effective strategy for managing ethnic divisions under authoritarian rule, as it simultaneously serves to de-politicise ethnicity and also maintain the regime.¹ As

¹ The use of the adjective 'effective' here does not suggest that the author advocates control as a strategy for managing ethnic differences.

explained in Chapter One, this study has understood control as a strategy that renders ethnic contestation difficult or impossible by coercive and/or noncoercive means in a state in which power is monopolised or dominated by a particular ethnic group. Advancing the concept of control, Lustick (1979) pointed to noncoercive techniques because he rightly believed that repression in and of itself is unlikely to serve as the basis for a stable pattern of intergroup relations. There have been, however, few studies that elaborated the importance of co-optation for control.

This study has sought to explore the mechanisms of elite co-optation while being attentive to the repressive side of government policy on containing ethnic contestation. To suppress ethnic movements, the government of Kazakhstan used measures which it justified in terms of Kazakhstan's legal order (rejecting or annulling registration of ethnic organisations, obstructing their standing for election or other activities, arrests of movement leaders) as well as informal oppressive methods (coercion and intimidation of leaders). Among others, the authorities frequently and arbitrarily used the constitutional provision against kindling ethnic hatred in order to silence activists of ethnic movements. While these techniques continued to be applied throughout the period examined in this study (1991-2005), since the mid-1990s more efforts have focused on conciliating ethnic elites and winning them over to the regime. By the year 2005, the Nazarbaev administration had transformed the leaders of the country's main ethnic movements from (possible or real) challengers to the state into supporters of the nationalities policy of the president.

As shown in Chapter Five, Kazakhstan's control strategy contains a 'consociational' element; pro-regime ethnic elites were mobilised to form a façade of power-sharing under the aegis of the APK. Moreover, non-Kazakhs were, though not in proportion to their population share, represented in the legislature by authoritarian methods: pro-presidential parties, created from above, recruited non-Kazakh political and economic elites to join their ranks; as a result, these potential ethnic leaders were successfully neutralised. Also, President Nazarbaev

used his prerogative of appointing deputies (the 'state list' for the 1994 Supreme Soviet election, and seven presidential nominees in the upper house of parliament since 1995) to send non-Kazakhs, who otherwise might have not been elected, to the parliament. In fact, during both parliamentary and presidential elections in Kazakhstan, ethnic issues were rarely addressed; these election campaigns served as a stage on which cross-ethnic support for Nazarbaev was played out. By the end of the period addressed in this study, leaders of ethnic movements, a large majority of whom joined pro-presidential parties, typically came to mobilise their communities in support of pro-regime candidates irrespective of ethnic background, rather than candidates of their ethnicity. Through such mechanisms, Nazarbaev and his allies were able to construct a regime which extracted political support from ethnic minority leaders. In turn, ethnic elites enjoyed certain political and economic dividends in exchange for their loyalty to the president. Thus, both sides were interested not only in avoiding conflict, but also in maintaining the status quo.

By projecting the image of some degree of power-sharing among ethnic groups, the Kazakh-dominated leadership sought to legitimise its rule, both at home and abroad. In Kazakhstan (as well as in the other former Soviet states) where ethnicity was institutionalised at all levels, the number of individuals of ethnic minority origin among the elite, (not only top party leaders or state officials, but also Heroes of Socialist Labour, doctors of sciences, writers and artists etc.), was, and still is, typically cited as an indication of ethnic prestige. For non-Kazakh minorities, the representation of co-ethnics in state organs is integral to official recognition as a distinct community.² On the international front, the Nazarbaev administration has increasingly used the notion of a Kazakhstan model of interethnic relations as a basis for legitimacy in the international system. The political leadership of the republic has shown enormous enthusiasm for advertising the successful cross-ethnic consolidation and unified support for the

² It may be that some members of ethnic minorities, in particular those with a one-digit share of total population, prefer representation guaranteed by the president to majoritarian democracy.

president under the current regime.³ For Kazakhstan, interethnic accord has almost become a quasi state ideology. The Palace of Peace and Accord (*Dvorets mira i soglasiia*), a 62-meter-high pyramid-like building completed in the fall of 2006 in front of the presidential residence in Astana, symbolises Nazarbaev's ambitions to be a globally recognised leader who has made great contributions to the peaceful co-existence of the peoples with different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. A hall resembling the conference hall of the UN Security Council, located on the highest floor of the palace, appears to reflect his wish to present his country as a mini-UN, an ideal model of multiculturalism and the friendship of peoples. Kazakhstan has made much of this 'model' in its bid for the rotating chairmanship of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).⁴ For the Kazakhstani leadership, to secure the OSCE chairmanship is a matter of state pride. While failing to fulfil its commitment to individual liberties and free and fair elections, Astana has been trying to appease the Organisation by demonstrating that Kazakhstan satisfies its criteria over the issue of minority protections.

Elite co-optation, outlawing political organisations, arrests and intimidation of outspoken activists—all were techniques widely used for oppressing the opposition in general, and constituted an essential part of authoritarian rule. In Kazakhstan, the marginalisation of ethnic movements was part of a general decline in political opposition under authoritarian regime. It is more than coincidence that the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan (APK) was established in 1995, the same year that the parliament was dissolved, the term of President Nazarbaev was extended, and a constitution that consolidated presidential power was adopted. And, as demonstrated below, the fact that a parliamentary quota for the APK was introduced for the first time in the elections

³ A book entitled *N. Nazarbayev—The Founder of [the] Kazakhstan Model of Interethnic and Confessional Concord* (Aliev 2006), printed in English for an international audience, is another clear example of such efforts.

⁴ At the OSCE Ministerial Council on the 30th of November 2007, Kazakhstan was elected to its chairmanship as of 2010. A decision on Kazakhstan's bid to chair the OSCE in 2009 was originally to be made in 2006, but had been postponed.

of 2007 testifies to the fact that the co-optation of ethnic movements has advanced in line with the strengthening of authoritarian rule; in the same year (2007), a presidential party won all directly elected seats in the lower chamber of the parliament, and a constitutional ban on a third consecutive term for the presidency was lifted for First President Nursultan Nazarbaev.

In addition to legal control and elite co-optation, this study has identified demographic manipulation as a device used to avoid politicisation along ethnic lines (3.2.2 of Chapter Three). Efforts to make non-Kazakhs—among others Russians—numerical minorities nationwide or locally by inviting ethnic Kazakhs from abroad, *oblast* restructuring and relocating the capital city from the south to the north of the country served this purpose. For Kazakhstan, however, this demographic manipulation was not absolutely essential to the effort to assure Kazakh numerical superiority, because the mass emigration of the Slavic and German populations coupled with a relatively high birth rate among Kazakhs guaranteed the demographically dominant position of Kazakhs.

7.2 Triadic Nexuses in Kazakhstan: The Limits of Primordial Ethnic Ties

By examining the transnational minorities of Kazakhstan, this study has pointed to the limits on the power of ethnic linkages between minorities and their kin states as a means to promote ethno-mobilisation. As demonstrated in Chapter Six, the kin state's compatriot policy—to promote the interests of co-ethnics within the host state, or to provide an opportunity for them to 'return' to their historic homeland—is largely dependent on international relations and political and socio-economic conditions at home, rather than primordial ethnic ties. Here, internal and international constraints cannot be ignored. In a multiethnic state, it is not easy to reach an agreement on which foreign citizens should enjoy the privileges accorded ethnic kin of the state, while kin states do not like interference in domestic issues involving their own citizens. Also, as the cases of Russia,

Uzbekistan, and South Korea show, it is quite challenging to set up a legal framework to determine who is a compatriot because it is difficult to define ethnicity precisely.

It has often been argued that the ethnically based international links that minorities enjoy may pose a threat to the security and territorial integrity of the host state. But this study has demonstrated that Kazakhstan in fact enjoyed international conditions favourable to control over its minorities. Among the kin states of Kazakhstan's minorities, it was only Russia in which the presence of co-ethnics abroad had a significant meaning in the political debate. Hosting a substantial Russian minority, Kazakhstan was often viewed as a possible target of Moscow's aggressive policy toward its co-ethnics. But Kazakhstan successfully managed to reach agreements over the citizenship issue and territorial delimitation with Russia—which did not wish to jeopardise its relationship with Kazakhstan in order to meet the expectations of its co-ethnics. Also, despite considerable internal pressure, Russia's presidents have remained committed to a territorially determined definition of Russia. Defining Russia in ethnic terms would necessarily invite opposition—and even separatism—from regional and ethno-national movements within Russia itself, not to mention protest from neighbouring states with Russian diasporas. In the mid-1990s, the domestic utility of the Russian diaspora began to diminish. President Putin, who succeeded Yeltsin in 2000, even supported Nazarbaev's efforts to place all ethnic Russian organisations under his control. Uzbekistan, another kin state that could possibly claim an obligation to support co-ethnics in Kazakhstan, viewed Uzbeks abroad as a potential threat to the Karimov regime. Thus, they became objects of surveillance rather than co-ethnics to be protected or repatriated. This attitude toward the Uzbek communities in neighbouring states has led to the alienation of the Uzbeks in Kazakhstan from their kin state.

On the issue of border delimitation between Kazakhstan and its neighbouring states, ethnic communities divided by state frontiers never became a source of conflict. Kazakhstan and its adjacent states did not lay irredentist claims

based on co-ethnic communities across the border. Here, the interlocking nature of ethnic 'diasporas' acted as a key restraint. These states understood well that attempts to raise the issue of cross-border territorial claims based on ethnic affinity in the course of negotiation would inevitably invite counter claims from the other states. States have thus shared an interest in depoliticising the issue of co-ethnics abroad over the potential domestic costs of being seen to be weak from a nationalist perspective. In the case of the Uighurs straddling the border between Kazakhstan and China, both states viewed the Uighurs' desire to have their own nation state as a threat to the existent international order, and thus unified their efforts to contain the Uighur independence movement. For the Uighurs who had no option of 'return' to the homeland, and were vulnerable to being labelled as 'extremists' willing to use violence for the liberation of Xinjiang, pledging loyalty to the Kazakhstani state was the most realistic strategy for survival.

In addition to the limits and obstacles to co-ethnic protection by kin states, Kazakhstan's minorities themselves often found Nazarbaev's policies more acceptable than those of their kin states or of other states in which their co-ethnics resided. Many of Kazakhstan's neighbouring states were politically unstable and economically weak, and/or less tolerant towards non-titular ethnic communities than the government of Kazakhstan. In multiple interviews with the leaders of ethnic organisations in Kazakhstan, the author often heard them commenting on Nazarbaev, saying, 'he suits us (*on nas ustraivaet*).' The Uzbeks and Uighurs felt that they were better off compared to their co-ethnics in their respective homelands. In the case of the Uighurs, their co-ethnics in Xinjiang are under close surveillance by the Chinese authorities, and the Uzbeks are not envious of their fellow Uzbeks in Uzbekistan, a country that is less economically developed and is increasingly exhibiting the characteristics of a police state. In the case of the Russians and Koreans, comparison with the neighbouring CIS states, rather than with the kin state, was perhaps more relevant. Social disorder in the aftermath of the regime change in Kyrgyzstan in March 2005, and the tragic events in Andijan, the Ferghana Valley of Uzbekistan in May 2005, only strengthened pro-regime

feeling among ordinary people in Kazakhstan.

The triadic nexus model argues that historically rooted ethnic settlements straddling international borders may result in strong political demands, such as claims to an autonomous region within the host state, or separation of settlements from the host state and unification with their ethnic homeland. But the cases examined in this study suggest that while ethnic community views on indigenous attachment to the land on which it resides are an important consideration, this is not the decisive factor in minority strategy building. The variable of ethnic attachment to the land does not in and of itself determine minorities' choices; rather, host and kin states policies have a greater impact on minority choice. As the case of Uzbeks most clearly demonstrated, an ethnic community that has developed a strong indigenous identity, and resides in a compact community proximate to the kin state does not necessarily demand territorial autonomy or the incorporation of settlements into the ethnic homeland. Almost irrespective of ethnic identification with the territory of residence, minorities are tempted to leave host states only in cases where the kin state is more attractive to live in than the host state, and where the kin state is keen to accept co-ethnics from abroad.

7.3 Diversity among the Four Transnational Communities

As noted in Chapter One, this study addressed four diverse communities in Kazakhstan in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the triadic relationships between host state, minority, and kin state. We have briefly reviewed Russia's and Uzbekistan's compatriot policies toward co-ethnics and the border issues between Kazakhstan and its adjacent states above. Each group's political struggles, and the ways in which their homeland affected their strategy for survival, are summarised below.

For the ruling elite of independent Kazakhstan, the Russian movement—with Russians' significant numerical presence in the country and

their demands for power-sharing, dual citizenship, and according Russian the status of a state language on par with Kazakh—posed the most serious challenge to the legitimacy and integrity of the state. In the early- and mid-1990s, Russian organisations actively appealed to the electorate directly and through mass media, resulting in their successes in sending several activists and allies to the parliament in the 1994 Supreme Soviet elections. Afterwards, however, repeated coercion and intimidation targeted at Russian movement leaders forced them to leave the country or fall silent; others were successfully integrated into the political process. On the eve of the 2005 presidential election, the Kazakhstani regime had largely completed the process of co-optation of the Russian movement, winning over the movement *Lad*, the last bastion of the Slavic opposition.⁵ In the decade and half since independence, the Russian community in Kazakhstan lost more than a quarter of its population due to large-scale out-migration to Russia, and those who chose to stay (or had no other option but to remain) passively accepted the status quo in the host state, rather than pressing ethnic demands. They had little hope that Moscow would defend their interests in Astana.

In their compact settlements in the south of the republic, the Uzbeks sought to press their interests primarily locally but also nationwide by sending ethnic Uzbek deputies to the *Mazhilis*. Uzbek local networks operating through neighbourhood community *mahalla* could theoretically have served as effective tools for mobilisation, but their efforts for increased political representation were largely unsuccessful due to government oppression and co-optation. A key characteristic of the Uzbeks in Kazakhstan is the process of ‘diasporisation’ they have undergone since the late 1990s. In Soviet times, their settlements had effectively formed a part of the same cultural, social and economic space as the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, but the Kazakhstani Uzbeks grew increasingly separate from independent Uzbekistan. This is evident in the different alphabets used in Uzbek schools in Uzbekistan and in Kazakhstan, and also by the fact that

⁵ This is not to say, of course, that Russians will never make political demands in the future.

some ethnic institutions for the Uzbek minority in Kazakhstan (institutions of higher education, Uzbek-language newspapers, and an Uzbek Theatre) were re-opened or newly established. Uzbekistan's policy toward co-ethnics abroad (de-facto ignoring them and even rejecting them) and its 'highest priority—national security' approach strongly influenced the pace of the alienation process.

As the largest Uighur community outside of Xinjiang, the Uighurs in Kazakhstan cannot be viewed separately from the issue of the Uighur independence movement. The Kazakhstani Uighurs faced a dilemma: they wished to have their own nation state (thus many felt sympathy for the independence movement), but were fearful of being accused of supporting 'terrorists', ready to resort to armed struggles. Close relations between Kazakhstan and China obviously worked to the Uighurs' disadvantage. Astana would not tolerate any Uighur movement that would adversely affect its relationship with China, even those that explicitly eschewed violence. The Uighur leaders were divided over the approach to the Xinjiang question, but this has not led to outbidding, or mutual radicalisation of ethnic demands in order to appeal to the co-ethnic community. Like the Uzbeks, the local networks in compact Uighur settlements could have provided favourable conditions for ethnic mobilisation. However, Uighur leaders exercised maximum self-restraint in any public activities in order to avoid being labelled as 'extremists', and preferred petitions and informal negotiations to achieve their goals.

Finally, of the four communities addressed here, the Koreans were the group most suited to government control. United under the aegis of the Association of the Koreans of Kazakhstan, Korean leaders willingly stressed their non-native status in Kazakhstan, and pledged their loyalty to the Nazarbaev regime. The Koreans were not, however, a mere object of control; their leaders lobbied actively for the appointment of ethnic Koreans to high-ranking official posts, and for the establishment of a parliamentary quota in the Assembly of the Peoples, to which they have made the greatest financial contribution. Meanwhile,

after decades of alienation between the Soviet Koreans and their historic homeland, since *perestroika* Pyongyang and Seoul have competed for greater influence over co-ethnics in the Soviet Union and then in the newly independent states. This rivalry ended in an overwhelming victory for South Korea. After the euphoria of long-awaited exchanges with ethnic kin abroad, however, the Kazakhstani Koreans came to realise the clear differences in culture and mentality between themselves and co-ethnics in South Korea. They began to develop a Russian-speaking Korean identity distinct from that of their co-ethnics in the Korean Peninsula.

7.4 Constitutional Reforms in 2007

Constitutional reforms and subsequent parliamentary elections in 2007, one of the most important political developments after the period 1991-2005 examined here, substantiate the argument of this study that President Nazarbaev exploited the logic of power-sharing to bolster the legitimacy of his rule. In Kazakhstan, ethnic representation was institutionalised at the expense of democracy.

The constitutional amendments of May 2007, proposed by Nazarbaev and approved two days later by the parliament, were allegedly made to strengthen the role of the parliament (see Table 4.1 of Chapter Four). The most distinct change came in the structure of the *Mazhilis*, the lower chamber of the parliament: the number of its deputies was increased from 77 to 107, the 67 single-member constituencies were abolished, and instead, 98 (previously 10) seats were chosen under the proportional representation system, and nine were elected directly from within the APK (Article 51.1). This meant that minority leaders achieved their goals; as discussed in Chapter Five, they had demanded that a parliamentary quota be established for the APK. Further, the president nominated fifteen upper chamber deputies, rather than seven as had previously been the case, ‘considering the necessity to secure representation of national-cultural and other significant

interests of the society in the *Senat*' (Article 50.2).⁶ At the same time, the presidential term was reduced from seven to five years (Article 41.1).⁷ While approving these proposals by the president, the parliamentary deputies decided to allow Nazarbaev to seek re-election as many times as he wanted. Now Article 42.5 of the constitution stipulating that one and the same person cannot be elected president more than twice in succession is accompanied by the wording: 'this limitation is not applied to the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan.'

Following the constitutional reform, the president dissolved the *Mazhilis* in June 2007 and called for early elections on the 18th of August. These elections resulted in an overwhelming victory for the pro-presidential *Nur-Otan* party, headed by Nazarbaev,⁸ which won nearly 90 percent of the vote and gained all 98 directly elected seats, leaving no seats for other parties. The elections from within the APK, held separately on the 20th of August, were a de facto vote of confidence as the APK had nominated only nine candidates, the exact number to be chosen from the Assembly.⁹ To be sure, the deputies representing the APK contributed to diversifying the ethnic composition of the *Mazhilis*; the number of ethnic groups represented in the lower chamber increased from three to nine.¹⁰ Yet the lower house continued to be dominated by ethnic Kazakhs, and the number of Russian

⁶ As discussed in Chapter Four, the 1995 Constitution established the two-chamber parliament and gave the president the right to nominate seven members of the upper house. During the parliamentary elections held in the same year, the head of the Central Electoral Commission justified this nomination system by the necessity to ensure representation of ethnic and other group interests (Kolstø 2004: 172). The 2007 constitutional amendments made specific reference to this idea for the first time.

⁷ This five-year term will be applied to presidents elected after 2012, when the term of the incumbent president will expire. The presidential term had previously been set at five years until it was extended to seven years by constitutional amendments in October 1998.

⁸ In 2006, the *Otan* Party absorbed pro-presidential parties such as *Asar*, Civic and Agrarian Parties, and renamed itself *Nur Otan* at the end of that year. Following the 2007 constitutional amendments that abolished Article 43.2 (a ban on the involvement of an incumbent president in party activities), Nazarbaev officially assumed the chairmanship of *Nur Otan* in July 2007.

⁹ Ethnic backgrounds of those elected were as follows: Balkar, Belarusian, German, Kazakh, Korean, Russian, Uighur, Ukrainian, and Uzbek. The elected Uzbek deputy was Rozakul Khalmuradov, Chairman of the Republican Association of Social Unions of Uzbeks *Dostlik* (see the introduction of 5.1.3, Chapter Five)

¹⁰ Successful candidates chosen by proportional representation included a German candidate, who was the sole non-Russian, non-Kazakh elected deputy.

deputies continued to decline.¹¹

On the 29th of August, Nazarbaev appointed eight senators to fill the newly added seats to be nominated by the president. Iurii Tskhai, President of the Association of the Koreans in Kazakhstan, was one of them.¹² As discussed above, the enlargement of the number of presidential appointees was justified by the necessity to secure the representation of a variety of social groups. However, the introduction of the eight new members did not have a significant impact on ethnic representation in the upper house; except for Tskhai and a deputy of Slavic origin, it appears that all other deputies had Kazakh family names.¹³ Thus, under the pretext of institutionalising ethnic representation in the parliament, President Nazarbaev in fact increased the number of deputies whom he could appoint. Though representing their respective ethnic communities, deputies from the APK were also presidential appointees, and this combination served to strengthen the influence of Nazarbaev—the APK chairman for life with the authority to appoint its members, in the legislature.

Meanwhile, the 2007 constitutional reforms brought another change to the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan; it is called the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan (*Assambleia naroda Kazakhstana*).¹⁴ APK Deputy Chairman Sergei D'iachenko explained the reason for using 'people' in the singular as follows: 'In these years [since the APK was founded in 1995] we have indeed transformed into the people of Kazakhstan.'¹⁵ What is stressed here is not assimilation of non-Kazakhs into the Kazakh nation, but the formation of a multiethnic Kazakhstani people whose members identify themselves with the Republic of Kazakhstan irrespective of their ethnic background. In the sixteen

¹¹ The ethnic composition of the *Mazhilis* elected in 2007 was as follows: 82 Kazakhs (76.6 percent of the total), 17 Russians (15.9 percent), and 8 others (7.5 percent). For the 2004 *Mazhilis* election results, see Table 3.16 of Chapter Three.

¹² See 5.1.3 of Chapter Five.

¹³ There was no female deputy among the eight presidential appointees.

¹⁴ As a result of the 2007 amendments, the constitution for the first time specified the status of the APK.

¹⁵ Programma 'Betpe Bet,' 24 May 2007, *Khabar*, www.khabar.kz [accessed in June 2007].

years since independence, it indeed seems that a sense of Kazakhstani identity has been growing. However, the new title for the Assembly does not suggest that such an identity has been fully established—after all, identity building is a long-term process and it is hard to tell when the process has been completed. Rather, by applying the singular ‘people’ the government seeks to boast that President Nazarbaev has successfully integrated a variety of ethnic groups into a civic Kazakhstani nation.

7.5 Future Prospects: Is Ethnic Stability Sustainable in Kazakhstan?

Over nearly two decades, Nazarbaev’s manipulative control strategy has ensured the cooperation of a Kazakh-dominated ruling elite with non-Kazakh elites, and bolstered his rule in the multiethnic state. This is not to suggest that control is the best prescription for the management of ethnic differences. Moral judgement aside, control does not necessarily guarantee ethnic stability over a long period of time. Under what circumstances may interethnic accord attained through control become fragile or collapse? Or, more broadly, what could potentially threaten Kazakhstan’s political stability in the future?

Kazakhstan’s overarching elite accommodation is based on personal ties between the president and his cronies on the one hand, and pro-regime ethnic leaders on the other. The APK, a consultative body which plays the central role in elite co-optation, is permanently chaired by Nazarbaev and connected with him as a person rather than to the presidency as an institution. This is not to say, as the Kazakhstani government has been arguing, that no one but Nazarbaev can secure interethnic accord in the country. However, because Kazakhstan’s co-optation mechanism depends heavily on the incumbent president, it does have the potential to break down upon a change of regime.

As of 2007, Nazarbaev’s rule appears to be secure as Kazakhstani elites find more benefit in supporting the president than organising a collective

challenge to him. While his current term will expire in 2012, Nazarbaev secured the elimination of term limits through the 2007 constitutional reforms. In addition, he still enjoys a certain popular support, including a passive belief that there is no better alternative. Needless to say, however, Nazarbaev cannot remain in power forever. If not resignation or electoral defeat, death—natural or otherwise—will end his rule. Will his successor be able to present him or herself as the guarantor of interethnic accord as Nazarbaev has?¹⁶ The highly personalised character of cross-ethnic consolidation under the president implies that its sustainability is not guaranteed. Moreover, if Nazarbaev is ousted from his office and an opposition leader takes power, the legitimacy of the APK and its affiliated organisations will come into question, as its members are not elected by the ethnic communities they claim to represent, but are appointed by the president.

However, Kazakh political and demographic dominance has been firmly established over the two decades since independence, and this means that minority movements are unlikely to seriously challenge the state order. Rather than anticipating a new opportunity for contestation after Nazarbaev leaves office, non-Kazakhs appear to be fearful that they may become targets of discrimination or even persecution by the majority group. In fact, a weakening of control is more likely to lead to the rise of Kazakh nationalists. Under the Nazarbaev regime, they have been, like Russian and other minority leaders, largely marginalised by coercion and cooptation. As discussed in Chapter Two, the government also diminished the *raison d'être* of independent titular movements by incorporating their demands into its official policies. However, discontent among a substantial section of the Kazakh population, a potential resource for Kazakh mobilisation, has not been resolved but even appears to be growing.¹⁷ Kazakhs in *auls* have

¹⁶ One possible scenario to sustain current control is that Nazarbaev anoints a reliable successor to himself, while he continues to exercise political influence as the APK chairman for life and as the head of *Nur Otan* Party after his tenure as president ends.

¹⁷ Kazakhstan suffered from recurring outbreaks of violence between Kazakhs and minorities from 2006 through 2007. While actual details of these incidents are not clear, they did follow a similar pattern: a brawl among individuals or a criminal act escalated into serious clashes between members of different communities. One possible explanation for these events is that frustration among the Kazakhs, in particular among

benefited little from the 'Kazakhisation' project and economic prosperity in the country. With the urban-rural economic gap increasingly widening, linguistic and cultural cleavages between urban Kazakhs and Kazakhs in rural areas have not been addressed. Disempowered under Nazarbaev's rule, the rural Kazakhs may, once conditions are favourable for political entrepreneurs to mobilise them in that direction, organise themselves to protest against 'half' (*shala*) Kazakhs who, in the eyes of the impoverished rural Kazakh population, monopolised the power and wealth of the state.

Kazakh nationalism may become a critical issue even before a presidential power transfer. While he never actively fought for Kazakh independence, President Nazarbaev has managed to keep Kazakh nationalists under control by embracing the independence that came to Kazakhstan by default and consolidating it. But many Kazakhs still aver that Kazakhstan has not turned into a state of and for the Kazakhs. To preserve the legitimacy of his leadership and his nationalities policies, President Nazarbaev may be pressured to promote nationalising policies to a greater extent than ever before, while tightening his control over co-ethnic nationalists. Whether or not Nazarbaev will succeed in

young people expressed itself through violence against 'others'. This is not to suggest, of course, that only Kazakhs are to blame for the disturbances.

In November 2006, a brawl in a café in Shelek, Almaty *oblast*, triggered a street fight between Kazakhs and Uighurs. A Kazakhstani newspaper sensationally reported the details of the incident, and quoted the Uighurs as saying 'The state is yours, yet the land is ours!' But the owner of this cafe denied this statement in an interview with Ferghana.ru (25 December 2006). Then, in March 2007, a fight in a billiard-room in Malovodnoe, Almaty *oblast*, escalated into an attack by a couple hundred Kazakhs on a small number of Chechens, who responded with gunfire. This shooting (which took place in a neighbouring village Kazatkom) killed two Kazakhs, and three Chechen shooters were murdered in retaliation. Finally, at the end of October 2007, Kazakhs burned the property of Kurds in Maiatas in the South Kazakhstan *oblast* after the sexual assault of a four-year-old Kazakh boy by a 16-year-old Kurdish male was reported to police. After this incident, the majority of Kurds reportedly fled the village. One may also add an October 2006 mass disturbance among the labourers of the Tengizshevroil joint venture to this list of events, although it happened between Kazakhstani citizens and foreigners. According to the official records, some 400 local (apparently mostly ethnic Kazakh) and 100 Turkish contractors clashed, leaving about 140 wounded. They were working on the construction of a plant near the Tengiz oil field in the western part of the republic. Commenting on the incident, local observers blamed discrimination in wages (Kazakhs were paid significantly less than foreigners) and Turkish workers' arrogant attitude toward Kazakh colleagues.

retaining power, the Kazakhs' newly won political and numerical ascendancy are likely to make minorities more insecure and make intra-ethnic cleavage more salient in the future.