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KAZAKHSTAN'S TV IMPACT ON POLITICAL NEWS

This study examines Kazakhstan's TV impact on political news. Television plays a significant role as a public watchdog, with greater success than other media in disseminating a range of perspectives, information, and commentary in Kazakhstan. The analysis examines whether televised political news and information leads to support for democracy and increases public interest in the democratization process. The study discusses the utility and implications of the role of television in democratization.

Key words: Kazakhstan, TV impact, political news use, democratization process.

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Қазақстан телевидениесінің саяси жаңалықтарды таратудағы ықпалы

Бұл зерттеу қазақстандық телевидениенің саяси жаңалықтарды таратудағы ықпалын қарастырады. Қазақстанда теледидар бұқаралық ақпарат құралдарының басқа түрлеріне қарағанда қоғамдық пікір қалыптастыруға ерекше ықпал етеді. Автор телевидениедегі саяси жаңалықтардың қоғамды демократияландыру үдерісі мен қоғамдық пікірдің қалыптасуына ықпалын талдайды. Зерттеуде демократиялық қоғамды қалыптастырудағы телевидениенің рөлі мен ықпалы нақты мысалдар негізінде айқындалады.

Түйін сөздер: Қазақстан, телевидение ықпалы, саяси жаңалықтар, демократияландыру үдерісі.

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Влияние телевидения Казахстана на политические новости

В этом исследовании рассматривается влияние телевидения Казахстана на использование политических новостей. В Казахстане телевидение играет значительную роль общественного наблюдателя с большим успехом, чем другие формы СМИ. Автор анализирует, способствуют ли телевизионные политические новости поддержке демократии, повышают ли, в этой связи, общественный интерес к процессу демократизации. В исследовании обсуждается полезность и значение роли телевидения в формировании демократического общества.

Ключевые слова: Казахстан, влияние телевидения, политические новости, процесс демократизации.

Introduction

This study examines the relationship between the use of political news on television and support for democracy since the independence of Kazakhstan in 1991. It also analyzes whether the political news and information on television in Kazakhstan leads to support for democracy and increased public interest in the democratization process. In terms of a 'transition to democracy', the dissolution of the Soviet Union was a major component of a wider global shift towards democracy at the end of the twentieth century, and this includes an independent Kazakhstan. This political transition has had tremendous impact on the country's media. Since transition from the Soviet system, individuals' constitutional rights and freedoms have been only gradually established, and there is still insufficient check on abuse of authority; therefore, the media can play a critical role. (Katsiev, 1999, p 123)). In Kazakhstan, the methods used are less tyrannical than those of the Soviets, but government control over the flow of information is strict and ownership is restricted. Most media including TV, radio stations, and newspapers are owned or controlled by members of the president's family (Wolters, 2011). However, private independent media has emerged and is a source of tension. According to the Europe and Eurasia Media Sustainability Index, mass media is the epicenter of social and political turbulence in Kazakhstan. (IREX Index, 2013). Several scholars argue that television is the most prevalent form of media in Kazakhstan, as well as the most trusted (Junisbai et. al. 2015; Nikolayenko, 2011; Laruelle, 2015).

According to Shafer (2011), in Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan, democratic journalism has become synonymous with Western-style journalism and is viewed as dedicated to extending democracy and free market economics worldwide. However, Junisbai (2011) argues that elites use the media as weapons in their political struggles, which applies to Kazakhstan as its media and democratic processes develop. The expectation of citizens about democratic power in Kazakhstan is best described by McNair (2000): 'Citizens in democracies expect access to their choice of print and broadcast media – and in these times, online and other forms of new media – for accurate and objective political information' (p. 41). In Central Asia's mass media environment, at least for the near future, Soviet-style state-controlled media permeated with pro-regime propaganda continues to define media use (Freedman, 2011. p.). Because of that, Kazakhstan's, 'print and electronic media

are desirable not necessarily because of their profitability, but because of their potential as instruments for influencing public opinion and attacking rival elites in a legitimate and seemingly neutral form' (Freedman, 2011. p.).

Starr (1999) points out: 'By the late 1990s tens of millions of dollars, pounds, marks, and francs had been spent on the development of "civil society" in Central Asia' (p. 29). That investment is part of what scholars argue is the hope of Western democracies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and human rights groups for democratic mass media systems to be stabilizing, modernizing, and nation-building tools. However, there remain significant obstacles to the development of functional and effective press systems able to maintain economic and political autonomy (Shaffer, 2016; Freedman, 2016).

Television journalists' primary goals have been the promotion of democratic journalism as a foundation of civil society, advocacy of press freedom and journalists' rights, and advancement of independent, sustainable media outlets in an environment hostile to those principles (Laruelle, 2015). The assumption here is that television -- as the most powerful medium in most of Central Asia -- should sensitize and accelerate the democratic process among the voting public. Katsiev (1999) said that 'another feature of the broadcasting scene in Central Asia since independence has been the continued access to television originating in Russia.. Since Kazakhstan has a higher percentage of ethnically Russian and Russian-speaking citizens compared with other Central Asian countries, the "Russian legacy" has been partly responsible for the more rapid development of the electronic media there [in Kazakhstan] than in the other Central Asian countries' (p. 123). He also pointed out that at the same time local authorities wish to take advantage of Russian broadcasting, the national government and relatively broad segments of society have reacted negatively to the content of Russian programming. "The political commentary on the Russian channels may be unacceptable" (Katsiev, 1999, p. 123). As Jacobowicz (2007) says, media changes in the post-Soviet Union countries are 'a consequence of the processes of liberalization and democratization on the one hand and commercialization on the other'.

Empirical research into media impacts on political challenges and democratic support is largely confined to Western democracies because of media accessibility and practitioners' ability to view the media from the perspective of ordinary citizens. (Junisbai, 2011, p. 35). Normative theory has

been used to assess journalism as a profession and describe the role of the media in democratic societies (Christians et al., 2009). This type of theory focuses on values and objectives rather than detailing specific processes of influence (Stromback, 2005). In the broader context of political communication, normative theory also has been used to better understand deliberation (Habermas, 1996) and more general day-to-day activities of citizenship (Meijer, 2001).

The analysis is based on the Baltic Surveys/ The Gallup Organization research conducted on behalf of the International Republican Institute. Field work was carried out by the Institute for Comparative Social Research- Kazakhstan. The national representative survey was conducted from February 17-28, 2011. The eligibility criteria was based on age (18 years and older). A sample of 1,527 Kazakh participants were interviewed face-to-face in their homes. Kazakhstanis were asked about their political views, media choice for political news, their opinion about impact of mass media, plus other variables related to support for democracy and political news use.

Political News Use

The main theoretical assumption of this research is that some individuals use television for exposure to political news and to engage their political interests as citizens and that this sensitivity to, and engagement with, the political process leads to supporting democracy. This argument is supported by Garnham (1992), Grossberg et al. (2006), Howley (2007), Poster (1997), and other scholars who discuss the role of media as an important discursive site for political information within the public sphere.

McQuail (1992) says this line of argument calls for measures to strengthen the media's independence from government, to ensure sufficient resources, and to provide access rights to information as a form of media accountability. The relationship between television news and support for democracy in Kazakhstan has not been empirically examined. While there is scholarly work detailing the relative strengths and weaknesses of Post-Soviet and post-communist media, the work does not specifically address Kazakhstan (Androunas, 1993; Benn, 1996; Brown, 1995; Foster, 1996; Sajo, 1995; Wilson, 1994).

In his comments about the broadcasting era in a broader world context, Uscinski (2017) found:

There was very little relationship between people's intended choices and the messaging they

encountered. Whatever change did occur usually took the form of people aligning their candidate preferences with their underlying party affiliation. External events and economic conditions mattered, of course, but they tended to make their impact regardless of messaging. This is not to say that news, advertisements, and campaigns have no effects. But those effects tend to be less direct and of lower magnitude than people assume (<http://reason.com/archives/2017/02/05/fake-news-freakout>).

Uscinski (2017) stated that issues considered important in the mass media lead to political awareness and interest, and 'they found ways to discount it or to interpret it in a manner that made it congruent with their pre-existing opinions. People hear what they want to hear' (<http://reason.com/archives/2017/02/05/fake-news-freakout>). According to data from the Europe & Eurasia Media Sustainability Index (IREX, 2016) Kazakhstan media does not reflect the whole spectrum of societal and political issues since they are managed by the government. The media law does not limit the ability of the government to create and own media resources. The majority of media, including the most popular television channel, offer multiple news sources to provide citizens with reliable, objective news. State media reflect the views of the political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest. The media provide news coverage and information about local, national, and international issues. Kazakhstan media produce their own programming content particularly in the news format. Television channels are the most independent in this regard, creating their own news and analysis programming (IREX, 2016). These attributes are key components to understanding the relationship among media use, political interest, and support for democracy particularly in Kazakhstan where television is the most prevalent form of media, as well as the most trusted (Junisbai et al., 2015; Nikolayenko, 2015; Laruelle, 2015).

The OSCE/ODIHR has observed elections in Kazakhstan since 1991. The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission for the 2011 early presidential election found that 'needed reforms for holding genuine democratic elections still have to materialize as this election revealed shortcomings similar to those in previous elections. While the election was technically well-administered, the absence of opposition candidates and of a vibrant political discourse resulted in a non-competitive environment' (<http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kazakhstan>). Independent TV channels, led by political commentators, journalists, and talkshow hosts, debated the issue and publicly supported

the opposition by calling on voters to support independent candidates or multiparty politics.

Television in Kazakhstan

As of 2015, there were 1,367 newspapers, 531 magazines, 260 online media outlets, 95 television stations, and 58 radio stations registered in Kazakhstan. The main source of political information is television, ahead of newspapers and radio. State-owned electronic media is operated by the Kazakhstan Radio and Television Corporation. Most media outlets are privately owned, but only a few are seen as independent and providing well-balanced and fair coverage of political developments. Critics from the media and NGO sectors indicate that media freedom is limited by a strong concentration of media ownership, with owners controlling the editorial policy of their outlets. Furthermore, legal provisions concerning the 'honor and dignity' of the President -- violation of which may lead to up to three years imprisonment -- reportedly contribute to an environment with generally limited freedom of expression in which journalists exercise self-censorship (<http://homepage.divms.uiowa.edu/~jones/voting/KazakhOSCE.pdf>).

As Shafer and Freedman (2009) point out: 'The existence of freedom is essential for the dissemination of news, information, and varying viewpoints and perspectives on events and ... policy to the public, Predictability of the degree of freedom is important for human rights and rights advocates as they shape strategies to soften or overcome governmental constraints...' (p. 5).

The struggle for the freedom of press in Kazakhstan started as early as 1991 with the collapse of Soviet Union. When Kazakhstan gained independence, the departing Soviet rulers handed over the television and printing presses to Nazarbayev's incoming government. The president had favorable coverage from the national television and radio because the media at that time were used to advocate for liberty, and the subsequent 'transition' to a 'normal' (i.e., democratic and capitalist) society. As Diamond (1992) noted, the transition to a normal society was based on expectations among prominent Western scholars and policymakers of the region's eventual political and economic liberalization.

Freedman (2011) pointed out: 'However, mass media research since 1991 has largely ignored the five former Soviet republics in Central Asia – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. And Uzbekistan – primarily due to the region's perceived remoteness and because it was off limits to most Western scholars during the Soviet period' (p. 7). Freedman says '... the

leaders of nascent regimes in Central Asia swiftly transformed the mass media from tools to build the Communist party to tools to build national identity and a sense of statehood' (p. 8). All media were state-owned until the late 1990s and were subject to censorship and direct political control immediately after independence. In this sense, Kazakhstan's initial independence produced a relationship between media and government that retained some authoritarian principles; 'A trusted, respected, and independent mass media system is a major indicator of a country's development of democracy and civil society' (Freedman, 2009, p. 844). The emergence of press freedom started by the general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, during "perestroika" was then accelerated in the years after independence. Newspapers were the first to develop an independent media. 'In the beginning of the 1990s, new private newspapers appeared almost every day, inspired by the spirit of freedom and criticism displayed by the rapidly changing Russian press' (Katsiev, 1999, p. 124). The first independent television stations were launched in 1990, and by the end of 1996 there were over fifty private TV stations. . These private TV stations were 'airing programs about issues of real concern to their audiences is a significant step away from standardized state programming' (Katsiev, 1999, p. 125). These independent TV stations created public affairs programs, talk shows, and political news coverage. And, according to Katsiev (1999), these stations: – *KTK* in Almaty, *Efir* in Astana, *RIKA-TV* in Aktuybinsk were quite independent as they exposed human rights violations and launched investigative journalism (Katsiev, 1999). Junisbai points out: 'Although the country's image as a liberal polity during these early years was marred by retaliation against individual media outlets for including stories considered too critical of the government, a number of those working in television and radio recall the idealism of this period'. (Junisbai, 2011, p. 43). Junisbai's case studies demonstrate that the independent TV channel *Tan* in Almaty and regional television stations like *Rika TV* in Aktobe and *Irbis* in Pavlodar, 'which before late 2001 had not aired opposition political views, suddenly became sharply critical. The stations began broadcasting programs calling for the acceleration of unrealized democratic reforms that the president had promised for a number of years' (Junisbai, 2001, p. 45). The public affairs programs and special interviews generated popular debates between politicians and audience. From

a theoretical perspective, this indicated growing interest in political news, which could lead to public support for the democratization process.

Journalists investigated the dominance of financial-industrial groups in media, corruption, and abuse of power by government. However, the successes achieved by independent broadcasters by late 1996 led the authorities to take steps that are now radically changing the television market in Kazakhstan. The chief device, which someone in the government invented, is what came to be called the 'tender on radio and television frequencies'. (Katsiev, 1999). In the beginning of 1997, Nazarbayev announced the tender competition. The tender competition requires that private stations wishing to broadcast pay the state for a license since air frequencies were now considered a national resource from which the state should legitimately gain a profit (Katsiev, 1999). The tender competition was one of the tools to regulate broadcast frequencies, control broadcasting by a committee of the Council of Ministers of Kazakhstan, and control excess demand for frequencies. According to Katsiev, this competition was "merely to close down private broadcasting" (1999, p. 128).

The heavy-handed approach of government to strictly enforce these new requirements has persisted throughout the post-independence era. Katsiev (1999) found manipulation of the media by the committee of the Council of Ministers through their authority to decide who would receive a frequency. Junisbai (2011) argues that in 1997, compared with 1993, the cost of obtaining rights to electronic media became prohibitively expensive and the majority of television and radio companies lost their licenses (Freedman, 2011). In January 1997 when the first tender was held in Almaty, various public organizations such as Internews and the Human Rights Committee criticized the conditions of competition (Katsiev, 1999). Katsiev argues that by the end of 1998 there was another pressing political reason to 'winnow the existing private TV and radio stations and to ensure that only the loyal ones remain on the air' (Katsiev, 1999, p. 131). In October 1998, the parliament insisted that a president election should take place on January 10, 1999. The government realized how important the role of television is to ensure victory in an election. As Katsiev points out: 'Even given the support of state television, the president would have no guarantee of victory, if opposition candidates managed to turn in their favor the increasingly popular private television. As it happens, not only the state television network but also the only "private"

companies with broadcast rights throughout can now be expected to support President Nazarbayev's re-election campaign' (1999, p. 131).

Research Questions

One would expect the use of political information on television station to lead to support for democracy in Kazakhstan if there is any interest in politics, particularly since earlier case studies in several Central Asian countries have shown television's potential to mobilize the masses. However, recent political developments tell a different story, particularly in instances where the president mobilized the tender competition. Private stations wishing to broadcast paid the state for a license since air frequencies were now considered a national resource from which the government can profit. The legal and political environment raises questions about how the media and democratic principles operate, particularly for a recently established country with an authoritarian past. Does the use of political news lead to support for democracy within a restricted legal and political environment? To what extent does political interest account for the relationship between television news use and democratic support? Three research questions are asked to help us understand the relationship between media and politics.

RQ1: Is there a relationship between Kazakhstani voters' use of televised political news and their interest in politics?

RQ2: Do Kazakhstani voters who access political news on television show strong support for democracy?

RQ3: Do Kazakhstanis with higher levels of political interest have greater levels of support for democracy?

Media and Politics

Answers to these questions are found in reports and monitoring data produced during presidential elections. Report data shows how media was used in the election process. Cross tabulation and regression analysis using.... From this analysis, the relationship between Kazakhstan's media and democratic processes begins to emerge. A 2015 survey commissioned by the Eurasian Council on Foreign Affairs (ECFA) and conducted by UK market research agency Ipsos MORI found that nearly eight out of ten (79%) respondents agree with the statement that 'Kazakhstan is ready to hold the Presidential Election on 26th April 2015' and only 3% 'disagreed', with the remainder (9%) stating 'don't know'. A further 82% of respondents stated that they were 'certain' or 'very likely' to vote in that election

(<http://www.eurasiancouncilforeignaffairs.eu>). Considering the ongoing intimidation of journalists and suppression of information, the question arises as to whether important political campaigns and interactive discourse about current affairs aired on TV leads to significant support for democracy.

Since 1999, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) and the Election Observation Mission (EOM) conducted qualitative and quantitative monitoring of national TV stations – state-owned and private television and newspapers, including two that are state-owned. The EOM analyzed the quantity of the time/space allocated to candidates and election officials, as well as the tone of their coverage in prime-time programs and print publications. (www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2005/12/17259_en.pdf).

On March 28, 2015, the OSCE/ODIHR EOM commenced quantitative and qualitative monitoring of seven television channels: *Kazakhstan TV* and *Khabar TV* (state-funded), *First Eurasian Channel* (mostly state-funded), *Astana TV*, *Channel 7*, *Channel 31*, and *KTK* (private); radio station *Kazakh Radio* (state-funded); three online media: www.nur.kz, www.tengrinews.kz, and www.zakon.kz; and five newspapers: *Egemen Kazakhstan*, and *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda* (state-funded), *Karavan*, *Vremya* and *Zhas Alash* (private). According to the monitoring results of broadcast media's coverage, candidates were given nominally equal coverage, but the incumbent was also extensively covered in his official capacity, thus contributing to an uneven playing field. Altogether, the coverage of the incumbent was approximately twice that of other candidates. State-funded *Kazakhstan TV* and *Khabar TV* dedicated a comparable portion of political prime time news coverage to all three candidates, with 20% and 18% to Turgun Syzdykov, 19% and 18% to Abelgazi Kusainov and 15% and 14% to Nazarbayev. However, the coverage differed in its tone; for Nazarbayev it was overwhelmingly positive, regularly featuring expressions of support from citizens, while the tone was mostly neutral for the other two candidates. In addition, both channels usually started their prime time news programs with reports about Nazarbayev in his official capacity, devoting an additional 26% and 31% of political news coverage to him in positive and neutral tones. Most monitored television channels, as well as two official state-funded newspapers, had a similar pattern in their election coverage with information on the incumbent's official activities visibly prevailing (most notably on *First Eurasian Channel* with 37%).

In addition, the CEC interpreted the Election Law in such a manner that any airtime given to a candidate outside the news was considered campaigning and should be paid for by that candidate. This, in combination with the media's perception of their role to strictly comply with the principle of equal opportunity, restricted editorial freedom and did not encourage analytical coverage or critical public debate. The lack of comprehensive campaign information considerably limited the opportunity for voters to make a well-informed choice. The Election Law could be amended to encourage media to provide more diverse and analytical campaign information to voters. The observers' final report suggested, 'Formats of election coverage and decisions on paid election-related material should depend solely on the media's own editorial policy' (Early Presidential Election, 26 April 2015, OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report). According to the OSCE, the strongest result of their monitoring of candidate-related news coverage shows that Nazarbayev was more frequently portrayed in his capacity of President than as a candidate, and was presented predominantly in a positive light. (www.osce.org/documents).

Results

This study questioned whether public consumption of television news on political affairs leads to support for democracy in the complicated context of Kazakhstan. Also examined was political interest; whether it is a moderating indicator of television news use and support for democracy. On the question of political news use, 75% of respondents indicated that they use the media, especially television, to get news about politics and government. Overall, 50.5% said they use the media for political information every day, while 24.9% use a medium of choice a few times a week.

Cross-tabs results showed that respondents are interested in politics, discuss politics, and hold strong beliefs about the impact of their votes on their leaders. With all key indicators of political interest entered in the model, 86% of respondents said they were interested in what was going on during the democratization process.

In order to further examine the relationship between media and politics, regression analyses were performed using data from the OSCE/ODIHR EOM in 2015 stepwise regression analysis was run to test the relationship between voters' use of television for political news and their interest in politics (RQ1). The regression showed that the more Kazakhstanis get political news from television, the more they are

interested in politics. This is consistent with other research. The 'television news use' values in that model produced a strong relationship. The stepwise model was also used to examine the relationship between voters' access to coverage of political news on television and their support for democracy. The survey results indicated that television news use was not a strong predictor of voters' support for democracy.

Analysis of the relationship between level of political interest and the level of democratic support found a positive relationship. This indicates that overall political interest is perhaps more powerful than media attention. This important correlation indicates the impact of political interest as a moderating variable between television news and politics.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to determine whether the use of political information on television in Kazakhstan leads to support for democracy or whether prior public interest in politics is a moderating variable to their democracy, and to answer three research questions.

Public opinion survey data show considerable use of television for political information by Kazakhstani, but no direct influence on their support for democracy. Greater use of television to get political news was strongly related to measures of political interest; this is also a moderating factor between television news use and increased public support for democracy.

Respondents also answered the question of how much, in their opinion, the audience trusts the mass media. More than 60% of media workers are absolutely sure that readers and viewers trust mass media; approximately 20% believe that the audience generally trust mass-media but not always; and the other 20% are sure that a lack of trust in journalists has existed for a long time.

OSCE/ODIHR EOM observers reported that sensitization of the public towards democracy by the government and the media was inadequate. They asserted that the state used the ignorance of voters to conduct referenda and to change laws to make them less democratic. Data showed that greater use of television by respondents to get political news led to higher interest in politics. The use of television by voters promoted individual interest in public affairs, and their keenness contributed to the political discourse and the democratization process.

Despite this considerable use of television for political news, there was no showing of

direct influence of television news use on support for democracy. In fact, the descriptive findings show that radio in Kazakhstan contributes to public debate but with less trust than state-owned television. The use of television was not a strong predictor of democratic support, and this could be explained by the negative influence generated by questions of trust. 'The result has been to establish uncontested control by the governing elite over the most effective media that could have any influence in the upcoming presidential election. There is now no effective national forum for a political opposition.... While the world "independent" may still be used with regard to nongovernmental media, in fact the dependence of all the major media on the local and central authorities has become quite obvious' (Katsiev, 1999, p. XX). The authors concluded that existing media laws and state restrictions have hampered the independence of the news media in Central Asia and have had a profound effect on citizen's ability to make rational decisions in support of democratic governance. Kazakhstan appears to be following this trend.

On the question of political interest, more than one-third of voters understand politics and say they have the ability to participate in democracy and influence political behavior. The findings support the media use hypothesis that the higher the level of political interest, the greater the level of democratic support. Since the independent media generally report and expose graft and unprofessional conduct in public service as well as in the executive and legislative branches of government, voters trusted Nazarbayev, who apparently remains above media criticism. The criticism of his administration and other politicians makes voters rally behind the president, but not the independent adversarial press.

As indicated in the previous section on television news use, certain freedoms of speech and of the press are curtailed by the president. 'Democratic reforms are essential for society to function under normal political and economic conditions. Society must be able to accumulate sufficiently large financial capital to support private mass media that will not be in the hands merely of the governing elite. The state must establish and defend laws guaranteeing a free press and other mass media, in line with international norms' (Katsiev, 1999, p. XX). Based on these findings and the case studies on Kazakhstan's political leadership, one can conclude that voters are not adequately informed about democratic principles and values by some prominent national television broadcasters and state-sponsored television. This may explain why the majority did

not vote in favor of basic democratic values during the referenda on multiparty democracy despite their strong democratic support.

Conclusion

The more Kazakhstan voters access news coverage of political information on private television accounting for their interest in politics, the higher their support for democracy. They also see democracy as a political activity through which they fulfill an obligation of answering the president's call to support his ideology and regime legitimacy. As a result, the president periodically gets away with changing his political ideologies in referenda despite television news coverage, which oppose such unconstitutional political maneuvers. Without addressing presidential hegemony through which the government imposes despotic policies that undermine multiparty democracy, stifle political contestation, suppress a free press, and curtail political mass mobilization on private television, a reversal to full autocracy is inevitable. The limitations of this study are primarily grounded in some of the unanswered questions that emerge

from these findings. It remains unclear whether Kazakhstani voters truly recognize presidential hegemony in undermining the democratization process; this matter needs further exploration. Could there be other reasons that explain why the direct influence of television to support democracy is not more strongly supported by the general public? As an ideological tool, could the national television also build support for anti-democratic sentiments of those in power? Are there some underlying cultural institutions that are more important than democracy?

What we learn from this endeavor is just a first step toward understanding television use of political information disseminated through news and public affairs programs for the process of democratization in this part of the transitioning world. The implications from this study add considerably to what we know about media and politics in a developing third world country like Kazakhstan: that if civil society gets citizens interested about politics, television can play a major role at fostering public debate and sensitizing society through their news and public affairs programs to mobilize citizens to support democracy.

Electronic resources

- www.osce.org/documents/
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