

Choosing Your Battles: Different Languages of Kazakhstani Youth Activism

CAP Paper 226, January 2020

by Nafissa Insebayeva

Nafissa Insebayeva is a PhD Candidate at the University of Tsukuba, Japan, where she specializes in Kazakhstan’s domestic politics, development cooperation, and international development strategies. She previously took part in development-related conferences, workshops, and trainings at the University of Oxford, Harvard University, Columbia University, and the National University of Singapore. She holds a BA in Economics from Nazarbayev University (Kazakhstan) and an MA in International Area Studies from the University of Tsukuba.

*“The state is obliged to listen to its citizens and, most importantly, to hear them,”
Kassym-Jomart Tokayev¹*



Illustration by Mori. All rights belong to the author.

On March 19th, 2019, Nursultan Nazarbayev, the first president of the Republic of Kazakhstan, announced his resignation as the nation’s leader after nearly three decades in office. In a televised national address, Nazarbayev handed power over to the Chairman of the Upper House Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, while stating he would “remain the Chairman of the Security Council, which is vested with serious powers.”² The timing of this decision took many Kazakhstanis by surprise, causing significant speculation regarding the country’s future.

The next day, during his speech at the Joint Session of the Chambers of Parliament, President Tokayev praised Nazarbayev’s decision to “voluntarily relinquish his powers as the Head of State,” and suggested Nazarbayev’s name be “immortalized” in the capital’s name.³ The news about renaming of the capital from Astana to Nur-Sultan was met with mixed reactions. While some believed it was an appropriate way to honor Kazakhstan’s distinguished contemporary,⁴ others took to the streets⁵ and social media with slogans such as “Нурсултан не мой город” and “У меня есть выбор” (translation “Nursultan is not my city”, “I have a choice”) to express their disapproval of the proposal.⁶

Although these demonstrations surrounding the first transition of power in Kazakhstan were not the largest in scale, they served as a starting point and inspiration for future youth movements. In the months since this transition, the country has witnessed an unprecedented number of protests and demonstrations: from youth digital activism campaigns and protest art to “solitary pickets” and rallies.

Thousands of people have reportedly been arrested for their involvement in peaceful, but “unsanctioned” protests.⁷ While various forms of activism existed long before Nazarbayev’s resignation, it is the relative scale of mass participation, media coverage, and an emerging sense of urgency that make post-Nazarbayev instances of youth civic engagement of a particular interest.



Illustration by Mori. All rights belong to the author.

While many works have studied the activist field in the Kazakhstani setting,⁸ the existing discourses of Kazakh-language and Russian-language activism, beyond the widespread “ethnic vs. civic Kazakh nationalism”⁹ nexus, remain unexplored. Despite the linguistic heterogeneity that persists in the country, the role of language in civic engagement and political participation among youth has not yet received due attention. This is particularly important in light of these recent developments in Kazakhstan. There is thus a great need to highlight the profound effect of language on the undeniable increase of youth activism in Kazakhstan. It is important to emphasize that the point of this particular discussion is not to differentiate between Kazakh and Russian speakers per se, but to explore how themes and discourses of activism vary depending on the language.

This study acknowledges that language plays a crucial role in youth’s socialization as engaged citizens and, consequently, their decisions in regard to ‘formal or informal’ and ‘traditional or alternative’ political behavior. Various informational and cultural environments shape people’s identities and value systems over time, and, by extension, impact their interpretations of civic engagement. This paper also acknowledges that language is not the only factor that informs stakeholders’ behaviors; other socio-cultural and economic variables play a vital role as well. While

this is an interesting avenue for further research, the scope of this study focuses more narrowly on the trends and narratives of Kazakh- and Russian-language civic engagement exhibited by Kazakhstani youth. In addition, the general focus of the study is to analyze Kazakh- and Russian-language activism in the two biggest cities in Kazakhstan: Nur-Sultan and Almaty.

This paper therefore seeks to answer the following question: What are the key differences and similarities between existing discourses of Kazakh- and Russian-language social and political youth activism in Kazakhstan? The study concludes that language does not constitute the key differentiating factor between socially and politically active youth in Kazakhstan; rather, it is the activists’ willingness to cooperate with government-supported organizations and movements which largely dictates the divisions in the activist space.

The work draws on extensive key-informant interviews, media materials, and relevant legal documents—such as the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan and others. Interviews were chosen as one of the major sources of qualitative data due to their ability to cover both factual data and subjective perceptions of interviewees about the subject of discussion. As a result, the conducted interviews serve as a vital source of information that sheds light on the events and discourses surrounding observed political activity in Kazakhstan.

Structured, semi-structured, and open-ended interviews were conducted in Kazakh and Russian with leaders of various activist youth organizations from ages 18 to 38. Convenience and snowball sampling were used to recruit participants of this study, with the primary criteria being subjects’ participation in rallies, marches, campaigns, demonstrations, protests, or other types of civic engagement. The range of issues of primary concern for the interviewed activists was not limited in scope and did not serve as a selection criterion. Furthermore, an approximately equal number of female and male activists were interviewed as a part of this study.

Existing Literature

Traditionally, much of the existing literature on youth and political participation used to revolve around the decline of orthodox or conventional manifestations of civic and political engagement, such as voter turnout and party membership (Skocpol, Fiorina 1999; Norris

1999; Dalton 1998; 2006). These studies showed that although youth had increasingly become disengaged from traditional modes of political activity, they were more likely to exhibit alternative political behaviors (i.e. demonstrations, boycotts, and social media activism) (Mann et al., 2009). With the diffusion of the Internet, youth that were raised during the times of major shifting landscapes and tumultuous change have shaped a unique relationship with politics. These observed trends have thus fueled a rapid expansion of research that concentrates on alternative channels of political involvement and their impact on citizen participation in political decision-making. (O’Toole, Lister, and Marsch, 2003; Ó Beacháin and Polese 2010; Ekman and Amna, 2012;¹⁰ Halpern and Gibbs, 2013; Boulianne, 2015; Ekström et al., 2014; Dimitrova et al., 2014).

In the Kazakhstani setting, where youth comprise a growing segment of the population and a potential potent political force, major contributions in the field have been made during recent years. For instance, Kosnazarov (2019) explores a less direct or latent form of political participation – consumption of politically charged content on social media – arguing that apolitical youth exhibit an “unconscious political attitude” by refusing to participate in traditional structures and engaging with “at least partial civic activism.”¹¹ Another study by Junisbai, Junisbai and Whitsel (2017),¹² attempts to investigate whether “differences in regime type translate into differences in political attitudes in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.” The research concludes that, in comparison with their Kyrgyz counterparts, Kazakhstani youth are less likely to “support practices associated with democracy or to be concerned about the domination of narrow interests over the common good.”

While these studies have made a great contribution to our understanding of local youth and their political involvement, the issue of language in relation to political participation and civic engagement in the Kazakhstani context remains an underexplored matter. While some prominent studies, such as those prepared by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation of Kazakhstan¹³ and Kazakhstan’s Ministry of Education and Science, have presented some interesting findings on the values of Kazakhstani youth, they lack linguistic dimension and tend to draw distinctions on the basis of ethnicity instead.¹⁴

The importance and power of language in the political context is constituted by its ability to create influence through words. Language plays a crucial role in people’s socialization as engaged citizens and, subsequently,

their decisions regarding their formal or informal and traditional or alternative political behaviors. Various informational and cultural environments shape people’s identities and value systems over time, thus impacting their interpretations of civic engagements. Language proficiency and language preference offer exclusivity in access to and consumption of some media sources and social environments, which in turn shape people’s attitudes toward the “political.” This results in different linguistic groups, each developing a different set of attachments and aspiration—potentially becoming a big enough part of one’s identity to motivate an active position and civic participation in demonstrations and protests.

Linguistic divides: Concerns over language in the activist space

Most activist initiatives in Kazakhstan have been increasingly utilizing both Kazakh and Russian languages to promote their agenda. In light of recent events, the Kazakh-language activist space has significantly widened. Although many employ the national language in their rhetoric, the goals they set and demands they press vary greatly.

Unsurprisingly, in accordance with the findings of Serik Beisembayev (2015), one of the main issues of mounting concern expressed through Kazakh-language media sources and digital activism was the current status of the Kazakh language. The participants of this study, whose primary “language of activism” is Kazakh, also expressed their dissatisfaction with how the national language is perceived, treated, and utilized in everyday life. Concerns over language have traditionally been associated with ethnic nationalist attitudes, which, in the Kazakhstani context, are sometimes interpreted as one of the primary drivers of ethnic tensions. Nevertheless, according to the respondents, there are many activists who are concerned with the development of the Kazakh language but do not have any ethnically driven political aspirations. To them, their nationalist beliefs lay in the space of civic nationalism, which aims to elevate the status of the national language among other things.

Interestingly, with activist attitudes on the rise, these language-based concerns have not been limited to criticisms of the government’s language policies; they have also spilled onto the activist space. All respondents felt that it was difficult to find reliable Kazakh-language materials dedicated to human rights, sexual education, technology, and other topics—which would sometimes

constrict them solely to Russian or English-language sources in their work. It also meant less exposure to some of those topics among communities who primarily rely on Kazakh-based media platforms for information and communication.

In addition to these factors, some Kazakh-speaking interviewees believed Kazakh-language media were less likely to post content that criticizes the government:

“Qazaq tildi media belsendilik tanyta qoimady. Sebebi olar da memlekettik organdarga táýeldi bolǵandyqtan, oppozitsualyq kózqarasty bildirýge múddeli emes” (Kazakh).

“Kazakh-language media are not very active. This is because they are not interested in expressing oppositional attitudes due to their dependence on government agencies.”

Others felt that while Kazakh-language media sources are capable of covering politically and socially important issues, their interest in those topics is limited in scope. Most respondents maintained that one is more likely to read Kazakh-language articles about the events in Zhanaozen¹⁵ and anti-Chinese attitudes than about women’s rights, for example.

Indeed, even from a quick glance on social media, the prevalence of Russian-language activism pertaining to the rights and freedoms of the LGBTQ+ community or sexual liberation for women, for instance, is evident. This does not necessarily imply that leaders and participants of those movements represent a homogenous linguistic group (Russian-speakers), but it points at which language more effectively empowers these groups in one instance versus another. The Russian language allows one to establish a dialogue with other Russian-speaking communities outside of Kazakhstan, which, in turn, brings a spirit of comradery.

Moreover, Kazakh-language activists revealed that they often feel that the Kazakh language is being neglected in the activist space, or as one of the respondents put it, even being “mocked.”

“Aty shýly ‘oiangán’¹⁶”, ‘syni oily’ sektorda da kóbinese qazaq tiline qarsy kemsitýshilik máselesi elenbeidi & tipti kúlkige amalady syni oily.” (Kazakh)

“In the well-known “awakened,” “critical thinking” sector, the issue of discrimination against the Kazakh language is often ignored and even becomes a laugh.”

They shared that, from their point of view, many activists tend to minimize or outright neglect the impact of Kazakh activism in certain areas, and they assume all Kazakh-speakers are inherently more traditional and less liberal. According to the respondents, while smaller in numbers, Kazakh-language activists that focus on women’s rights, for instance, also exist. They just do not have the same outreach, opportunities, and resources to spread their message.

Women as Agents of Change

Another important similarity between Kazakh- and Russian-language activism is the prominent role of women in both. Indeed, protests and campaigns led by women that target women’s and children’s issues have been on the rise for the past couple of years. Mothers continuously press their demands for better social welfare benefits,¹⁷ feminist advocates march for better protection of women’s rights and freedoms,¹⁸ and women actively participate in anti-sexual harassment and violence campaigns.¹⁹

While the dominant narratives and main themes of Kazakh- and Russian-language female activism vary greatly, what unifies them is the role of women as agents of change. This is not surprising since women, just like men, do not represent a homogenous group, and have different life experiences and different priorities and needs. Whether they are demanding adequate support for “hero-mothers”, which has been a concern expressed in protests across the country,²⁰ or fighting for sexual liberation, which is still a taboo in the country,²¹ women in Kazakhstan are actively engaging in the country’s social, political, and economic life.

“Как я вижу, в активизме в основном находятся женщины, потому что созданы довольно сложные преграды нашему активному участию в управлении государством.” (Russian)

“As I see it, women are mainly active because complicated barriers have been created to our active participation in the government.”

Most respondents believed that it is time to have more women in office, which will help ensure women’s issues and rights are placed at the forefront of the country’s agenda. Once again, many referred to the recent women-led protests and demonstrations to show that it is time to change the current state of affairs in our country.

Indeed, although Kazakhstan committed to ensuring

equal rights for all and preventing gender imbalances by approving the Concept of Family and Gender Policy in 2016,²² the country's performance in those areas should still be improved. In 2017, the Global Gender Gap Report ranked Kazakhstan at 52nd of 144 countries. A year later, the country lost 8 positions, and it is now ranked 60th.²³ Even though some progress has been made in regard to improving women's participation in the nation's economy—primarily in the form of government-funded trainings and loans²⁴—the role of women in government remains limited. According to the latest official statistics, while women constitute 28% of the deputies in the Lower House—a relatively impressive number—female representation in the Upper House drops to a jaw-dropping 4%.²⁵ In comparison, respondents reported that women play the key role in most, if not all, civil society organizations, activist groups, and social movements in the country.

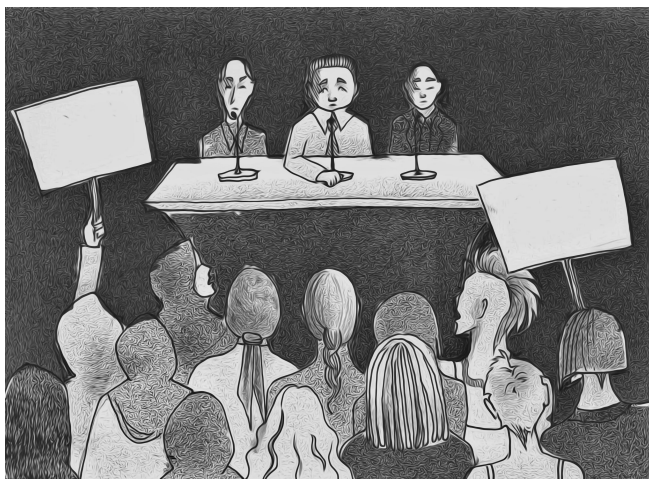


Illustration by Mori. All rights belong to the author.

Jas Otan, Oyan Qazaqstan, and Someone in Between

The language divide was not the only issue that respondents found to be polarizing, and this is an issue that both Kazakh- and Russian-language activists seem to agree on. The interviews suggested that in the aftermath of the 2019 elections, tensions within the growing activist space in Kazakhstan have also increased.

According to the interview participants, regardless of one's political stance, a significant amount of stigma exists surrounding political beliefs in Kazakhstan. More specifically, there seems to be a clear division between those who engage in social and political activism in support of the national government and those who oppose the government's approach altogether. Some people revealed that cooperation with the government

is immediately frowned upon by those who push for reforms, regardless of what area this cooperation is in. A few respondents shared their experience of being labelled “nur-bots”²⁶ or being criticized for their involvement with the youth wing of the ruling political party Nur Otan - “Jas Otan” (translation “Young Motherland”).²⁷ To them, this felt like they were being stripped of their identity as activists who are striving for positive change, as their intentions and motivations were questioned due to their willingness to work together with the government or government-supported groups. However, according to these interviewees, their activism and their identity as Jas Otan members or partners do not have to be mutually exclusive. They also understand the need for reforms in Kazakhstan, but they choose to look for opportunities under the current order and make gradual changes to political and social structures. Some respondents have shared that their view of the self-proclaimed civil movement Oyan, Qazaqstan!²⁸ (translation Wake up, Kazakhstan!) is largely based on their perceptions of the movement's anti-government attitudes:

“Для многих людей они (Оуан, Qazaqstan!) являются новыми героями, такими революционерами, которые что-то хотят поменять. И я не хочу, чтобы они учили людей слепо критиковать власть. Не все, что делает правительство плохо... Со всеми можно вести диалог.” (Russian)

“For many people, they (Oyan, Qazaqstan!) are the new heroes—revolutionaries, who want to change something. And I do not want them to teach people to blindly criticize the government. Not everything the government does is bad... You can have a dialogue with everyone.”

Despite this significant trend, however, all respondents agree that it is important to establish a dialogue with each other and to make the society at large—and the activist space specifically—less fragmented.

“bogemualyq orys tildi liberal ‘oiaŋandar’ men qazaq tildi ‘namystylar’ arasynda dialog artýy tis.” (Kazakh)

“A dialogue between the bohemian Russian-speaking liberal “awakened”²⁹ and Kazakh-speaking “dignitaries”³⁰ should be established.”

“Когда я говорю об активизме, я готова прислушаться к мнению абсолютно всех групп, всех представителей” (Russian)

“When I’m talking about activism, I am ready to listen to the opinions of all groups, all representatives”

In addition, most interviewees, regardless of the language of their activism, believed that the events that Kazakhstan has witnessed in the past several months have further diminished public trust. For instance, some referred to the post-election statements of presidential candidate Amirjan Qosanov as one of the factors that contributed to this phenomenon. Qosanov, who was a candidate from the Ult Tagdyry Party, ran his platform on supporting political freedoms, strengthening the status of the national language, and fighting against corruption³¹ among others. According to the official poll, 16% of voters chose Qosanov as Kazakhstan's next president, but many argued that the elections were not as transparent as they should have been. While many of his supporters were ready to continue to question the results of the elections, Qosanov was quick to issue a public statement proclaiming the elections to be fair. Such a reaction from the presidential candidate, whose message many citizens believed in, caused public anger and frustration, and Qosanov was labelled a "traitor to the public interest."³² Hence, in the aftermath of this "betrayal," some people hesitate to trust any political movement:

"Qazir qoғamda belsendilik bar, biraq senim zhoq."
(Kazakh)

"Now, there is activity in society, but there is no trust"

National Council on Public Trust, #SaveKokZhailau, and Political Prisoners

The rising tensions between the government and the citizens eventually evolved into an issue that demanded an immediate response from lawmakers. As such, during President Tokayev's official inauguration, he made a list of promises to improve government's efficiency and transparency. In the face of increasing public concern, Tokayev acknowledged the need to engage in a dialogue with a broad range of prominent public figures and civil society representatives to improve the government's public responsiveness. On July 17th, in compliance with subpoint 20, article 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Tokayev ordered the creation of the National Council on Public Trust.³³ The Council was created as a dialogue platform between the government and the public to ensure citizens' engagement in the nation's policy-making process.³⁴

The Council currently consists of 41 invited members and is intended to have no less than three meetings per year.³⁵ In Tokayev's words:

"Each of the members of the National Council has their own opinion and position. This is a completely natural state of a developed civil society. We all must proceed from the thesis that I expressed in my inaugural speech, 'Different opinions – one nation.' Indeed, without alternatives, initiative, and activity, there is no development"³⁶.

While the premise and objectives of the Council sound promising, its composition has raised many eyebrows. Only 5 women were invited to the Council, and, given the current mood among politically and socially active citizens, this lack of female representation in the body that is supposed to bridge the communication gap between citizens and ruling elites is quite concerning.

While many have expressed their skepticism regarding the Council's potential to improve the role of citizens in policy-making, some respondents are rather hopeful. Despite their active political position that criticizes how the government functions, all participants of this study did not believe that positive changes were only possible if the government was changed. In fact, respondents emphasized that their active political and social position is aimed at reforms, and the key element of their civic engagement is not to force the government to resign, but the desire to be "heard" by the officials.

"Для меня необязательно, чтобы Токаев ушел...я хочу увидеть, что они (власть) могут услышать". (Russian)

"For me, it is not necessary for Tokayev to leave ... I want to see that they (the authorities) can hear (us)."

The most hopeful were youth activists concerned with ecology and environmental protection. According to these individuals, problems pertaining to ecology are more likely to be received with a level of "flexibility" in the government. It should be noted that interviewees highlighted that this has not always been the case, and that not too long ago, engaging in this kind of activism could come at the price of their jobs or "talks" with the authorities.

One of the most prominent, well-supported environmental campaigns was the movement known as #SaveKokZhailau. The movement was primarily Russian language based to start and has sometimes been accused of being "anti-Kazakhstani" in nature.³⁷ This issue dates back to 2005, when talks about building a ski resort on the territory of one of Kazakhstan's most treasured national parks, Kok

Zhailau, were receiving significant attention from the public.³⁸ The proposal was heavily criticized by activists who expressed concerns regarding the potential environmental damage the plan could cause. Ever since that time, the talks about potential construction would partially die out, slowly resurface, and then get stalled again. More recently, after a new ski resort proposal was presented to the government, 32,000 people signed a petition demanding that it be abolished. Despite the public outcry, preparatory works in Kok Zhailau continued until earlier this year. Finally, before the world entered the year 2020, Tokayev banned construction in Kok Zhailau citing the opinions of “professional ecologists” and “competent” representatives of the general public.³⁹ For environmental activists it was a big achievement—a great reward after several years of hard work:

“Сколько было вложено усилий по защите Кок Жайлау...Это не один год. Сколько мы призывали людей, собирали подписей...наконец это было услышано главой государства... Мы добились, это - наша победа” (Russian)

“How much effort has been put into protecting Kok Zhailau ... This was not (done in) one year. How many people we called upon (for action), collected signatures ... finally it was heard by the President ... We have achieved it, this is our victory.”

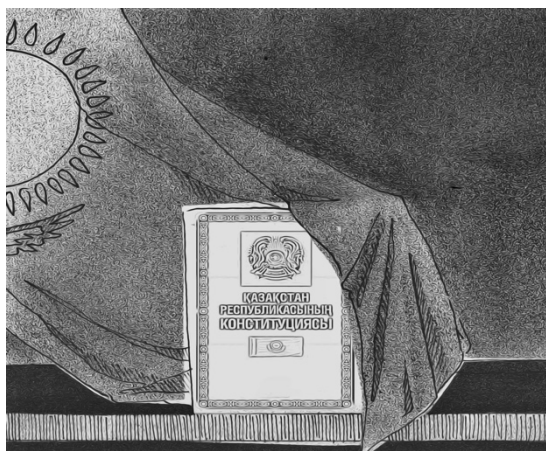


Illustration by Mori. All rights belong to the author.

The least amount of hope has been shown by Kazakh-speaking and Russian-speaking activists, whose primary goal is to assist political prisoners in Kazakhstan. This issue has become one of major importance across the nation and has attracted many civil and human rights supporters, regardless of the language activists use in their rhetoric. It has also been pointed out that both Kazakh- and Russian-language activism refer to the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan and other official documents in an attempt

to establish a dialogue with the government and press their demands. In their words, it is important to use the “language policy-makers use” when trying to get your point across.

While it is too early to celebrate any major achievements in this area, the activists do not lose their hope. Many express positive attitudes towards the recent shifts they have observed in the country.

“Границы того пространства,...в котором все взаимодействуют, оно намного расширилось. Теперь разные интересы могут более активно в публичном пространстве высказываться. И это - большое достижение.” (Russian)

“The boundaries of the space ... in which everyone interacts, they have been significantly expanded. Now, different interests can be more actively expressed in the public space, and this is a great achievement.”

Conclusion

The discussion presented in this paper reveals that the Kazakh-language and Russian-language activist fields in Nur-Sultan and Almaty have some significant differences, but also share important similarities.

First, the issue of a possible gap in access to certain Kazakh-language information has been extensively discussed by Kazakh-language activists. Contrary to popular belief, Kazakh-language activism is not only concerned with “ethnic” issues. While mass protests around the widely discussed Zhanaozen events and Kazakhstan’s relations with China are significantly larger in scale, it is important to shed light on Kazakh-language activism that goes beyond these issues. As highlighted by the participants of this study, it is vital that more information on human rights, sexual health, and other topics are made available in the Kazakh language—not only through media outlets, but through other sources as well. This is essential to ensure access to reliable information for youth who choose to function in an environment where Kazakh is the dominant social and commercial language.

Second, both spaces seem to treat political beliefs as one of the main dividing factors among politically and socially active youth. In this regard, it is not the language that becomes a differentiating factor; rather, it is the activists’ willingness to cooperate with organizations and movements that either support or are supported by the government. For some, the only way to push for reforms is to break out of the existing

structures and engage in an active protest to voice concerns over fundamental flaws of the Kazakhstani system. For others, reforms are more effectively achieved gradually by taking advantage of opportunities presented by the existing order and changing the system from within. While holding different opinions is not fundamentally bothersome, such division can undermine the potential positive changes that politically and socially active youth could achieve through an effective dialogue platform. There is a clear need for a mechanism that would facilitate communication between these groups and effectively engage both of them in the nation's policymaking.

Finally, leaving aside the disparities in demands, the majority of respondents acknowledged the role of women in shaping Kazakhstan's activist landscape. Despite making official commitments to tackle gender disparities across various sectors, the Republic of Kazakhstan has not made progress pertaining to female representation in politics. Problems related to religious freedoms, welfare for "hero mothers," wider representation of women on boards of directors, sexual harassment, and domestic violence are just some of the issues that women-led Kazakh- and Russian-language activist initiatives have raised. Accordingly, the government's response should be to more effectively include women's voices in the current policymaking process. More women in leadership means more competition, and more innovative approaches. It means better quality of leaders, a wider range of policy issues

discussed, and a more efficient government.

Recommendations

Given the discussion provided above, specifically the portion concerning female representation in the government, I recommend **the National Council of Public Trust under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan** to:

1. *Ensure higher gender representation in the Council by increasing the number of female representatives from the current 5 to at least 10 (out of 40 - 25%).*

Furthermore, acknowledging the fact that **Non-governmental Organizations, Government and Government-supported Development Agencies** also play a major role in assisting activists, I recommend they:

2. *Fund existing and new non-partisan initiatives that disseminate Kazakh-language information on issues such as sexual health, human rights, and environmental awareness. Examples of these initiatives include the magazine "Wake up, Kazak,"⁴⁰ the website 1001surak.kz, and others.*

¹ Aidana Yergaliyeva, "Kazakh President Calls for Gradual Reforms in First National Council of Public Trust Meeting", *The Astana Times*, September 7, 2019. Accessed September 12, 2019

² Nursultan Nazarbayev, "Address of the Head of State Nursultan Nazarbayev to the People of Kazakhstan", Astana, March 19, 2019. Accessed September 12, 2019

³ Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, "Speech by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev at the Joint Session of the Chambers of Parliament", Astana, March 20, 2019. Accessed September 2, 2019

⁴ For example, see Janibek Bektemissov, "Renaming Capital an Appropriate Way to Honour Kazakhstan's Founding President", *The Astana Times*, March 26, 2019. Accessed March 27, 2019

⁵ Reuters, "V Kazahstane Zaderzhany Uchastniki Aktsii Protesta Protiv Pereimenovaniya Stolitsy", *Golos Ameriki*, March 21, 2019. Accessed March 29, 2019; Asemgul Mukhitkyzy and Erzhan Amirkhanov, "'V Gorode Nazarbayeva'. Pereimenovanie Stolitsy i Zaderzhaniya v Astane", March 21, 2019. Accessed March 22, 2019

RFE/RL's Kazakh Service, "Kazakh Police Detain Protesters In Several Cities During Norouz Celebrations", *RadioFreeEurope RadioLiberty*, March 22, 2019. Accessed March 23, 2019

⁶ For example, there are about 5000 posts with #уменьяетьвыбор (translation "I have a choice") on Instagram. Moreover, one of the petitions against renaming of the capital collected as many as 45,000 signatures in a couple of days. See "My Protiv Pereimenovaniya Stolitsy", March 20, 2019. Accessed October 17, 2019

⁷ Reid Standish, "Kazakhstan's Second-Ever President Can't Tolerate Protest", *Foreign Policy*, June 10, 2019. Accessed October 2, 2019

Associated Press, "Kazakhstan Updates Tally of Protest Arrests to Nearly 4,000", *Voice of America*, June 18, 2019. Accessed October 2, 2019

⁸For example, Sergey Marinin, "Agents of Change? Civic Engagement of Western-Educated Youth in Kazakhstan," *CAP*

Paper #222. The George Washington University, Washington DC, 2019

⁹ For example, Serik Beisembayev, “Fenomen Kazakhskogo Natsionalisma v Kontekste Segodnyashnei Politiki: Ot Otritsaniya k Ponimaniyu,” *Central Asian Analytical Network*, 2015

¹⁰ Joakim Ekman and Erik Amna, “Political Participation and Civic Engagement: Towards a New Typology,” *Human Affairs* 22 (2012): 283-300.

¹¹ Daniyar Kosnazarov, “#Hashtag Activism: Youth, Social Media and Politics in Kazakhstan,” *CAP Paper #217*. The George Washington University, Washington DC, 2019

¹² Barbara Junisbai, Azamat Junisbai, and Christopher Whitsel, “What Makes ‘Ardent Democrats’ in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan?” *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo #489*. The George Washington University, Washington DC, 2017

¹³ Tolganay Umbetaliyeva, Botagoz Rakisheva, and Peer Teschendorf, “Youth in Central Asia: Kazakhstan. Based on a Sociological Survey,” Friedrich Ebert Foundation Kazakhstan, Almaty, Kazakhstan, 2016

¹⁴ Yeshpanova, D., Narbekova, G., and Biekenova, N., “Sotsial’naya Aktivnost’ Molodezhi Kazakhstana v Sovremennykh Sotsialno-politicheskikh Realiiyah,” *Institutes of Philology, Political and Religious Studies*. Almaty, Kazakhstan, 2014

¹⁵ Serik Beisembayev’s (2013) content analysis of Kazakh-language media websites a few years ago seems to have corresponded with currently reported observations. For details, see Serik Beisembayev, “Kontent-analiz Kazakhoyazychnykh Saitov Obshchestvenno-politicheskoi Napravlennosti,” *Obshchestvennyi Fond Strategiya*, Almaty, Kazakhstan, 2013

¹⁶ Here the interviewee refers to the supporters of the movement “Oyan, Qazaqstan!” (translation from Kazakh “Wake up, Kazakhstan!”), which is an initiative that pushes for political reforms in Kazakhstan.

¹⁷ For example, see RFE/RL’s Kazakh Service, “Dozens of Mothers Protest in Kazakhstan Demanding Government Support,” *RadioFreeEurope RadioLiberty*, February 8, 2019. Accessed September 28, 2019

Chris Rickleton, “Kazakhstan Jails Mothers to Be on The Safe Side,” *Eurasianet*, July 4, 2019. Accessed September 20, 2019

¹⁸ For example, see Georgii Kovalev, “Almatinskii Feministki Vyshli na Miting,” *Kursiv*, September 29, 2019. Accessed October 1, 2019

¹⁹ For example, see Human Rights Watch, “Kazakhstan: Little Help for Domestic Violence Survivors,” October 17, 2019. Accessed October 29, 2019, Colleen Woon, “#MeTooTalga: Kazakh Activists Push to Toughen Rape Law,” *The Diplomat*, August 29, 2019. Accessed September 2, 2019

²⁰ For example, see Sarah Dorr, “What Is The Kazakh Regime Learning From Citizen Protests?” *openDemocracy*, April 16, 2019. Accessed August 19, 2019

²¹ For example, see Ulpan Ramazanova, “‘V Strane Devochki Vzrosleyut Zazhatye Uyatom:’ Devushki Snyavshiesya v Zhanre Nyu,” *The Village*, January 25, 2018. Accessed September 1, 2019

²² “Republic of Kazakhstan,” UN Women, Accessed September 1, 2019

²³ “Zhenshchiny i Politika,” Official Website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Accessed September 29, 2019

²⁴ Diana Vassilenko, “Atameken Offers Free Business Training To Women Across Kazakhstan,” *The Astana Times*, August 15, 2019. Accessed September 10, 2019

²⁵ “Zhenshchiny i Politika.”

²⁶ The term “nur-bot” refers to fake social media accounts that actively engage with social media users by expressing their support for the government. Since the term’s invention, it has been adopted by some to refer to individuals who express their support for the government. For further information, see Pavel Bannikov, “The Nation Leader’s Farm: Who Manages the Bot and Troll Networks in Kazakhstan,” *FactCheck*, October 23, 2019. Accessed November 2, 2019

²⁷ For further information, visit <http://www.jasotan.com/> and https://www.instagram.com/jas_otan/?hl=en

²⁸ For further information, visit <https://oyan.digital/> and <https://www.instagram.com/oyanqazaqstankz/?hl=ru>

²⁹ Oyan, Qazaqstan! members/supporters

³⁰ Here, the interviewee refers to the nationalist patriots.

³¹ For further information, see <http://qosanov2019.kz/platform>

³² For example, see Merei Sugirbayeva, “Predatel’ Interesov Naroda Ili Simvol Protesta?” *Exclusive*, June 11, 2019. Accessed September 22, 2019

³³ “Ob Utverzhdenii Polozheniya i Sostava Natsional’nogo Soveta Obshchestvennogo Doveriya Pri Prezidente Respubliki Kazakhstan,” *Official Website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, July 17, 2019. Accessed September 2, 2019

³⁴ Yergaliyeva, “Kazakh President”.

³⁵ “Ob Utverzhdenii Polozheniya.”

³⁶ Yergaliyeva, “Kazakh President”.

³⁷ Manas Bistayev, “Zashchitnikov Kok-Zhailau Obvinili v Rabote Protiv Kazakhstana,” *NUR.KZ*, November 2, 2018. Accessed March 2, 2019

³⁸ Nariza Kozhanova, “The Kok Zhailau Problem and Kazakh Civil Society,” *The Diplomat*, December 25, 2018. Accessed September 12, 2019

³⁹ “Tokayev Bans Construction of Kok Zhailau Ski Resort,” *Interfax*, October 29, 2019. Accessed November 2, 2019, Mirkhat Azhigaliyev and Shokan Alkhabayev, “Zapreshchayu Zanimatsya Proektom ‘Kok-Zhailau,’ - Tokayev,” *Tengrinews*, October

29, 2019. Accessed November 2, 2019

⁴⁰ Different from the similarly named movement “Oyan, Qazaqstan!” (“Wake up, Kazakhstan!”) or online videos under hashtag “Men Oyandym” (“I woke up”).