Exploring the impact of online political activism on political processes in Kazakhstan: the Zhanaozen uprising

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A thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Master of International Communication
Unitec Institute of Technology, New Zealand
Declaration

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This Thesis entitled “Exploring the impact of online political activism on political processes in Kazakhstan: the Zhanaozen uprising” is submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of Master of International Communication

CANDIDATE’S DECLARATION
I confirm that:
• This Thesis represents my own work;
• Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.
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Candidate Signature: Date: 6 March 2016

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Abstract

In recent years social media attracted a lot of scholarly attention but exploring social media in a particular geographical locations was rather slow. The impact of social media on political, social and economic processes in Kazakhstan has not been explored yet. This thesis presents empirical findings of a research examining the use of social networking sites amongst Kazakhstanis during the uprising in the rich-oil town of Zhanaozen on 16 December 2011. It is guided by the main research question that looks at “What impact does online political participation have on political processes in Kazakhstan?”

This research provides a preliminary and exploratory analysis of how two blogging platforms: Yvision and LiveJournal serve as a foundation for the political and socially involved Kazakhstanis, and how in turn, this could have an effect on the political process in the post-soviet authoritarian state of Kazakhstan.

This research applied a two-stage content analysis of messages posted on the blogging platforms (Yvision and LiveJournal) and in the two national newspapers Kazakhstanskaya Pravda and Golos Respubliki and in its online version – Respublika portal. In both instances, the period of six months was covered: from 16 December of 2011 when the uprising took place until May of 2012 when the first trials of the protesters began. Such a specific timeframe was chosen as this research focuses on the representation of the uprising both in the traditional forms of media as well as online and the consequences it had on political participation in Kazakhstan. Data is collected via non-participatory technique with a non-random sample selection process that allows focusing on the events of 2011 in Zhanaozen.

Research findings demonstrated in the light of the uprising, online political activism does have an impact on political participation in Kazakhstan. Although Kazakhstanis
are generally quite apolitical, such a tragic event served as a catalyst in raising political awareness and online media provided a platform for exploring this.

However, not only did the authoritarian government prevented Kazakhstanis from being more politically involved by applying “just-in-time” censorship techniques, the existing digital gap prevented the majority of Kazakhstani to go online and participate in the online debate. Findings have also indicated that the crisis in Zhanaozen highlighted the long-standing problems with ethnic return migration as well as national and ethnic identity amongst Kazakhs.

This thesis contributes to existing research on how political activism online can provide support for political activism online and impact the governing bodies. It also establishes a foundation for future studies on Kazakhstan and impact social media and activism has on it.
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Chapter I: Overview

1.1 Introduction

Historically, politicians and social movement activists relied heavily on traditional forms of mass media to deliver the messages to the audience. The new Internet era has enabled independent media to communicate with the audience without having neither commercial nor political interest. This allowed some scholars, such as Grossman, to argue that the Internet could launch a new era of democracy (Cottle & Lester, 2011). In addition, in the last decade, social media made our communication more simultaneous, delivering messages directly to those involved from the places where certain events happen (Shirky, 2011).

Following the 2004 Ukrainian *Orange Revolution*, the 2009 Iranian *Green Movement*, and the uprisings of the *Arab Spring*, a number of academics, journalists and bloggers analysed the potential impact of ICTs used as a tool to empower civil societies in authoritarian regimes (Lange, 2014). In Ukraine, for example, during the days of the *Orange Revolution*, when television was censored by the officials, the Internet served as a tool to find the answers to basic questions regarding Ukrainian opposition’s next moves (Kyj, 2006). It was evident that the Ukrainian pro-democracy forces made a better use of technological advancements in comparison to the pro-governmental forces, and consequently benefited from that (Goldstein, 2007).

In 2009 the world again had the opportunity to witness the potential of ICTs to facilitate the civil resistance movements opposing authoritarianism, this time in Iran. Lange (2014) stated that the ICTs played a significant role in building the initial momentum of the *Green Movement* in Iran, which was later referred to as a *Twitter Revolution*, and was used to engage the international community in the uprising (ibid).

Kazakhstan’s 2011 events in Zhanaozen provide us with a complex case study that involved the use of online social media and became the stimulus for this thesis, which sought to explore their potential impact on political processes in Kazakhstan. Would
Kazakhstan’s Zhanaozen events and the engagement of bloggers provide the impetus for political changes in the country?

In order to understand the complexity of these events, we need to look at the context they took place in. The following section provides a brief contextual setting for this research, followed by a more detailed account in Chapter II.

1.2 Background context

The ongoing imbalance in the distribution of wealth in Kazakhstan over the past two decades and government’s inability to solve the existing problems intensified discussion around the socio-economic issues, with regards to immigration of numerous returnees in particular. To an ordinary Kazakhstani, the returnees posed a threat, a competition in the labour market. Furthermore, the integration of returnees in the western part of the country has turned out to be exceptionally problematic (Shmitz & Wolters, 2012). This contributed to the growing anger among the established population of West Kazakhstan already displeased to see oil revenue flowing out of the region, rather than raising the standards of living and foreign nationals being paid considerably more than the locals (Shmitz & Wolters, 2012). Following government’s inability to address and resolve these issues, such dissatisfaction led to the lengthy strike of the oil workers (Idrissov, 2012). It was reported that as many as 12,000 oil workers participated in the movement, representing a novelty in the post-independence history of Kazakhstan (Rysaliev, 2011). The stoppage in the oil production began in early 2011 at a facility run jointly by the Kazakhstani state-owned KazMunaiGaz and the Chinese CNPC (China National Petroleum Corporation), and spread over the course of a couple of months to a Kazakhstani-Italian joint venture and a KazMunaiGaz subsidiary. The strikers’ demands were for equal pay with the staff of other production companies and generally better paid foreign workers, improved working conditions and the recognition of independent trade unions (Rysaliev, 2011).
The management of the affected companies rejected demands for higher wages with the argument that pay was already high compared with the national average, and responded with mass dismissals and other punitive measures. Management also took legal action against the activists; furthermore, the district court ruled the strikes illegal. Representatives of the independent trade unions and political activists were arrested, and some sentenced to long prison terms (Shmitz & Wolters, 2012).

Neither these measures, nor the intimidation of the activists, nor attempts to prevent the protests from spreading by shutting down the regional mobile phone network succeeded in ending the strikes (Sharip, 2011). Instead, the employer’s intransigence and the open bias of the state led growing numbers to join the strike over the course of summer of 2011 and the labour dispute assumed an increasingly political character. More than a thousand striking oil workers resigned their membership of President Nazarbayev’s governing NurOtan party and joined an opposition alliance. Local authorities did everything they could to prevent information about events in Mangistau from trickling out unfiltered. Their actions were guided by worry that skeptical indifference of the Kazakhstani public toward the demands of the striking oil workers could flip over into sympathy (Shmitz & Wolters, 2012).

Until 16 December 2011, the government managed to control the information that was coming out of Mangistau before it reached the rest of the country. However, on 16 December 2011 - during the Independence Day celebrations, a group of oil workers were shot down by the police in the town of Zhanaozen, and the evidence of such crime was recoded, uploaded to YouTube and went viral not only in Kazakhstan but also abroad. Unable to filter information any longer, Kazakhstani officials shut down all forms of communication with Zhanaozen, arrested a number of Nazarbayev’s political opponents and eventually sent a group of pro-government bloggers to the western town to cover the events from what was considered an independent point of view. Such measures signified the importance of the role Information and Communication Technology (ICT) started to play in Kazakhstan, highlighting inability of the authoritarian government to control the online space any longer, just like in the cases with Ukraine, Russia and the countries of the Arab Spring movement.
1.2 Aims and Objectives

This research aims to explore the role of online social media and activism on political processes and participation in Kazakhstan. In the centre of this research are two blogging platforms - Yvision and LiveJournal. The consideration of the print media also took place as it provided a context for analysis of the social media in Kazakhstan. This research looks at the potential role of online social media as a catalyst for political transformation in Kazakhstan. It also looks at how the government of Kazakhstan has been using cyberspace to control the political dissent.

The data has been drawn from an event that took place in the town of Zhanaozen in Kazakhstan in 2011, which sparked an increased online activity, by the Kazakhstani bloggers and political activists online. Due to the large engagement of the civilians in the Zhanaozen events, the Kazakhstani officials felt obliged to take the country’s top bloggers to the town itself in the hope of getting some positive feedback. As a result, many of them backed the government’s assertions – that there were not hundreds of dead and detained and that the town had plenty of food and medical provision, which contradicted the statements provided by the Kazakhstani opposition (Ranson, 2012). This event signified both the importance of online community to the government, and the increase in government’s online engagement; in addition, it also highlighted the growth of social activism among Kazakhstanis. By looking at the situation in Zhanaozen and the interactions between the government and its citizens, this research provides an overview of online activism and its impact on political processes in Kazakhstan.

1.3 Research Question

The main question of this research seeks to identify “What impact did the events in Zhanaozen have on political activism in Kazakhstan?” Here the reference is made to the mentioned channels of social media such as Yvision and LiveJournal and to the print media.
The following sub-questions were also used to guide the research:

- SQ1: How was online social media used by political activists in Kazakhstan?
- SQ2: How did the government respond to the uprising in Zhanaozen and engage with the bloggers?

1.4 Rationale and Purpose

I began my Masters degree at Unitec in the year 2011. That was the year when events of the Arab Spring movement were unfolding and started to move across to other authoritarian nations. However, I could never imagine that anything similar could take place in Kazakhstan – an authoritarian state, driven by the same President since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

That same year I learnt that some form of the protest movement was taking place in the western part of the country. And although initially the information was neither confirmed nor denied by the Kazakhstani officials, the oppositional outlets, such as the Golos Respubliki newspaper, were reporting on further socio-economic inequality that contributed to the birth protest movements in Mangistau - oil-rich area of Kazakhstan. I also noted that although my family tends to follow the current affairs in Kazakhstan, they seemed to be unaware of what was happening in Mangistau. This, again, confirmed the existing levels of censorship in the country.

I began to wonder what if, only if, something similar to the Arab Spring or the Orange Revolution were to take place in Kazakhstan? How would the current government and Nazarbayev himself react to that? What if traditionally de-politicised citizens decide to take the conversation about politics and socio-economic situation in the country from their kitchens to the streets? Will they be able to protest the current regime like they did in 1989? Further literature review confirmed that no research on Kazakhstan was available and that indicated a possible research opportunity for me.

As the crisis in the Mangistau region was deepening, I discussed my thoughts and ideas with my supervisors, and decided it will be a good idea to write about the current
political situation in Kazakhstan and whether or not, the Kazakhstani Orange Revolution is possible. Little did I know that a few months later, what started as a purely economic conflict between the oil workers and the oil company will lead to the uprising in Zhanaozen, resulting in the worst conflict in Kazakhstan’s post-Soviet history. And although within the country, the scale of what occurred in Zhanaozen was unknown for at least two days, “that” video uploaded by Zhanaozen’s locals to YouTube demonstrated to the rest of the world how police, and essentially the state, deals with the opponents of the current regime. The state subsequently demonstrated the importance of social media and of its content by removing the video and cutting Zhanaozen off from the rest of the country and the world.

Although it has almost been four years since the tragedy in Zhanaozen, very little work has been done focusing on the role social media played on political processes in Kazakhstan during the uprising. I believe this research has the potential value for the rest of the Central Asian states given the cultural, political, social and historical similarities.

1.5 Thesis Outline

This thesis contains seven chapters including the Introduction and the Conclusion. This chapter - Chapter One, provides an overview about the research itself, including the importance of this research, main research question with sub-questions, rationale and purpose and well as outlines the organisation of this thesis.

Chapter Two starts off with a brief introduction of Kazakhstan, which is then followed by Kazakhstan’s ethnic make-up and Kazakhstan’s media profile, and concludes with the situation with the Internet and censorship in Kazakhstan.

Chapter Three looks at the literature available at the time of this research with the focus on social media and its effects on political participation. This chapter also presents the main concepts including social media, online activism, authoritarian state, digital surveillance, digital censorship and digital propaganda.
Chapter Four discusses the research design and methodology. This chapter justifies the content analysis approach as well as the framing theory and how both were applied. It also describes the data collection methods, the process of data analysis as well as ethical and privacy considerations when conducting research on social media.

Chapter Five presents empirical findings from a non-participant point of view of the two selected blogging websites: *Yvision* and *LiveJournal* and two national newspapers: *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda* and *Golos Respubliki*. This chapter is organised around the following sub-themes which were identified during the *framing* process: how the conflicts in Zhanaozen was framed, who the voices of the events were, what the story subjects of the news reports and blogs were, the sources which were used and the languages the stories were written in. The findings chapter is largely descriptive due to the employment of the “quoting extensively” technique which is used to provide the readers with an opportunity to evaluate and interpret the results independently (Anderson, 1999, p. 55).

Chapter Six presents the discussions of the research findings, which have been organized under the following themes: national identity, online social media in an authoritarian context and digital divide and the role it played in covering events in Zhanaozen. The key findings are interpreted and the chapter is concluded with an answer to the main research question *what impact online political activism has on political processes in Kazakhstan*.

Chapter Seven concludes this thesis with the summary of the main points as well as with the suggestions for research opportunities in future.
Chapter II: Background

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an introduction to the historical and political background of Kazakhstan – a country profile, which is aimed to assist the reader with placing the country on the map. It is then followed by the Kazakhstan’s ethnic make-up. Although there are two predominant ethnic groups in Kazakhstan: Kazakhs and Russians, the formation of the nation during the Soviet times still has a big impact on politics, culture and society nowadays. More importantly, the fact that the population of Zhanaozen is 99,99 per cent ethnic Kazakhs, had also had an impact on how the events unfolded and were covered by the media. The chapter concludes with the information on the media profile of Kazakhstan, the Internet and media censorship in the country and the current state of social networking.

Figure 1 Map of Kazakhstan

2.1 Country Profile

Kazakhstan is a former Soviet Union republic. It declared its independence from the Soviet Union on the 16th of December of 1991, and was the last republic to do so. Its former Soviet leader – Nursultan Nazarbayev, became Kazakhstan’s first President, a position he still retains today.
With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, many were hoping the era of democracy would begin in the Central Asia region ("A Sobering Reality: Fundamental Freedoms in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan Twenty years after the Soviet Collapse," 2012). In reality, however, a number of post-Soviet societies, including Kazakhstan, have built façade democracies, which either ‘manifest the forms of democracy but the substance is deficient’ or ‘the substance is absent and the forms are also either absent or distorted’ (Gill, 2001, p. 48). As a result, according to the Economist’s Democracy Index, Kazakhstan is viewed as an authoritarian state, where the President plays the role of ‘the highest state office, responsible for naming the government and other republic officials’ (Kekic, 2007).

Despite the public move towards constitutional reform and greater democratisation, Kazakhstan is dominated by a formal political elite and a highly centralised power base comprising the Administration of the President of Kazakhstan and key stake-holders therein: the State Secretary, Head of Administration and Security Council Secretary (Knox, 2008). Cummings (2003) argued that the elite system is a compelling factor behind the emergence and maintenance of authoritarianism in Kazakhstan. Amendments to the 1993 and 1997 Kazakhstani Constitutions helped to increase the power of the President (Cummings, 2003). In 2010, President Nazarbayev was declared Kazakhstan’s Leader of the Nation – position which allows him to shape and influence the politics after his retirement and guarantees him the immunity from prosecution (Dave, 2011). Such position grants Nazarbayev a founding-figure status just like in the case of Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew and Turkey’s Mustafa Kemal (Rahmetov, 2012). Nazarbayev also controls the bicameral Parliament as he nominates the candidates for both Chambers: the Mazhilis1 and the Senate2. The President also plays an important role in the juridical sphere as the current

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1 *Mazhilis* – is the lower house of the bicameral Parliament of Kazakhstan. There are 77 seats, 67 in single seat constituencies, and 10 by proportional representation. Members of Parliament are elected to five year terms.

2 *Senate* – is the upper house of the bicameral Parliament of Kazakhstan. The Senate is composed of elected members – two from each region, the city of republican importance (Almaty) and the capital of the Republic at joint sessions of the members of all representative bodies of respective regions, city of the republican importance and the capital city of Kazakhstan.
Constitution allows him to appoint the judges, and as the judges’ terms are not specified in the Constitution, they serve at the President’s will. Such influence extends to media as well. Currently, Nazarbayev’s circle controls the majority of newspapers and television stations, including the state television company *Khabar* (Cummings, 2003). Media has been used as a propaganda tool by politicians and for politicians in Kazakhstan since the Soviet era. In other words, there is a continuum in the country’s tradition of media control that did not end with the dissolution of the Soviet regime.

Until recently, some analysts suggested that there were three main reasons for the strong constant public support of Nazarbayev’s policies (Thu, 2005). Nazarbayev is described as a reform and market-oriented leader (ibid). Despite his family being accused of corruption, the President’s economic reforms based on the country’s vast natural resources, helped improve the standard of living of ordinary Kazakhstanis (ibid).

First, unlike other Soviet states, Kazakhstan has experienced an economic growth rate of eight per cent in the period of 2002-2007 (CIA, 2014). Since the move to a market economy, Kazakhstan moved from a relatively developed ‘mixed’ economy to one that is based on the export of primary goods, providing oil, gas and minerals for western countries and China. Reports estimate that oil and gas account for more than 80 per cent of Kazakhstan’s GDP. This compares with about 20 per cent in 1990. Alongside this, the privatisation of land and the breakup of collective farms saw the displacement and impoverishment of hundreds of thousands of land-labourers who migrated to towns in search of work (SocialismToday, 2014). Nazarbayev’s policies have also contributed to the new waves of migration to Kazakhstan from the former Soviet states, China and Mongolia, making it one of the most diverse societies among the former Soviet Union states.

Secondly, the government realised the importance of diversity and has proven effective in ethnic and religious conflicts (ibid).
Thirdly, according to the 1992 report, “Alma-Ata Declaration of Promoting Independent and Pluralistic Media” prepared by the United Nations, Kazakhstan was among the UNESCO member states to formally declare their commitment to take practical steps to promote free, independent, and pluralistic media. Among these was a commitment “to encourage the development of journalistically independent public service broadcasting in place of existing state-controlled broadcasting structures, and to promote the development of community radio” (UNESCO, 1995, para 4).

Lastly, after holding the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) chairmanship in 2010, the international community has noticed Kazakhstan’s desire to improve its political situation with regards to the political system and issues with transparency and democracy. However, the events of 2011 in Zhanaozen, jeopardised all the efforts made by the government and the President himself to satisfy both the citizens and the international community.

The oil fields of western Kazakhstan, where the 2011 strike wave erupted, are the most significant source of the Kazakhstani elite’s wealth, and an important source of supplies for the international oil market. Kazakhstan is the second-largest oil producer after Russia among former Soviet countries: its output is nearly twice that of Azerbaijan’s and not much less than Norway’s. The state oil company KazMunaiGaz operates the largest oilfield, Tengiz, together with the American and Russian companies – Chevron, ExxonMobil and LukOil. The huge Kashagan field, offshore in the North Caspian sea, is being developed jointly by KazMunaiGaz and big European and American companies. Chinese oil corporations play a significant part in onshore projects, and their influence has grown since and oil pipeline to China was completed in 2006.

Oil is Kazakhstan’s largest source of export revenues and the most significant contributor to its national economy. Since prices started rising in the early 2000s, the wealth of the Kazakhstani elite has swelled and the new capital, Astana, has filled up with skyscrapers and luxurious cars. Across the country, average living standards have risen. But Mangistau, always a poor region with little economic activity outside the oil
sector, has stayed poor. Although Mangistau produces more oil than any other Kazakhstani region, in 2008 UN researchers estimated that it had more people living below the poverty line than any other region, and that in terms of the UN development indicators had only reached Kazakhstan’s national average. Anger at this social injustice has certainly been one of the main causes of rising militancy in the Mangistau oilfields.

2.3 Kazakhstan’s ethnic make-up

Kazakhstan is a Muslim-majority secular state with a significant Slavic Orthodox Christian minority. Kazakhs claim a common ethno-genesis with other Turkic-speaking people of Central Asia, including Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Azeri, and Turkish ethnic groups (Beacháin & Kevlihan, 2011).

Kazakhstan has 125 national and ethnic minorities. According to the latest results of the National Population Census of the Republic of Kazakhstan held in 2009, 63.1 per cent of the population was Kazakh, 23.7 per cent was Russian, and some 10 per cent comprised Germans, Tatars, Ukrainians, Uzbeks, and Uighurs. The remaining 3 per cent include members of dozens of other nationalities. In Kazakhstan, the majority group’s (Kazakhs) share of the total population is the lowest of all post-communist states (with the exception of Latvia) (Melich & Adilbayeva, 2013). The state’s self-definition as multi-ethnic and multi-denominational has gone some way to shaping national identity, but it glossed over the persistent belief among non-Kazakhs that ethnic Kazakhs enjoy undue advantages. The potential for this to be a conflict trigger is low for now, but the authorities need be pro-active. The Russian-speaking community feels sidelined. Language policies, including the practice of replacing Russian place names with Kazakh ones, and the perception that government and business are largely closed to non-Kazakhs, cause offence. Well-connected members of other minorities also say ethnicity is a defining factor in business ("Stress Tests for Kazakhstan," 2015).
Although from the outside, Kazakhstan appears to be very tolerant towards other ethnicities, every now and then ethnic tensions, which government decides to turn the blind eye on, do occur. For example, authorities denied any ethnic motives in the unrest in the village of Molovodnoe, in the southern Kazakhstan that took place on 18 of March, 2007. A huge crown marched through the village, burning cars and setting building alight. At least three people were killed in the clashes between the local Chechens and Kazakhs ("The Examples of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan: Political extremism, terrorism, and media in Central Asia," 2008).

Preceding this clash, there had been riots in the Almaty region of Kazatkom involving members of the same ethnic communities. According to some estimates in the international media, the conflict between Chechens and Kazakhs highlighted underlying tension among ethnic groups in the country – tensions the government was trying to ignore. However, security officials insisted that “hooliganism” was the cause incident in Molovodnoe. A few opposition deputies in the Parliament pointed to other causes such as “utter poverty” of the locals and corruption ("The Examples of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan: Political extremism, terrorism, and media in Central Asia," 2008).

2.4 Kazakhstan’s media profile

The role of the mass media has never been underestimated in the Soviet Union. Citizens were able to receive at least one all-national television channel, two republican channels, and very often one local (provincial) television channel. Radio sets were available in any Soviet household including the most remote parts of the country. Newspapers, newsletters, bulletins, and magazines were published in unlimited quantities and editions (Krasnoboka, 2002). After declaring its independence, Kazakhstan inherited this tradition and to this day, media is represented greatly in the society.

There are over 2500 newspapers and magazines published regularly in Kazakhstan. Private mass media make up nearly 80 per cent of all standing media. The public sector
in the information sphere is represented mainly by the state mass media. In 2012, there were also 238 representatives of online mass media, as well as 100 television and radio stations (eGov, 2012). In 2010, the government had launched a number of new state channels, which include *Balapan* – a Kazakh-language children’s channel; a cultural and educational channel *Madeniet*, which broadcasts in Kazakh 80 per cent of its air time; *Bilim Arnasy* – the scientific-educational channel, and in June of 2012, President Nazarbayev established *24KZ*, which operates in Kazakh 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is worth noting that television is the most popular platform consumption to-date as well as the most heavily censored type of media (Emrich, Plakhina, & Tsyrenzhapova, 2013).

The Kazakhstan’s government had also recognised the importance of online presence of traditional media. As a result, the state-run television station *Khabar*, acts as a pioneer in establishing its existence online: in addition to its own website, *Khabar* is an active social media user on the following platforms: *Vkontakte*, *Facebook*, and *Twitter*. Although *Khabar* is not present on *Yvision* – Kazakhstan’s popular blogging platform, its staff members maintain private accounts there and post regularly (Emrich, Plakhina & Tryrenzhapova, 2013).

In 2007, Kazakhstan ranked 167th out of 196 countries in the *Freedom of the Press World Ranking*, which was one position lower than in 2006 (Tussupova, 2010). Freedom House also included Kazakhstan in the group of ten “*Not Free*” countries in the Central Asian and Eastern European Regions. In addition, Diana Okremova, the President of a non-governmental organisation based in Astana, claims that the independent national print media does not exist in Kazakhstan, however, there are examples of independent print publications at the regional level (North Kazakhstan Legal Media Centre, 2012).

According to Kassymbekova (2012), in Kazakhstan independent journalists have a different life to those who live in democratic states. As soon as Kazakhstan gained independence in 1991, it too wanted to attract more foreign investors. As a result, double standards were put in place, when communicating with the outside world,
issues of human and civil rights were highlighted, however, the message addressed within the country was very different.

Like in other Soviet counterparts, in Kazakhstan political journalism finds itself under the serious and ever closer attention (which rapidly transforms into control) of the state and influential political – financial groups. In different ways, journalists are pressed to limit their criticism and flow of investigation. Levels of punishment vary from purely economic pressure to state organs’ control (withdrawal of license, police, health and epidemic departments’ inspections and sanctions) and legal and/or criminal suits against journalists (Krasnoboka, 2002).

Currently, journalists are provided with criminal liability for insult and defamation. This tool has been widely used by authorities to prosecute the media spreading information containing criticism of the government (Open Dialogue Foundation, 2012). Consequently, two TV stations: Tan and Irbis which opposed the current regime, were shut down, and the newspapers covering the issues of human and civil rights were closed as well. The founder of the Tan station subsequently fled the country in 2008.

The Golos Respubliki (Respublika) newspaper has also criticised the government and President’s family. Its editorial team was threatened regularly (examples of harassment included a beheaded dog which was hung outside its office, and the burning down of newspaper’s office in 2011) (Ostrovsky, 2011). In 2009 the newspaper was forced to shut down by its creditor, the state-run BTA Bank. However, the Respublika newspaper re-opened under the new name Golos Respubliki. Its staff was then under pressure from the central government due to the coverage of the events in Zhanaozen. Journalists have been questioned by the security services of Kazakhstan and there was an attempt to connect the newspapers’ journalists to the civil disturbance cases that took place in Zhanaozen. In November of 2012, the public prosecution office of Almaty has demanded from Google, Facebook, Twitter, and a Russian blogging platform LiveJournal to stop publishing content from opposition media, including Golos Respubliki newspaper, which was declared extremist during the trials of the country’s opposition leader – Vladimir Kozlov (Degeler, 2012). In 2013, the newspaper was shut down once and for all, only remaining electronically.
**Golos Respubiki** was not the only newspaper suffered in the autocratic regime. In late 2011, the editor-in-chief of another opposition-supporting newspaper *Vzglyad* was arrested on the charges of calling to violently overthrow the constitutional system of the country by publishing the fliers with the image of Nazarbayev and the slogan “Take him to the dump!” The arrest was coupled with a seizure of all the equipment and documentation from the newspaper office. Interestingly, those fliers were collected from a car stopped on the streets of Almaty two years prior to the arrest. However, Vinyavsky was freed later, two months before the voting of the EU Parliament on the resolution regarding the human rights situation in Kazakhstan.

In 2009, Ramzan Yesergepov, editor-in-chief of the *Alma-Ata Info* was sentenced to three years’ imprisonment for writing an article “Who controls our country: the president of the KNB?” In addition to Yesengepov, those who supplied him with the information required to publish an article were also subjected to criminal prosecution and sent to prison ranging from two-year suspended sentence to eight years’ imprisonment. In late 2012, Yesergepov was released, however, was not able to engage in any journalistic activities until the end of 2014.

In 2011, the Almaty court ruled in favour of the wife of the head of the Financial Police of the Republic of Kazakhstan Saltanat Akhanova, regarding a defamation claim against Gulzhan Yergaliyeva and the news site *Guljan.org*. For moral damages allegedly caused by the publications on the website, she demanded compensation of 2 billion 640 million 296 thousand 400 tenge (about 14 million euros). The court ordered the newspaper to pay the equivalent of 26,336 euros. This led to the closure of the new site.

In December of 2011, the Almaty District Court satisfied the claim of a member of the Parliament Romin Madinov against the newspaper *Public Position* which released a series of revelatory articles about the activities of the politician. The author and the

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3 *National Security Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan (NSC)* – is intelligence agency in Kazakhstan. It was founded on 13 July 1992.
editor was required to pay the compensation of $5 million tenge (about 26,820 euros). However, the politician, unsatisfied with the amount of compensation, filed an appeal and requested an increased in the amount of compensation to 500 million tenge (about 2.6 million euros).

On the 27th of April, 2012, a hearing on the claim of Tilekkabyl Imashev, the head of the domestic policy of the Western Kazakhstan Province against Lukpan Akhmedyarov, the correspondent of the Uralskaya Nedelya newspaper. The basis for the claim was an article about the corrupt actions of official ‘Brother, relatives, influential pals’. The size of the claim was 5 million tenge (about 26,000 euros).

In late 2013, Kunabek Botabetov, the editor-in-chief of the Adilet newspaper published a series of publications on the corrupt actions committed by the authorities. For that he was arrested and later sentenced to one and a half years’ imprisonment and a fine of 300,000 tenge (around 1630 euros).

Not only do the newspapers get attacked by those supporting the government, the independent journalists do too. This is despite the fact that the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan contains an article, providing penalties for obstructing journalist’s professional activity. In reality, the protection of journalists does not exist. Despite a large number of attacks on journalists and editors of the media, since 1997 no criminal case has been instituted under this article. According to the statistics provided by the Open Dialogue Foundation (2012), there were 13 attacks on journalists recorded between 2010 and 2012. One of them is the attack on Daniyar Moldashev - the former editor of the Golos Respubliki newspaper on the 30th of March, 2011. This resulted in Moldashev resigning from the post and eventually leaving the country.

Although there are two newspapers in Zhanaozen itself, the authors of the Open Dialogue Foundation (2012) report suggest that print media and television stations in Zhanaozen and Aktau (big city in the same province as Zhanaozen) are not willing to cover topics that criticise the government. In fact, most of the correspondents of
government-affiliated national media stress their loyalty to the present authorities and consider reporting detailed information about the events in Zhanaozen unreasonable as it could lead to the spread of social tension. Public debate is also limited by the existing Article 164 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan – “inciting of social hatred”, which includes any message posted either online or in newspapers containing criticism of the authorities (Open Dialogue Foundation, 2012).

Under such conditions, journalists are left two options: either to accept the rules of a political game and introduce self-censorship or try to find other ways to organise their job and interactions with the public. The arrival and spread of Internet produced a hope that this new, uncensored medium would become a shelter for unbiased and objective journalism (Krasnoboka, 2002).

Within generally repressive environment, however, unexpected bouts of criticism have punctuated Kazakhstan’s normally government-supporting media coverage. Surprisingly, politically sensitive topics have at times been actively discussed and debated in the non-governmental press and on national television. Such a discussion occurred in 2007 in connection with a scandal involving Rakhat Aliyev, then son-in-law to Nazarbayev and one the richest people in Kazakhstan (Omarova, 2007). In late May 2007, the Astana television station devoted two evening prime-time hours to the former Chair of Nurbank, a major Kazakhstani bank jointly owned by Aliyev and the president’s oldest daughter and his now-former wife, Dariga Nazarbayeva. The ex-bank official alleged that Aliyev had kidnapped and tortured him and two others as part of a business-related conflict. That same night, Commercial Television of Kazakhstan (KT), owned by Aliyev and his then-wife, Nazarbayeva, was taken off the air. The Aliyev-owned paper Karavan was also shut down. In response, the International Press Institute issued a statement condemning Karavan’s temporary closure, calling it government censorship of the independent press. This was ironic, given that prior to these events, Karavan was closely associated with Nazarbayev’s ruling coalition.
In important ways, the 2007 exposure of Aliyev challenged media conventions in Kazakhstan. In the past, those criticising the president’s family members in print had been hit with libel suits and, predictably, lost. In this instance, however, outrageous and potentially slanderous claims were made on national television against a key member of the president’s family. Curiously, the station that aired the piece faced no negative consequences for such actions (Junisbai, 2011).

2.5 Kazakhstan’s media online

There is a number of newspapers are currently developing their online presence in Kazakhstan. *Golos Respubliki*’s website is the champion amongst all other newspapers. The paper makes use of social media, *Facebook* and *LiveJournal* in particular, to reach and engage with their readers online. Despite *Golos Respubliki*’s final closure in 2013 as a result of a court order, its editorial team is very active on the newspaper’s foreign-based website (Emrich et al., 2013).

In addition, television news organisations have also launched websites, although their popularity is behind other channels of mass media. However, there is an exception made by the Almaty-located *KTK Television*’s website, the website of which is professionally designed as well as is linked to the station’s social media accounts in *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *VKontakte*, and on *YouTube*. Radio stations have also established their presence online by allowing its listeners to live-stream broadcasts. However, radio in Kazakhstan is traditionally viewed as a source of entertainment rather than news (Emrich et al., 2013).

2.6 Kazakhstan’s media and the language

It is worth noting, that language is an important issue in the Kazakhstan’s media environment. The official language in the country is Kazakh, spoken by 64 percent of its population. Russian, spoken by 95 percent, is recognized as the official language of international communication. However, it is claimed that Russian- and Kazakh-language broadcasts and publications not only report in different languages, but also
cover different issues (Emrich et al., 2013). Nevertheless, with the recent attempts made by the Kazakhstani government to promote the official language which requires all broadcasters offer at least 50 per cent of their content in Kazakh, as well as the fact that Kazakh is becoming more prominent in all spheres of life; Russian remains to be the language of preference for media consumption (ibid). Hence, it is no surprise that about 80 per cent of the top-rated newspapers in Kazakhstan are published in Russian and only the remaining 20 per cent in Kazakh (ibid).

Furthermore, in order to achieve the ambitious goals in creating a hi-tech hub in Kazakhstan, skills in languages other than Kazakh are essential, and Nazarbayev acknowledges it very clearly. In 2007 he stated: “Kazakh is the state language, Russian is the language of inter-ethnic communication, and English is the language of successful integration into the global economy” (Uffelmann, 2011).

**2.7 Internet and Censorship in Kazakhstan**
The Kazakhstani Internet community is growing rapidly. Between 2001 and 2005, the number of Internet users increased from 200,000 to 1 million. By 2007, Kazakhstan reported Internet penetration levels of 8.5 percent, rising to 12.4 percent in 2008. The National Statistical Agency reports that 73 percent of users access the Internet by dial-up, 15 percent by means of ADSL, and 6 percent using satellite access. Over 50 percent of users accessed the Internet from home in 2008. Forty-two percent of families living in towns with populations of 70,000 people and more have a personal computer. KazakhTelekom reported an increase in its broadband subscriber base from 270,000 to 456,000 in 2008. The latest statistics suggest that as of June, 2014, there were 9,850,123 internet users in the country. This number equates to 54.9 per cent of the country’s Internet penetration. In comparison, in neighbouring Russia, the Internet penetration is almost the same – 61.4 per cent, given the number of total population is almost eight time greater (InternetWorldStats, 2014). Despite these increases, Internet usage is concentrated in urban centres, while outside those centres access remains beyond the reach of most Kazakhstanis (Statistics Agency of Kazakhstan, 2013).
Russian is the most popular language used on the Internet (94.1 percent), followed by Kazakh (4.5 percent), and English (1.4 percent), a figure which may account for the high percentage of Kazakh websites hosted in Russia (including those on the country-code domain name ‘‘.kz’’). Six percent of ‘‘.kz’’ domain websites are hosted in Kazakhstan, with the remainder hosted in Russia and elsewhere (OpenNet Initiative, 2010).

*KazakhTelecom* is the largest telecom player on the Kazakhstan’s market. The state-run company holds 73 per cent of shares of the market for all Internet and data communications, and offers its services in all major cities and regional centres (KazakhTelecom, 2011).

The ICT sector in Kazakhstan is overregulated, as evidenced by some 300 legislative acts that expressly or implicitly control the ICT environment. All telecommunications operators are legally obliged, as part of the licensing requirement, to connect their channels to a public network controlled by *KazakhTelecom*. The so-called Billing Centre of Telecommunication Traffic, established by the government in 1999, helps monitor the activity of private companies and strengthen the monopolist position of *KazakhTelecom* in the ICT sphere. In the past, some telecommunications operators circumvented such regulations by using VoIP for their interregional and international traffic, but the imposition of VoIP telephony tariffs eliminated this option.

The Nazarbayev regime guards the state by expanding its control activities. State-run *KazakhTelecom* dominates the market for Internet and mobile phone and regularly facilitates the blocking of websites publishing regime-critical comments, like *Respublika-kaz.info* and *Kplus-tv.net*. Other providers are required to install SORM-2 devices (the Russian surveillance system) to allow the Kazakhstani secret police to monitor times of Internet use, IP addresses and information on data traffic (Shmitz & Wolters, 2012).
In 2004, the chairs of the National Security Committee and the Agency for Informatisation and Communications of Kazakhstan approved Rules Providing for Mechanisms for Monitoring the Telecommunications Operators and Networks. These rules prescribe full collaboration and information sharing between the government agencies. This system is similar to that of the Russian ISPs, introduced to monitor activities of users and any related information. The rules oblige ISPs to register and maintain electronic records of customer Internet activity. Providers are required to install special software and hardware equipment in order to create and store records for a specified amount of time, including log-in times, connection types, transmitted and received traffic between parties of the connection, identification number of the session, duration of time spent online, IP address of the user, and speed of data receipt and transmission.

In 2010, the OpenNet Initiative has also conducted testing on two main ISPs: KazakhTelecom and Nursat. KazakhTelecom blocks opposition groups’ websites, regional media sites that carry political content, and selected social networking sites. In addition, evidence points to online media and bloggers practicing self-censorship for fear of prosecution by the state under highly restrictive defamation laws.

A number of proxy sites providing anonymous access to the Internet have also been blocked. The OpenNet Initiative suspects that filtering practices in Kazakhstan are evolving and are performed at the network backbone by KazakhTelecom, which filters traffic it provides to downstream operators. Consequently, Kazakhstani ISPs may unknowingly receive pre-filtered content. At the same time, not all-incoming and outgoing traffic passes through KazakhTelecom’s centralized network, resulting in inconsistent patterns of blocking. Kazakhstan companies apply filtering mechanisms at the user level to prevent employees from accessing pornography, music, film, and dating websites. However, OpenNet Initiative testing found that Kazakhstan does not block any pornographic content or sites related to drug and alcohol use. This suggests that censorship is mainly aimed at those websites and users who may endanger the political and economic stability of Kazakhstan (OpenNet Initiative, 2010). Indeed, according to Adil Soz Foundation, in 2011 in Kazakhstan, access to more than 200
websites was either temporarily restricted or blocked permanently and the websites targeted were of political nature ("The Monitoring of Violations of Freedom of Speech in Kazakhstan in 2011," 2011).

In August of 2011, by the decision of Sara-Arkynskiy court of the city of Astana, a popular blogging platform LiveJournal and more than 20 other Internet resources were blocked; the reason for blocking was ‘promotion of terrorism and extremism’, which was allegedly conducted in these resources (Open Dialogue Foundation, 2012). Some claim the blogging platform was blocked because of Nazarbayev’s former son-in-law Rakhat Aliyev’s blog, which contained compromising materials against the President (Tartuta & Zygar, 2010). This strategy of “event-based information control, which temporarily shapes Internet access” is viewed by Deibert (2008) as a characteristic of many countries in the CIS (p.183).

Like its neighbours, Kazakhstan responded to the events of the Arab Spring in Tunis and Cairo by tightening Internet censorship. The blocking of the blog posting service LiveJournal made it clear that the move was ultimately aimed at making it even more difficult to express criticism within the country (Shmitz & Wolters, 2012).

Saunders (2007) suggests that the Internet is actively used by Kazakhstani officials for the creation of a Kazakhstani state brand, promoting a particular understanding of Kazakhness; in addition, the Internet is one of the areas of Nazarbayev’s hi-tech feudalism (Uffelmann, 2011).

2.8 Social networking sites in Kazakhstan

According to the data provided by the Open Society Foundation, over the past few years, the number of those using social networking websites has grown dramatically in Kazakhstan (Emrich et al., 2013). Over the period of 18 months – from March 2011 until October 2012 – the number of registered users of Facebook has gone from 268,160 to 616,120 (Social Bakers, 2013). The majority of websites which are popular amongst Kazakhstani users are either based in the United States or Russia, and include the following (listed in order of popularity): Moi Mir (My World), Odnoklassniki
As for the existing and possible activism in Kaznet, it appears that social activism tends to be the most successful for mobilization of the country’s netizens. A number of ordinary Kazakhstanis have protested online and offline against a number of important issues: low wages, animal cruelty, and the ban of imported cars with the right hand steering wheel. However, generally netizens tend to avoid any actions which many deem too political, unless discussions take place on the so called ‘secretly politically’ blogs (Shklovski & Valtysson, 2012). Based on observations by the author during her research, over the past two years, there has been a noticeable increase in the participation and in numbers of Kazakhstani bloggers in regards to socio-political issues in particular.

2.9 Summary

Following the collapse of the authoritarian Soviet regime in late 1980s and the formation of the 15 independent states as a result, Kazakhstan was considered to have the potential of becoming an oasis of democracy and transparency. Although, the first elected President – Nursultan Nazarbayev is still the ruling leader, 23 years later after the collapse of the Soviet Union, some have suggested that the reason behind it is Nazarbayev’s reform and market-oriented approach to turn Kazakhstan into the ICT hub of Central Asia, the image (still) popular among many in Kazakhstan (SocialismToday, 2014).

Despite the large number of newspapers and TV stations available to the citizens in Kazakh, Russian and English languages, as well as an increasing number of Internet users, all forms of media are still heavily monitored and censored. This, as a result, has had an impact on how the news are delivered, who the audience and the consumers are and which language the news are presented in.

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4 Kazakhstan Internet
5 The term netizen (“citizen of the net”) describes a person who is actively involved in online communities or the Internet in general.
Given the above, in the following chapters I will explain how the riots in the western town of Zhanaozen in 2011 contributed to the facilitation of the discussion on the role of the Internet activism in the Kazakhstani society not only online, but in the traditional forms of media too. I also aim to explain whether or not such discussions had any impact or changed in any way the political participation of citizens in Kazakhstan.
Chapter III: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the research available on the current political participation online. The review of relevant literature indicated a gap in Kazakhstan-related research. However, there is an extensive amount of research available on China, some the former Soviet Union countries, Russia in particularly, and on the states that were part of the Arab Spring movement. The latter shall be covered in this literature review due to its ‘replanting’ effect on censorship policies implemented in the Central Asia following the movement. This section starts off by providing an overview of the existing theoretical and empirical research on the role of social media on political processes. These topics are discussed in depth in order to provide links to the following chapters of this research.

In addition, as this thesis is examining how socio-political issues have been framed by social media in comparison to the traditional forms of journalism, the literature on media frames and agenda setting and its links to social media will also be touched upon. Further theoretical frameworks applied in this thesis will be looked at in the Research Design chapter of this thesis. The chapter concludes with an overview of the different techniques of Internet censorship implemented by different states.

3.2 Activism in the Internet Age

In the academic community, while some scholars argue that online activism ‘marks a palpable revival of the revolutionary spirit’ (Yang, 2009, p. 209), some remained skeptical about the democratic potential of the Internet claiming that the Internet will not lead to revolutions, but a ‘gradual, slow evolution’ (MacKinnon, 2011) of the state-society relations (Gleiss, 2015). Others dismiss the Internet as a ‘democratic illusion (Leibold, 2011), claiming that it only produces ‘shallow infotainment, pernicious misinformation, and interest-based ghettos’ (p. 123). However, most agree that the web can be used to eliminate the traditional media as an intermediary and allow organizers communicate directly with their audience (Wong, 2001; Rucht, 2004; Earl
& Kimport, 2011). Furthermore, the Internet allows political opposition to spread the messages quicker in hostile environments (Danitz & Strobel, 1999; Fandy, 1999).

In the past, the tools used to enable political participation did not receive as much scholarly attention as they have over the past few years (Oser, Hooghe, & Marien, 2013). Instead of relying on face-to-face contacts or print media, mobilization agents have increasingly adopted new electronic media and the Internet to reach the potential participants (Carpini, 2000; Skocpol, 2004; Polat, 2005, Bennett, Breunig, & Givens, 2008). This was particularly highlighted recently as the political uprisings took place across the Middle East, China, and in a number of former Soviet Union states, where social media was used intensively (Voigt, 2011).

Oser, Hooghe, and Marien (2012) believe online participation is a distinctive type of social and political engagement and that the Internet has been adopted as its tool. Blogging, as one of the forms of online participation, has become a significant political force, not only in terms of influencing the discourse in mainstream media, but also in terms of its capacity to demonstrate and encourage participation (Baumer, Sueyoshi, & Tomilson, 2011).

Lynch (2011) suggests social networking websites played a key role in the proliferation of the political protests across the Arab region. In addition, Mossbert, Tolbert, and McNeal (2008) as well as Oates, Owen and Gibson (2006) state online opportunities for political participation have become an important avenue of citizen participation not only in the states in transition, but also in established democratic countries. In fact, in advanced societies, Internet now plays a major role in political communication and in various forms of political campaigns (Hooghe and Vissers, 2009; Howard, 2006; Krueger, 2006; Kenski and Stroud, 2006; Pasek et al., 2006). The 2008 Obama campaign, for example, having used online donations, YouTube movies, and various community websites, is often referred to as an example of a successful political campaign conducted online (Murray & Mosk, 2008).
Although the Internet provides societies with new opportunities for political engagement which have not been previously available, some studies have found little evidence of increased political participation through new tools like the social networking websites (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010; Boulianne, 2009). Furthermore, some have suggested that Internet is a less power tool to use and that it has a more limited socializing effect than traditional forms of civic interaction (Putman, 2000).

On the other hand, Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal (2008) have indicated that the Internet increases not only the online participation, but also affects the offline form of political engagement. Firstly, this is due to the fact that Internet lowers the costs of gathering political information and communication, therefore leading to the involvement of those economically disadvantaged. Secondly, Internet represents an interactive medium, hence allowing those who were previously disengaged members of the society to communicate directly with the political world. And lastly, increased knowledge of ICT skills at large could mobilize societies for political engagement (Krueger, 2002).

Lynch (2011) argues that the new media have reshaped the structure of political opportunity across an increasingly unified political field, but have ambiguous effects on the specific mechanisms of authoritarian state power. Lynch (2011) adds that new media and satellite television together offer powerful tools to protest organizing, reducing transaction costs for organization and presenting rapid and powerful channels for the dissemination of messages, images and frames. But at the same time, they do not necessarily translate into enduring movement or into robust political parties capable of mounting a sustained challenge to entrenched regimes or to transforming themselves in to governing parties.

Shirky (2011) argues that the Internet inevitably empowers to organize outside the state, rendering the traditional nation-state irrelevant and reducing the transactional costs of all sorts of societal-level organizations. Morozov (2011), on the other hand, suggested that these effects would not be directly translated from shifting individual attitudes, competencies and preferences into political change. They will, instead, be
mediated through the existing structures of power and control – which include massive state capacities for and experience in surveillance, repression, infiltration, and control (Lynch, 2011).

### 3.3 Framing and Agenda setting theories

Within the last several years, the concept of framing has become increasingly attractive in media research, finding its way into a number of related fields – including communication, sociology, and political science. Framing refers to the way events and issues are organized and made sense of, especially by media, media professionals, and their audiences (Reese, 2001). Goffman and Bateson are credited with the introduction of both the theory and the metaphor. As a result, we now consider how people rely on expectations to make sense of their everyday social experience. Framing has been particularly useful in understanding the media’s role in political life (Reese, 2001). Gamson (1996) described framing as a discursive process of strategic actors utilizing symbolic resources to participate in collective sense-making about public policy issues.

Tankard, Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss, and Ghanem (1991) described a media frame as “the central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration” (p. 3). Specifically in terms of salience, Entnam (1993) said:

> To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (p. 52).

In other words, framing is the construction of an agenda with a restricted number of thematically related attributes in order to create a coherent picture of a particular object (Combs & Ghanem, 2001).

Goffman (1974) also argues that individuals actively work to make sense of experiences by classifying, labelling, and interpreting them. He also adds that we use frames to “locate, perceive, identify, and label” information. Building on Goffman’s
work, Gamson and Modigliani (1989) offer five distinct framing devices – metaphors, exemplars, catch phrases, depictions, and visual images. For both Goffman and Gamson, frames are devices that help us organize our experiences, tools we use to make meaning of events. Hence, frames and framing have received a great deal of attention in studies of news media (Hemphill, Culotta, & Heston, 2013). The importance of framing is the fact that it influences public opinion and behaviour. Media frames likely influence our own individual frames, or how we make sense of political news (Entman and Rojecki 1993).

Agenda setting is considerably more than the classical assertion that the news tells us what to think about. It is a theory about the transfer of salience from the mass media’s pictures of the world to those in our heads (Combs & Ghanem, 2001). The news also tells us how to think about it. Both the selection of objects for attention and the selection of frames for thinking about these objects are powerful agenda-setting roles. Central to the news agenda and its daily set of objects – issues, personalities, and events – are the perspectives that journalists, and, subsequently, members of the public employ to think about each object (McCombs, 1992). Given that in Kazakhstan the government controls media, the perspectives of the officials, rather than of journalists are projected onto the Kazakhstani public. As a result, these perspectives direct attention toward certain attributed and away from others. The generic name for these journalists’ perspectives is newsworthiness where objects are framed in a wide variety of ways (McCombs and Shaw, 1993).

There also is evidence that the way an object on the agenda is framed can have measureable behavioural consequences. The attributes of an issue emphasized in the new coverage can influence the direction of public opinion (McCombs and Shaw, 1993). Whenever the attributes of an issue – or other topic – presented on the news agenda, the consequences for audience behaviour are considerable. How a communicator frames an issue sets an agenda of attributes and can influence how we think about it. Agenda setting is a process that can affect both what to think about and how to think about it (McCombs and Shaw, 1993). Cohen (1963) further states that the media may not tell us what to think, but they are successful in telling us what
to think about. New research exploring the consequences of agenda setting and media framing suggest that the media not only tell us what to think about, but also how to think about it, and, consequently, what to think (McCombs & Shaw, 1993).

In the context of social movements, framing refers to signifying work of meaning construction engaged in by social movement activists and participants and other parties, such as the antagonists, elites, media, counter-movements, relevant to the interests of social movements and the challenges they mount. In social movements, meanings are typically contestable and negotiable and thus open to debate and differential interpretations. The verb ‘framing’ employed by social movement scholars denotes an active phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction. Movement actors are defined as signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers (Yee, 2012). At the same time, social media offers politicians an opportunity to bypass traditional media and directly influence their audiences’ opinions and behaviour through framing. Frames are communication devices that diagnose, evaluate, and prescribe issues, and we rely on them to make sense of what we read (Hemphill et al., 2013).

It is argued that the social media, with its power in transmission of textual, visual and audio messages, has largely strengthened the discursive power of frames by expanding the genre of discourses in the public sphere (Yee, 2012).

Based on the previous research conducted by both, McCombs and Shaw (1993) argued that framing and agenda setting are essentially the same thing – that through framing, the media indicate issues that are important and that demand our attention. In this view, the media accomplishes framing by selecting some issues to cover and others to ignore (Hemphill et al., 2013). Kosicki (1993), however, disagrees with such statement, suggesting that framing should not be viewed as an extension of agenda setting, because framing begins from an explicit cognitive perspective, and agenda setting does not. Iyengar and Simon (1993) too have published research that measures framing and agenda setting as separate concepts.
Recently, more scholars have been looking at the convergence of agenda setting and framing which offers several theoretical advantages, because the traditional emphases of the framing and agenda setting research traditions complement each other to a considerable degree. Within the agenda setting tradition, there is a vast wealth of research on the impact of mass media content on the public agenda and considerably less attention to the variety of influences shaping the media agenda. Within the framing tradition there has been considerable attention to the frames found in the media and sometimes the origins of those frames, with much less attention to the impact of those frames on the public. The convergence of their two research will yield a greater unity in our knowledge of how the media’s pictures of the world are constructed and, in turn, how the public responds to those pictures. More precisely, the outcome can be a unified theoretical framework linking communication settings, ranging from news sources and interest groups through the media to the public (Combs & Ghanem, 2001).

Research conducted on the importance of framing and agenda setting theories in mass media suggests that both have an incredible potential to influence public opinion and political behaviour (Entman, 1993; Pan and Kosicki, 1993; Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007). Social media offers politicians an opportunity to circumvent traditional media and to directly influence their audience’s opinions and behaviour by establishing their own frames for issues. As demonstrated in the findings of this research, the events in Zhanaozen in 2011 have been framed differently depending on where and by whom the news were published. In other words, in choosing and displaying certain aspects of the events as they were unfolding in the oil-rich town of Zhanaozen, editors, newsroom staff and bloggers played an important part in shaping Kazakhstan’s political reality. As a result, not only did the readers learn about an uprising, they also learnt how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information they were given by either the state-run media or the one supporting the opposition-in-exile and the oil workers. And as Lang and Lang (cited in McCombs, Maxwell and Shaw 1993) put it:
The mass media force attention to certain issues. They build up public images of political figures. They are constantly presenting objects suggesting what individuals in the mass media should think about, know about, have feelings about (p. 60).

3.4 Internet censorship and its different stages

Internet, as Stein puts it, is an operating system of global politics (Dalbeitt, Palfrey, Rohozinski & Zittrain, 2008). Ideas, news and information get to travel the world in seconds crossing the nation borders in no time. However, Internet is not a “free operating zone” (ibid). On the contrary, a number of states have demonstrated their willingness to control the communication, which takes place on the Internet.

Deibert and Rohozinski suggest that “the centre of gravity of practices aimed at managing cyberspace has shifted subtly from policies and practices aimed at denying access to content to methods that seek to normalize control and the exercise of power in cyberspace through a variety of means” (p. 44, as cited in MacKinnon, 2011). Currently states operate such methods through a variety of techniques.

Deibert and Rohozinski (2009) divide the techniques used by governments for the Internet censorship and control into three “generations”. The “first generation” approach focuses on the “Chinese-style” filtering techniques and Internet-café surveillance. Under such approach, access to specific Internet resources is denied through the means of blocking certain keywords and IP addresses.

The “second generation” method involves the construction of such environment in which information and authorities’ claims to remove content are legitimized and technical shutdowns of websites are a regular norm. As a result, certain content online gets blocked “just-in-time”, especially when websites contain the information of the highest value (Dalbeirt & Rohozinski, 2009).

Under the umbrella of the “third generation” – a highly sophisticated technique, warrantless surveillance takes place, as well as the creation of “national cyber-zones”, state-sponsored information campaigns; also physical actions are taken to silence
certain individuals. In other words, the focus is less on denying access but rather on counter-information campaigns that aim to overwhelm, discredit, and demoralize the opponent (Dalbeirt & Rohozianki, 2009; MacKinnon, 2011).

The overall trend in Internet filtering is toward more states adopting filtering regimes. The states with the most extensive filtering practices fall primarily in three regions: East Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, and Central Asia. Some of the newest filtering regimes, such as those coming online in the former Soviet Union states, appear to be more sophisticated than the “first-generation systems” still in place in some states. In the CIS and in parts of the Middle East and North Africa, the filtering techniques are highly targeted in nature and carried out “just-in-time” to block access to information during sensitive time periods.

The following part of the literature review will explore such techniques applied in different countries in more detail. This can provide a context for Kazakhstan’s Internet regulation practices and place them in the wider spectrum of Internet control.

3.4.1 Countries of the Former Soviet Union – “first and second” generation of control

The role of the mass media has never been underestimated in the Soviet Union (Krasnoboka, 2012). Citizens were able to receive at least one all-national television channel, two republican channels and very often one local television channel. Radio sets were available in every Soviet household, including the most remote parts of the country. Newspapers, newsletters, bulletins, and magazines were published in unlimited quantities and editions. However, extremely high levels of Communist Party censorship together with conscious self-censorship defined the editorial policy of the Soviet media. Perestroika was the golden age of journalism in the Soviet Union. Neither before nor after Perestroika were the Soviet journalists so independent and respected in their job; and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 had clearly demonstrated it.
Following the dissolution of a great empire, many undemocratic regimes remained in power, which resulted in unprecedented corruption of the state leaders and those close to them. Therefore, a number of states were found to have fertile ground for political, social and economic protests. In the early 2000’s, street protests, prompted by contested election results, had urged the presidents of Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan to leave office. Moreover, the Kyrgyzstani leader Askar Akayev had to flee the country. Regimes in Belarus, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Moldova and Uzbekistan had also faced significant threats, and seemingly stable post-Soviet states such as Russia and Kazakhstan had become increasingly concerned with the existence of the grassroots movements. Consequently, civil society was subjected to ever-greater restrictions; international NGOs like Open Society Institute were expelled from some countries and a wide array of other international organizations from the BBC to Freedom House was views with increasing suspicion (Polese & Beachain, 2014).

In the following paragraphs, I present an overview of the literature that focuses on the role of the Internet on social movements and on the state of censorship in some of the former Soviet states and try to draw some links to the Kazakhstan situation.

- **Kyrgyzstan**

Kyrgyzstan’s political leadership adopted the philosophy of a managed democracy – a regime with formal democratic institutions such as regular contested elections and other forms of popular participation like referenda, diverse and private press and developed civil liberties such as freedom to travel (Kulikova & Perlmutter, 2007). Kyrgyzstan of the later years of Akayev’s presidency is a typical example of this managed democracy model: the elections are regular and contested but manipulated so skillfully that even outside observers cannot confirm fraud; political parties do exist but have little influence on the actual legislative process because the candidates prefer to run on an individual rather than a party ticket; more than 500 media outlets are registered with the Ministry of Justice but only about 150-180 operate in the entire country at any given point in time; there are more than 3000 registered NGOs, many of which are quasi-NGOs created by pro-government circles to channel the grant
money. At the same time, the citizens are free in their consciousness (religion), thinking, and travel within and outside the country (Kulikova & Perlmutter, 2007).

Mass media in Kyrgyzstan has rather been relative free, especially when compared to other Central Asian countries. However, following country’s independence in 1991 and the emergence of international donors willing to support the existing civil society, the government made significant efforts to control the content and direction of reporting of the mass media (Melvin & Umaraliev, 2011). Like in Kazakhstan, the ownership of media in Kyrgyzstan by business elites linked to the government and the use of state financing to support newspapers and television, including nominally private media, has made distinctions between private and public media impossible. Such economic influence – together with the government’s control over communications licensing and health and safety inspections, which can be used to intimidate or close media, and the capacity to enforce censorship – provides the government with powerful means to shape the information environment in the country (Melvin & Umaraliev, 2012). Consequently, the Internet became the alternative to the mainstream media that failed to provide the population with news information and analysis (Toktogulova, 2001). However, Internet usage was, and continues to be, a predominantly urban phenomenon. It is primarily concentrated in the capital, Bishkek, which accounts for one-sixth of the country’s population but 77 per cent of its Internet users, who are mostly connected through home, work or smart phones as there are few Internet cafes (Melvin & Umaraliev, 2012).

According to Freedman (2005), from the late 1990s, there was almost constant pressure from the governments of the first two post-Soviet presidents, Askar Akayev and Kurmanbek Bakiyev to restrict the media, with repressive measures spiking during periods of turmoil. However, given the slow technological development and Internet penetration in the country, the traditional media was the focus of government restrictions over the past decade. As new and social media in Kyrgyzstan started to develop more actively, some parts of it quickly acquired political functions, raising questions about how to control this new source of information.
The Tulip Revolution in 2005 in Kyrgyzstan was in fact the first revolution amongst post-Soviet nations where the Internet was considered a factor in disseminating information and mobilizing political protest. Still in its infancy, the Internet in Kyrgyzstan played its role – albeit a highly weak one – in supporting anti-government protests that overthrew President Akayev and his government (Turdubaeva, 2014). And although the emerging social media did not play the part in the events themselves per se, the coverage of the events online using the LiveJournal blogging platform was still taking place. This resulted in the various funding projects aimed to support the new media in Kyrgyzstan, including the foreign ones who supported a number of blogging projects financially. Those projects included one of the earliest blogging websites – neweurasia.net which covered all five Central Asia countries – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Kloop.kg is another example of a project launched to teach the journalists how to use new media tools to cover the events happening in the country and to create a free blogging platform (Melvin & Umaraliev, 2012).

Further political development in the country – the growing dissatisfaction with the newly elected president Bakiyev only sparkled the online discussions further. Allegations of corruption were covered by the members of the online community, however the traditional media, which was controlled by Bakiyev at the time, stayed out of it (Melvin & Umaraliev, 2012). However, only a few years later, in 2010, Bakiyev was overthrown and as many as 86 people were confirmed dead. Additionally, the events were subject to unprecedented levels of reporting as they were unfolding due to the use of social media (Melvin & Umaraliev, 2011).

The opportunity to discuss issues related to Bakiyev and his family online helped gather the likeminded in the Kyrgyzstan blogosphere to discuss the wider political situation in the country. This resulted in Twitter acquiring a political role in Kyrgyzstan (Melvin & Umaraliev, 2012). However, Diesel Forum – an administrator-moderated, member-based online new discussion forum – was a more popular tool that had a greater impact on Kyrgyzstani Internet users. In 2010 it was the most visited and commented website in the country (Makarov, 2011). This resulted in government
extending its media control to the Internet. To prevent certain events spilling to the Internet, the government-run telecom monopoly, started to block access to the websites of independent news agencies and radio. A new law was prepared according to which Internet media is required to register within the state as traditional press. As a result, Diesel Forum, under pressure from the government, started deleting the threads on controversial topics, however was unable to stop the discussions altogether. As in the case with Kazakhstan and the Golos Respubliki newspaper, advanced Internet users started to disseminate information on proxy websites by other means. This has forced the Kyrgyzstani government to take further steps at blocking not only certain Internet webpages, but also stop the broadcast of leading Russian TV stations which still covered the events as the unfolded in the country. Unfortunately for the regime, many have the direct access to Russian news programs via satellite and cable services, which meant people could still watch the unedited versions of the political events. This again, created further discussion on Twitter and on other social media websites.

The highlight of the tensions took place in April of 2010 when a group of protesters decided to organize protest movements across the country. This led to the clashes with law enforcement agencies. The Minister of the Interior Affairs was sent to the town of Talas to restore the order, but was instead captured by the protesters and severely beaten. The events were recorder by protesters themselves and later uploaded online generating thousands of views and comments. As in Zhanaozen, the state media presented a very different picture suggesting that the situation was taken under control, when the social media was stating otherwise. However, unlike to what happened in Kazakhstan, when the protesting movements never spread to other parts of the country due to government’s quick reaction at blocking the Internet and any other forms of communication channels, the rally in Kyrgyzstan quickly spread to other regions. This together with the rest of the factors, consequently, led to the fall of Bakiyev’s regime (Melvin & Umaraliev, 2012).

Driven by the momentum of the political and violent upheavals during and after the Tulip Revolution, new media continues to develop in Kyrgyzstan. While the country
enjoys a freer information environment since the fall of both Akayev and Bakieyv’s regimes, the journalists and bloggers continue to face the challenges of operating in a highly polarized political environment (Khamidov, 2011). This challenge raises difficult questions about the role of censorship and free speech in building democracy in a post-conflict environment (Melvin & Umaraliev, 2012).

- Ukraine

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Kuchma and the oligarchs who surrounded him aimed at maintaining their power, and preventing any criticism of growing corruption by limiting the amount of information circulating in the Ukrainian society (Dyczok, 2004). The journalists in Ukraine were very well aware of it, however, were convinced that the political system was not at all transparent; citizens often lacked the information and the details that would enable them to do something about it (Lichavhova, 2003). Prohorelova (2004) later added that censorship was connected to economic interests, and that the information vacuum was being used not only for political purposes but also to conceal financial wrongdoings.

Dyczok (2006) suggests that President Kuchma and the oligarchs who surrounded him went to great lengths to control mainstream mass media outlets, ostensibly believing that this would facilitate their consolidation of power and minimize criticism of the regime. They thought it would lead to individuals becoming disinterested in politics and feeling uninspired to participate in public life, or as Ukrainians called it, ‘zombirovanie ludei’. However, the effectiveness of this censorship is questioned by Dyczok (2006) with an argument that heavy-handed media manipulation did not deliver the desired results for Kuchma.

Since Ukraine became independent in 1991, its media landscape has undergone numerous changes. Although the transformations continue, the shadow of Soviet legacies still remains in the country. Most analysts believe that Ukraine’s transformation was stuck in the ‘grey zone’ where economic growth was occurring but corruption was rampant. The media evolved into what can only be called a hybrid
model, where the structures, power relationships and societal role of media has retained certain features from the Soviet era and acquired new ones common to democratic, capitalist societies (Dyczok, 2006).

According to Dyczok (2006), three important changes occurred in the early 1990s which changed the nature of Ukraine’s media in significant ways. The state ended official censorship, gave up its monopoly on ownership and dropped the barriers to the outside world. In 1993, the Parliament adopted legislation which legalized private ownership of media and this opened the door for numerous privately owned newspaper, magazines, radio and television stations. Additionally, despite relatively low start in the early 1990s, Internet usage began to grow at a very fast pace, increasing from 3.8 million in 2003 to 5.9 million in 2004, which amounted to 12.37 per cent of the population (Dyczok, 2006).

In the early years of Independence, Ukraine’s first president, Leonid Kravchuk, had a rather full agenda of state building, economic reform and consolidating Ukraine’s position on the international scene, and therefore paid little attention to mass media issues. Thus, the years 1992-1994 became known as the golden era of Ukrainian journalism, since during those years many new media outlets appeared and were allowed to exist without state interference, continuing the trends, which began during the Gorbachev years (Dyczok, 2006). However, after Kravchuk lost the presidential elections in 1994 to Leonid Kuchma, the so-called oligarchs began to emerge and gradually came to own and control the main mass media outlets in Ukraine. As Kuchma prepared to run for re-election in 1999, his popularity declined, and he decided to limit media criticism against himself. Some suggest that serious censorship began in 1997 when Kuchma used television to discredit his main opponent – Oleksander Moroz. Since the main television stations were in the hands of the state and Kuchma’s allies, this was not a problem; censorship deepened, Kuchma was re-elected, and this trend continued until the Orange Revolution in 2004 (Dyczok, 2006).

According to Goldstein (2007), the Orange Revolution in Ukraine was one of the first ones during which the Internet played a crucial role. However, very few social media
platforms were used during this period, most of the content online was generated by the news media; hence, Hintler (2012) characterizes it as primarily Web 1.0 based, as opposed to the social character of Internet usage observed in the political uprising across the Middle East.

Initially, the large protests in Kiev were not reported at all on national television, then the number of protesters who turned up was dramatically under-reported, and later the situation was misrepresented by showing images of street people and drunks when reporting on the protests (Dyczok, 2004). This fit in with gate-keeping and possibly a variant of agenda-setting theory, where media and political elites attempt to shape public views and behaviour by controlling what information is allowed to circulate in society (Manning & White, 1949). Agenda-setting theory suggests that media owners use editors to create filters, which determine what is reported and what is not. In that way elites use media not so much to tell people what to think, but rather ‘what to think about’ (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). In a variation of this, Kuchma and his colleagues were trying to limit what Ukrainians could see on national television, and thus perhaps trying to control what they thought about.

Despite the above, Dyczok (2004), suggests that despite the heavy handed censorship imposed on mainstream media outlets, Kuchma’s regime was only semi-authoritarian and allowed certain media outlets to exist. Alternative sources of information were always available in the country, initially through independent or political party newsletters, and later through new technologies, especially the Internet. However, as in the case with Kazakhstan, access to the Internet was limited in Ukraine, and as a result, the political establishment did not anticipate the new technology to influence the masses. The authorities, on the other hand, were aware of the importance of the Internet as a key resource for business, and therefore, did not see the need nor the desire to interfere. In addition, as Dyszok (2004) points out, the Internet as well as a small circulation of oppositional newspapers were allowed to exist in Ukrainian environment so that the politicians could deny any censorship taking place in the country by pointing at those if questioned by the West.
Such efforts to control the media suggest that both Kuchma and his inner circle continued to perceive the role of the media in old, communist terms: they believed the media was an instrument of power and influence which the elite could use to shape and manipulate public opinion (Dyszok, 2004).

Despite the widespread acknowledgement that censorship existed, it was rather difficult to pinpoint where and when it took place and who is responsible for it. Instead, the government officials used the infamous method of \textit{temnyky} – technique which was invented by the Russian PR experts and which was used in the 2000 presidential elections in Russia that saw Putin come to power (Wilson, 2005). The technique essentially consisted of a number of instructions sent to the media outlets on how to report the news, what to focus on and what to exclude.

Dyszok (2004) suggests that the \textit{temnyky} are a very good illustration of Kuchma-era censorship not only because they were very effective as a tool, but also because they were difficult to trace back to the government. Pidluska (2004) added that unlike during the Soviet times, pressure coming from the authorities was becoming much more sophisticated, as it is no longer the ‘heavy-handed’ type of pressure that exists in totalitarian societies. Although everyone knew where the instructions on what to cover in the news came from, \textit{temnyky} were sent out without any form of identification of the source - no signatures or any contact information, and were often left lying around in newsrooms.

Censorship concentrated on national television and state owned media outlets, but that is not to say that other forms of media were allowed to exist freely. Restrictions against private newspaper, magazines and radio stations were exercised through a number of mechanisms. One common means was through ownership – either by purchasing the media outlet outright, or by exerting pressure on the owners. Alternative steps included the manipulation of broadcasting licenses, restriction of distribution networks, and at times, outright physical intimidation and attacks (Dyczok, 2002).
Although it is hard to determine how successful such measures were, it was evident that Kuchma’s popularity during his second term was rather low. Trust towards media remained low. Formal opposition not only existed but solidified into a coalition; public protests continued and ultimately culminated in the *Orange Revolution* of 2004.

The 2004 presidential election once again demonstrated that control of the mainstream media, intense censorship and various strategies such as negative advertising, running of technical candidates, using administrative resources and intimidation were not sufficient to win an election in Ukraine. The fact that opposition candidate Victor Yushchenko was practically blocked from national television did not prevent from receiving the largest number of votes (Dyszok, 2004).

In effort to understand the role Internet played in the political processes of Ukraine and during the *Orange Revolution* in particular, it is also important to overview the political situation in Ukraine at the time.

Similarly to Kazakhstan, after gaining its independence in 1991, Ukraine became the state of oligarchy with the president Kuchma controlling politics, economy and media landscape. The emergence of the Internet, however, supported the development of an alternative media, but it was only viewed as a “peer-to-peer communication tool and not as a mass media platform” hence the regime did not see any danger to it at the time. Consequently, the opposition media started using the Internet as the new public space where discussions were generated.

Journalist Gregory Gongadze founded one of the first online news websites called *Ukrayinskaya Pravda*. The website became a template for opposition groups during the 2004 presidential elections (Kuj, 2005). Through persistent reporting in his Internet newspaper about rampant corruption within Kuchma’s administration, Gongadze’s website became a principal forum for questioning government motives and conduct (Kupchinsky, 2002). Within two weeks, Gongadze’s body was found outside of Kiev (The Economist, 2011). The suspicion of a political killing quickly fell on the government. This resulted in the protest movement *Kuchma-free Ukraine*
amongst the Ukrainians and resulted in online news platforms becoming increasingly popular in the country.

According to the data gathered by CIA, in 2004 Ukraine had over 94,000 Internet users, which allowed to get the news to a number of people which later had a profound effect on the course of the events in Ukraine (Kyj, 2005). In addition, it is believed that the Internet levelled the playing fields in the Ukrainian election by successfully disseminating information through non-traditional channels (ibid).

The study on the role of the Internet during the Orange Revolution demonstrated that a number of newspapers started publishing their articles online. News stories included reports from one to two paragraphs and were the ongoing reports not only of professional journalists but of the activists as well. As a result, facts, errors and rumours shared the online space. Other websites acted as a recruitment agency for activists and a morale-boosting place for the Ukrainian youth (Kyj, 2005). Anti-Kuchma’s anthems were recorded and uploaded onto the websites in MP3 format (Shaw, 2004). Additionally, Channel 5’s websites provided video links to downloadable short videos of election-related stories, making it possible to save, review, and disseminate them.

Goldstein (2007) suggests that the Internet played an important role in Ukraine for two reasons: it provided citizens with a forum where they could express their opinions and concerns freely, and secondly, it facilitated the coordination of elections and the protests that followed. Dyczok (2008) agrees with Golstein by stating that the Internet was a tool used by the activist to coordinate the geographically dispersed activist. However, she adds, once the movement was organized, it was the footage from Channel Five (opposition-led) that encouraged more people to join in. In addition, despite being physically silenced by death, Gongadze, in many ways, had his revenge of the authorities: his website became a dominant destination for news. During the presidential elections of 2004, Ukrainska Pravda hosted 319,024 visitors. Taking into the account that some of these visitors were based outside Ukraine, one site managed to account for 30 per cent of all Internet users in the country. Although it is doubtful
whether president Kuchma could quantitatively appreciate the threat of Gongadze’s website, he had to understand it intuitively.

Yuschenko’s victory in 2004 presidential elections did not last long. On the 21 of November 2013 spontaneous protests erupted in Kiev after the Ukrainian government suspended preparations for signing a Free Trade Agreement with the European Union (EU) in favor of agreements with Russia (Dagaev, Lamberova, & Sobolev, 2014). The protest movement was quickly named EuroMaidan (European Square). The idea behind those was the socio-economic and political development of the country and further Europeanization of Ukraine. In the matter of days, the protesting movement in Kiev grew to 200,000-300,000 people. The initial agenda of closer relations with the EU was soon encompassed in the wider protest against Yanukovich, elected President in 2010. He subsequently left the country in February of 2014 (Dagaev et al., 2014).

Although the events at first were very similar to the ones during the Orange Revolution, later on the protests descended into a kind of violence previously unobserved in independent Ukraine. Bajak (2014), Bohdanova (2014), Chornokondratenko and Orlova (2013), Heintz (2013), Kapliuk (2013), Lokot (2013), Talaga (2014) had suggested that social media were quite important in mobilizing the protest movements in Ukraine with “tweets” and “posts” posted by journalists and activists being the key in bringing thousands onto the streets. Using social media technologies, EuroMaidan has created an interactive map of logistics that provided detailed information on and locations of where to eat, makeshift hospitals, information booths, and the barricades. Clicking on the icons of the map, one discovers not only the locations of the facilities but also their needs, which enabled coordination of protesters’ efforts to contribute to the common cause. However, just as in the case of Tahrir Square of the Tunisian unrest, the common cause was poorly defined: aside from dissatisfaction with Yanukovich, the protesters exhibited very different preferences for the future course of action (Dagaev et al., 2014).

A study conducted by Onuch (2015) on the other hand, indicated that during the EuroMaidan movement in November of 2014 messages sent via Twitter and Facebook seemed to motivate only the most dedicated, experienced and connected individuals.
In addition, Onuch (2015) states, it was not until university student associations, civic organizations, and, importantly, opposition political parties sent out mass press releases about the march for EU Association that the number of protest participants rose from 1,000 to approximately 80,000-200,000. This indicated that the early protest participants responded to calls by organized groups rather than individuals posting online. Bohdanova (2014) too suggested that it was not social media but offline social ties, however amplified by online social network, that were crucial in bringing people to the streets. Thus, most protesters relied on the telephone calls, emails and personal contacts rather than on Facebook or other online social network invitations when deciding to join the movement. Additionally, although to an outside observer it might have seemed that the protests were led by a group of three opposition leaders, in reality the movement struggled with creating a functioning leadership body and formulating a list of clear demands from the authorities. This, Bohdanova (2014) states, poses another threat: radicalization. In fact, some of the bitter January clashes between EuroMaidan protesters and the police were sparked by the failure of political leaders to offer any meaningful course of action against escalating government repressions.

Social media enthusiasts may be right to praise technology for the quickness and ease it allows in mobilizing a large number of people, which was true to EuroMaidan. In the case of Ukraine, social media also allowed activists to keep each other informed, amplify their message in traditional media and organize many activities to help sustain the movement. However, before becoming Internet optimists, one should keep in mind that online organizing also poses a set of serious challenges. EuroMaidan has managed to overcome some of them and achieve its ultimate goal of ousting President Yanukovich, albeit at a great human cost. This does not mean that all social media-enabled movements are bound for success. After all, technology is only an instrument; it does not necessarily guarantee a specific type of outcome (Bohdanova, 2014).

At the same time Onouch (2015) suggests that while speeding up Ukrainian activists’ ability to mobilize, social media has also left activists more exposed. Howard and Parks (2012) agree by stating that social media enabled the state to track activists, prevent
and prepare for protest actions, and facilitate the imprisonment and repression of dissidents.

Ukraine made a good start after it became independent in 1991 and the state media it possible for private media outlets to exist, ended formal censorship and opened the doors to the global information highway. Yet, by the end of the decade it became clear that freedom of speech had not developed in Ukraine, and in fact censorship had returned in a new form. Private ownership of media outlets did not prove to be a guarantor of free speech as over time it became increasingly evident that the difference between state and private media in Ukraine was no longer relevant. The return of censorship was an indicator that Kuchma and the oligarchs who surrounded him continued to think of the media as an instrument of power which they could use to contain public opinion, or, as the journalist Pohorelova has suggested, as a shield to protect themselves from public protest by limiting the amount of information which was allowed to circulate in society. This was also part of the re-organisation of power structures: the establishment was no longer promoting an ideology, but rather was interested in consolidating its power, and various oligarchic groups were engaged in struggles for resources and influence. The president was at the centre of these processes and the media were used as both instruments of intra-elite struggle and to create a distance between elite and society at large. However, before autumn 2004, attempts to create the information vacuum and manipulate public opinion were successful only in as much as large-scale public protests were contained. The establishment was not successful in gaining public support or winning votes despite their control of the media during the 2002 and 2004 presidential elections. Ultimately, the attempts to control information failed and the massive street protests that became known as the Orange Revolution led to a new president and end of censorship (Dyczok, 2005).

- Georgia

During the Soviet period, Georgians struggle, with some success, to maintain their national identity. Georgian remained the official language of the Georgian SSR, the
only republic where Russian was not an official language (Lincoln, 2012). With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Republic of Georgia was one of the 15 former Union republics to begin a transition towards a state based on market economy and democracy in 1991.

After the civil wars of 1991/1992 and 1992/1993, Georgians had an idea what dire consequences protests could have. For a long time they were reluctant to take to the streets for any kind of action, with the exception of freedom of speech and media (in 1991 and in 2001 (Companjen, 2010).

In the days that followed the elections held in Tbilisi on 2 November 2003, thousands of people rallied in front of the City Council and the Parliament building, to protest about the manipulation of votes. Even before the count was complete, Georgia’s Central Elections Committee (CEC) had announced that the ‘bloc’ of President Shevardnadze, For New Georgia, was leading in the elections with 21.32 per cent, while Saakashvili’s National Movement had ‘only’ 18.08 per cent. The results from exit polls and parallel voter tabulation showed an opposite tendency: 26.60 per cent for Saakashvili and ‘only’ 18.92 per cent of Shevardnadze (ibid).

Such difference in numbers resulted in people taking to the streets with more than 50,000 demanding Shevardnadze’s resignation. By the end of November, this number increased to 100,000 protesting on the streets of Tbilisi – an event that eventually led to Shevardnadze announcing his resignation (Companjen, 2010). Consequently, Mikheil Saakashvili was elected in January 2004 with an overwhelming majority – 96 per cent of Georgians voted for the new democrat (Waters, 2005).

Internet access and usage continues to grow rapidly in Georgia, particularly as interest in connecting with friends through social-networking sites has increased in recent years. State bodies and several key politicians have also increased their use of the Internet and modern social media tools to share information with citizens and attract attention from the potential electorate.
Despite a moderate Internet penetration rate, in 2013, social media tools were used alongside traditional media outlets to document and respond to significant political and social events. Restrictions on online content in Georgia have decreased over the past years. There are no indications of censorship or content being blocked by the Georgian authorities or ISPs and there are no recent cases of activities or reporters being questioned or arrested for their online activities (IDFI, 2013).

According to the *Freedom On The Net* report (Freedom House, 2013), there is no evidence of online content being blocked in Georgia in 2013-2014. However, in 2011, the government temporarily blocked access to torrent sites and peer-to-peer file sharing services to discourage the illegal download of a Hollywood action film about the 2008 Russian-Georgian war (Georgian America, 2011). Apart from that, users can freely visit any websites around the world, upload or download any content, establish their own website, and contact other users via forums, SNS, and instant messaging applications. At the same time, both voluntary and induced self-censorship among Georgian Internet users is active to some extent. It is widely acknowledged that instances of self-censorship due to political pressure have decreased over the past few years. However, representatives of particular professions sometimes prefer to abstain from expressing themselves freely on social networks. While some media representatives post their viewpoints without restrictions, other journalists consider refraining from openly judging politicians and decision-makers to be part of professional ethics. Additionally, civil servants in some cases may exhibit self-censorship in their online activities and comments due to pressure from higher officials (Freedom House, 2013).

Even before the *Rose Revolution*, Georgia rightly was considered one of the most liberal states in the former Soviet Union. Georgia was one of the few countries where media freedom included the existence of television channels uncontrolled by the state. Georgia’s liberal character depended partly on the progressive mature of the government. As in the case with Kyrgyzstan, Georgia’s strong economic and political dependence on the West made it malleable to western demands for democratization and respect for human rights. But the liberal atmosphere depended equally on the
utter weakness of the Georgian state. Indeed, the Shevardnadze government’s inability to control Georgia’s territory or its own state institutions effectively precluded it from exercising a greater degree of control over Georgian society. The Rose Revolution occurred very much as a result of the corruption, incompetence, and criminalization of the Georgian state (Monson, 2009).

- **Russia**

Russia today presents a very particular form of authoritarianism. The executive arms of the state are the dominant force in society, allowing no challenges from an independent business community, the judiciary, an empowered electorate, or free media. Yet the state itself is dominated by a variety of informal influence groups that vie for control of key assets. The state holds elections and boasts representative institutions, but they mean little. Russia under the current regime can be described as a selective capitalist kleptocracy because it employs certain genuine components of a market economy, but only to the extent that they benefit, or at the very least do not hinder, a ruling elite engaged in practices that would entail criminal prosecution in any free-market society with a functioning legal system and an independent judiciary (Kimmage, 2009).

In a selectively capitalist kleptocracy, heavy state involvement in the economy and a plethora of informal relations blur the distinction between high-level “businessmen” and senior “officials”. The distinction evaporates completely when, as in Russia, government officials sit on the boards of large state-run companies. Even where a formal division exists, businessmen must bribe officials in order to do business, making officials de facto participants in the management process, almost always to the detriment of corporate government (Kimmage, 2009).

In the early 2000s, the Kremlin has cracked down on the country’s freedom of the press and nationalized all television stations. Although radio and print media have not suffered to the extent that television has, radio broadcasters and newspaper editors are under constant pressure to please the government (Rulyova, Hutchings, &
Beumers, 2009). As a result, mainstream mass media, from nationwide television stations to major newspaper, are now either under direct state control or owned by Kremlin-friendly business magnates. Violence against reporters is routine, and a number of critical journalists have been murdered. The official message resounds most clearly on television, where dissenting voices are blacklisted; newspapers enjoy somewhat more freedom, but with the balance clearly in favour of the Kremlin. Where the state does not have direct control, proxies like Gazprom-Media, which owns television networks, radio stations, and newspapers, perform a similar function although they sometimes allow their holdings a longer leash, as Gazprom-Media does with radio station Echo Moskovy.

Since 1991 the Russian government has produced a body of legislation that regulates the Internet (Strukov, 2009). The first period of Russian Internet policy-making was characterized by legislation closely resembling Soviet-style bureaucratic oversight, at the expense of both the free growth of the industry and practical efficacy in executive policy-making. On many occasions, the government attempted to establish control over the Internet, but had to withdraw under pressure from Internet communities or due to the lack of financial or legal sources. Later the government showed concern for two other areas related to Internet use, namely, the security of the new technologies and national identity. The first concern was grounded in the Cold War-motivated rivalry felt by the military-industry complex and in obsessive fears of terrorist threats and possible political instability arising from the war in Chechnya. The Russian government saw the Internet as a system that contributed to the divulging of information of national importance. The second concern was aimed at the protection of a means of mass communication from an overwhelming foreign influence evident in the presence of foreign Internet providers, and especially in the use of computers manufactured abroad.

Further, as in the case with China, the Federal Security Service (FSB) made Russian ISPs install surveillance devices and high-speed links to local FSB departments which would allow the FSB to directly access Internet users’ communication (Libertarium, 2006). Those that did not co-operate, were forced out of business by the FSB which at the
time controlled the official ISP licensing procedure in Russia. In 1999, the policies around such surveillance had been changed – FSB is now required to obtain a warrant prior to looking into user’s electronic traffic. Nevertheless, it is still claimed that such law is not being implemented in practice (Kozlovskii, Strukov, & Zassoursky, 2007).

Early Internet practices in Russia coincided with the liberating processes of perestroika and the first post-perestroika years, when freedom of speech and the right to publish were most valued. And extension of the samizdat culture and the dissident movement, the Internet provided its users with an opportunity to communicate instantly with people in Russia and abroad and to independently voice, exchange and discuss their opinions (Strukov, 2009).

As the Internet gradually became a mass medium online freedom was significantly curtailed. This was due to more sophisticated Internet technologies that allowed the tracking of a user’s Internet activity through the ‘digital trace’, that is, a record of online movement and publications. The increasing reach and proliferation of the Internet, and especially the rise of online media, compelled the Russian government to acknowledge and scrutinize new media technologies and establish a set of regulatory practices to achieve its political goals (Strukov, 2009).

New legislation concerning the Internet was introduced at the time of Putin’s re-centralization of executive power through a division of the country into seven administrative regions, run by Putin’s loyal representatives, as well as the appointment of regional governors announced in the wake of the Beslan siege. The Chechen campaign was used as a pretext to establish the notorious ‘verticality of power’; the horizontal architecture of the Internet, with its opportunities for creating multi-level, multi-party networks, is at odds with these consolidating political tendencies (Strukov, 2009).

The Internet at first glance appears to contradict the rule, with independent voices readily available in some outlets, and even flourishing on blogs. Yet cyberspace is also the focus of increasing manipulation, with a vast array of Kremlin-funded websites
promoting illiberal ideologies and regime-friendly forces stepping up their ownership of key infrastructure, like hosting sites for bloggers. And if web-based new media in functioning democracies have improved access to information and forced mainstream media to become more competitive, mainstream media in Russia simply ignore inconvenient online revelations and discussions, cutting off the cycle of feedback and response that has enlivened the press and enhanced accountability elsewhere (Kimmage, 2009). Morozov (2010) too, suggests that if one reads the Western press, it is easy to get the impression that the Internet in Russia is an effective and extremely popular vehicle for attacking — if not overthrowing the government. Nevertheless, while civic activism — raising money for sick children and campaigning to curb police corruption is highly visible on the Russian Internet, it is still entertainment and social media that dominate the Runet. The most popular Internet searches, Morozov adds, are not “what is democracy?” or “how to protect human rights?” but for “what is love?” and “how to lose weight?”

Furthermore, websites like Russia.ru represent government’s experiment in Internet television supported by the Kremlin’s ideologies. The website does bit hide its connections to the Kremlin. In fact, senior members of the Kremlin’s various youth movements even have their own shows on it. The need for such a site stems from the Kremlin’s concern that the transition from the world of television, which it fully controls, to the world of the Internet might undermine government’s ability to see the agenda and shape how the public reacts to news. From the government’s perspective it is far better to keep young Russians away from politics altogether, having them consume funny videos on Russia’s own version of YouTube – RuTube (which is owned by Gazprom-Media), or on Russia.ru, where they might be exposed to ideological messages as well. This is further to the concerns expressed by the Russians politicians openly. In an interview with Novye Izvestia in June of 2004, Lyudmila Narusova, senator for the republic of Tuva and member of the Federation Council’s commission on information policy, declared that the situation with Internet technologies in Russia called for the immediate intervention of the appropriate authorities due to the fact that on the Internet, one can find most incredible rumours, including those that
denigrate people’s reputations. And while one can sue a newspaper, with the Internet this is virtually impossible (Strukov, 2009).

Rulyova et al. (2009), however, believe that Internet-based news and information sources operate relatively freely in Russia. Strukov (2006) too suggests that although Moscow made tentative moves towards policing the Internet, such efforts are currently producing little to no impact on the freedom of information in Russian cyberspace. Therefore, even if the Kremlin did attempt to create something similar to the “Great Firewall of China” to block access to certain sites, the government is rather unprepared to implement or to reinforce such measures (Rulyova et al., 2009). Some experts also question whether content filters deployed on a national basis could really do their job. Igor Ashamov, general director of Ashmanov and Partners, which specializes in developing programs to combat spam stated that a number of large Russian companies have been using filters for years to prevent employees from accessing certain websites (Ashmanov 2005). However, implementing such a system for the entire Internet in a country, as has been done in China, would be impossible in Russia. All ISPs would have to route their traffic to a single server (Strukov, 2009).

In addition, the increasing prosperity of Russians is aiding Internet adoption levels as well. Russia’s changing demographics, specifically the movement of young people to the cities, further promotes Internet use through work, home access and Internet cafes. The increasing convergence of mobile telephony and Internet access is also promoting greater levels of Russian web use. With mobile phone penetration reaching 100 per cent coverage by the end of the 2006 and the near ubiquity of web-enabled cellular phones in today’s marketplace, most Russians have at least the option of gaining access to portions of cyberspace and utilizing many functions of the Internet via mobiles (Rulyova et al., 2009).

As the most recent media technologies, the Internet has the potential to combine all previous media in a personal, interactive form that can be virtually free from state or corporate control or censorship. The Internet offers the promise of a truly democratic form of information exchange by combining the immediacy of the telephone, the
intimacy of post, the graphics of television and the interaction of a community bulletin board (Strukov, 2009).

As it will be demonstrated further in my discussion chapter, the potential of the Internet as a tool for building a democratic society has been challenged in Russia by the reality of the digital divide. Defined as a social and financial gap between those who have and those who do not have access to new digital technologies, this divide has increased, especially in the last five years.

Furthermore, the Internet in Russia does not reflect the interests of all tiers of society. Television is a channel of information that reaches virtually all citizens of the Russian Federation, whereas the Internet is available only to better-off members of society. In spite of the digital divide, the Internet in Russia does hold a symbolic status of a truly liberating technology and a democratic space. In addition, the Internet in Russia has qualities of the spoken rather than written word and thus resists censorship in the way the spoken word resisted censorship in the Soviet Union. Newspaper and television channels can be controlled and the books burnt, but as the Soviet authorities learnt, it is impossible to control what people say in the privacy of their kitchens (Strukov, 2009).

3.4.2 China – “first generation” censorship

In the Soviet Union under Lenin and Stalin, the media were used as a propaganda tool to spread Communist ideology. Soviet totalitarianism is considered by democratic nations to be a particularly notorious example of the use of brainwashing techniques, but the Chinese government has copied it wholesale. In fact, the pupil has surpassed the teacher. Before the 1980s, the Chinese media were controlled mainly through ideological means. In the 1990s, the government began to employ more sophisticated techniques of media control. Today, the methods are more insidious, ingenious, and successful than they ever were in the Soviet Union, and they are less easily noticed by the international community (Qinglian, 2008).
From the start, the Chinese government made it very clear that it intends to control the Internet. A set of regulations was published in 1994 - a year before the Internet became commercially available in China. According to the document, the Ministry of Public Security was made responsible to “supervise, inspect and guide the security protection of computer information systems” and to “investigate criminal activities” that undermine computer networks (Tai, 2006, p. 98). However, no specific regulations were made about which type of content was forbidden on computer networks (Tai, 2006). As a result, follow-up regulations were published in 1997. According to the new document, it was forbidden to use the Internet to create, replicate, retrieve, or transmit information that is “harmful, subversive, obscene, or is damaging the state or state organs”. Still, it was not clear which information could be considered punishable; hence, the Chinese government reserved every right to decide, in many cases after the fact, what is punishable and inappropriate (Tai, 2006).

On the one hand, the Chinese government’s enthusiasm about the Internet has been largely driven by the realization that the Internet represents a commercial gold mine for the country’s economy in the new century; on the other - the government fully recognized that an unregulated computer network could undermine the power and authority of the communist regime. Thus, as Hachigian (cited in Tai 2006) points out, the government has adopted a three-part Internet strategy: “providing economic growth and some personal freedoms, managing the Internet’s risks, and harnessing its potential” (p 97).

According to the January 2008 Blue Book of Social Development produced by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, more than 50 million Chinese read blogs regularly, making them “an important channel for people to voice their opinions about important events” (Qiang, 2011, p. 203). In addition, there is a growing evidence that Internet has become an empowering tool for Chinese individuals to engage in a variety of innovative, expressive acts of communication that are rarely seen in the highly controlled media landscape (Tai, 2015). Tai (2006) also suggested that Chinese Internet users are avid content producers. Compared with their counterparts in cross-
national settings, Chinese netizens display a much higher propensity to both contribute to, and rely on, user-generated content of the Internet.

As users have become more and more sophisticated in bypassing official blockages to spread “harmful information” on the Internet, the Chinese state has launched several campaigns to train special police task forces to deal with online rebellious behaviour. The Internet laws in China stipulate that content and service providers are responsible for the content that their website carry or that is available from the physical facilities in their jurisdiction. Those that are in violation may face fines or closure or both. As a result, individual service or content providers have set up their own monitors patrolling such relevant areas of cyberspace as bulletin boards and chat rooms, and deleting materials that may appear offensive to official censors. Almost all Chinese portals have appointed their own 24-hour cyber-managers to enforce the official rules to varying degrees. Internet café personnel also check which websites are accessed by their visitors (Tai, 2006).

Empirical studies have demonstrated that comparing to the mainstream media, television stations and newspapers, blogs in China contain information that is both critical and divergent from party-state propaganda (Esarey and Xiao, 2011; Leibold, 2011). However, according to Leibold (2011), political content contributes only towards a small portion of China’s current cyber activities. In fact, entertainment, sports, relationship and investment-related sites dominate China’s largest weblog portals (Kluver et al., 2010; Peters, 2002; Yang, 2009). Liang and Lu (2010) also suggest that one should be not be surprised by the fact that the Chinese netizens are generally quite politically apathetic however are highly supportive of government controls in cyberspace. Morozov (2011) justified such point of view by stating that in authoritarian countries like China, government does in fact use the Internet to depoliticize the population due to the lack of existing civic organization and free media. In other words, Morozov (2011) suggests that the Chinese netizens are distracted by the Internet from forming any alternative thoughts or taking any actions against the regime.
Tai (2006), Tang (2005), Zheng (2008), and Yang (2009), however, argue that Internet, and blogs in particular, have allowed Chinese netizens to express their viewpoints, creating a “digital civil society”, which challenges “cultural stereotypes, corrects misinformation, and resists symbolic violence (meaning violence inflicted on society by the ruling elites through labelling, categorization, and other discursive forms)” (p. 213). Yang (2009) adds that such communication in the end “expands citizens’ unofficial democracy by undermining state control and generating political transparency”.

Furthermore, after examining a nation-wide representative survey data set, Lei’s (2011) empirical study finds that the Chinese netizens are more politically opinionated than the consumers of the traditional forms of media. In addition, Lei (2011) argues that the likelihood of netizens supporting the norms of democracy is rather high. The Chinese netizens, he continues, are prone to be more critical about the party-state and the political conditions in China. As a critical citizenry, China’s netizens constitute a new social force challenging authoritarian rule. MacKinnon (2005), however, notes that although the Internet and blogs are the tools one can use to politically express him or herself, some offline activities are also required. Unlike Morozov, MacKinnon (2005) makes a set of assumptions about Internet’s ability to further political debate, critical and rational thinking – characteristics which are applicable to the Western-style democracies only (Yang, 2009). Judging from the level of debates and the lack of systematic empirical evidence, the political role of the Internet is arguably the most contested area in the Chinese communication research (Rosen, 2010).

Nevertheless, in the last 20 years that China was connected to the Internet, a number of issues have become evident. The Chinese government has certainly demonstrated a strong will, as well as the capacity to regulate not only the Chinese netizens but also multinational companies, like Google and Yahoo by making them remove the unwanted content off certain Internet sites available to the citizens of China (Lei, 2011). This is done as part of the regulation techniques applied by the Chinese government in order to manage what the Chinese people can learn, discuss and organize online. Not only does it include cyber-attacks which affected Google in late
2009 when a number of human-rights activists’ accounts were hacked into, it also involves device and network control, domain name control, localized disconnection and restriction. This approach is very similar to the one taken in the Xinjiang province after ethnic riots took place in July 2009. In addition, surveillance of Internet and mobile users also contributes to an atmosphere of self-censorship.

Furthermore, according to Bandurski (2008), at least 280,000 people had been hired at various levels of government to work as “online commentators”. Also known as the “fifty-cent party”, these people are paid to write posts that show their employers in favourable light in online chat rooms, social-networking services, blogs and comments section of news websites. Deibert and Rohozinski (2008) characterize such cyber-control as being largely “first-generation”. At the same time, the Chinese government aggressively uses the “second- and “third- generation” techniques also, as the Great Firewall alone is not as effective. This, together with the low penetration rate of the Internet in the country and the lack of well-established civic culture in the Chinese society are amongst the factors that still keep the Internet from becoming a fully democratic force in China. Tai (2015), however, suggests that as the Internet further penetrates every aspect of life in Chinese society and as it becomes deeply ingrained into the everyday life of ordinary Chinese citizens, the revolutionary effects of the Internet on Chinese civil society will become more earth-shaking.

Deibert and Rohozinski (2008) also point out that a number of governments, particularly those in the former Soviet republics and in the Middle East and North Africa, have bypassed the “first-generation” control almost completely, and instead are concentrating their energies on “second- and “third- generation” controls, most of which are quite subtle, difficult to detect and compatible with democratic or pseudo-democratic institutions. MacKinnon (2011) adds that strong governments in weak or new democracies are using second- and third-generation Internet controls in ways that contribute to the erosion of democracy and slippage back toward authoritarianism. Whether or not that is the case, I will be exploring it in further paragraphs.
3.4.3 Countries of the Arab Spring movement – “second- and third generation” censorship

The Arab Spring is a term used by scientists, new commentators and journalists to describe the demonstrations, protests, and revolutions that took place across a number of Arab countries since 2011 (Hintler, 2012). The most prominent among those movements are the Tunisian and the Egyptian revolutions, as both succeeded in removing their authoritarian regimes (Wyre, 2010; Bly, 2011). According to Hintler (2012), several organizations made use of new technologies as well as of traditional methods to mobilize large parts of society. While little social media was used in the initial phase of the planning in order to circumvent state control, Facebook and other social networking sites became the main instrument for mobilization.

The wave of protests began in 2011 in Tunisia and Egypt and then spread across North Africa. While the problems were socio-economic in nature, it was the highly anticipated political changes that led masses onto the streets. The experience of continuous political stagnation and unequal distribution of wealth in the region produced a very quick de-legitimization of the existing political regime. The quick spread of the new communication media of Internet and mobile phone and digital social networks contributed to the rapid spread of the protests (Schmitz and Wolters, 2012).

According to Lynch (2011), the uprising posed a serious challenge and the long-term evolution of a new kind of public sphere may matter more than the immediate political outcomes. Although it may be too soon to know whether these uprising will have brought about fundamental transformations of any of these regimes, they have already decisively reshaped the nature of regional politics and challenged many assumptions about the power and durability of authoritarian Arab states.

Social media that became an alternative news platform during the days of the Arab Spring too played an important role. User-generated content of the protests, such as videos, photos and small posts were uploaded in real time and became visible to
millions of people. Acts of aggression by the state, therefore, were documented and used to influence public’s opinion.

According to Hintler (2012), despite relatively low Internet penetration rate in Egypt of approximately 15 per cent, social networking sites were intensively used and played a crucial part during the movement. Participants used it for communication, to mobilize and coordinate masses, and to raise awareness about the movement across the globe. Hintler (2012) goes as far as suggesting that in the hands of Egypt’s Internet-savvy youth, social networking sites were powerful tool used to challenge the Mubarak regime and contributed substantially to the success of revolution. In addition, the expansion of electronic media has transformed communication behaviour. Mobile phones and social platforms have grown in popularity and the number of Internet users have quadrupled since 2005 reaching the levels of Arab world. Despite that, the role of Twitter in organizing the Iranian Green Movement protests appears to have been greatly exaggerated, with its main impact being on external perceptions of the protest rather than on internal political organization or mobilization (Lynch, 2011).

Some suggest that the wave of protest activity in Egypt between 2003 and 2006 took advantage of the opening of the political opportunity structure around a series elections and referenda. Facebook helped catch the Egyptian authorities off guard in 2006, for instance, but not in 2007, when the regime was ready and waiting for a second attempt, while in 209 the Iranian regime was able to quickly marshal a daunting array of responses (Lynch, 2011).

Lynch (2011) also states that the new media, both television and Internet-based social media, posed a particular challenge to such Arab states because of the existing intense state censorship and initially low Internet penetration. Lynch proposed four ways by which the new media can be seen as challenging the power of Arab states. They include the promotion of contentious collective action – when the new media increases the prospects of collective action by raising the costs to authoritarian regimes of repression especially by documenting atrocities like it happened during the televised unleashing of government-backed thugs on Tahrir Square on February 1,
2011, which ultimately cost the Egyptian regime more in international outrage than it gained in intimidation. Limiting or enhancing the mechanisms of state repression is also amongst the techniques proposed by Lynch. He suggests that authoritarian regimes as well as activists have learned to use the new powers of the Internet. Vodafone, for example, collaborated closely with the Egyptian government, providing details on subscribers and sending out pro-regime text messages during the crisis. In addition, Googling passengers arriving at airports has become a standard practice, with border police demanding to see private Facebook pages and other personal information which may reveal political activity. Third technique involves affecting international support for the regime by undermining it, which could prove devastating to the regime survival. And lastly, affecting the overall control of the public sphere. By becoming producers of information and circumventing the editorial control of state censors and mass media outlets, the youth will become new kind of citizens, better able to stand up to the instruments of state control.

The aftermath of the Arab Spring remains unclear for both protesters and the world. The Syrian social unrest has resulted in ongoing violent conflict, while Libyan society still experiences serious problems with the formation of a new government after the murder of Kaddafi and the end of civil war. Tunisia and Egypt were able to choose new presidents and form new governments. The latter were themselves dismissed soon after they came to power: the first elected post-Mubarak government collapsed in mid-2013 after a year of almost uninterrupted protests. These two cases are especially interesting as constitutional exits of leaders who were in autocratic office for less than one year were generally cause by coups and not protests between 1945 and 2002 (Dagaev et al., 2014).

For all the turbulence, the Internet’s most fundamental challenge to the state will likely be generational rather than immediate, and is likely to work through widening and changing the operation of Arab public spheres rather than by directly changing the Arab states. The rise of networked communication and the transformed competencies of growing numbers of individuals across the region – particularly the young, educated urban elites who have traditionally played an outside role in driving
Arab politics – may be profoundly altering societal norms, religion, the state, and international politics (Lynch, 2011).

The events in North Africa and the Middle East were watched closely by the Central Asian states. Like the countries of the Arab Spring, a number of Central Asian countries are exporters of resources and labour. There are other similarities too, including the unequal distribution of countries’ wealth in societies combined with a relatively high economic growth. As in the case with the countries of the Arab Spring, in Central Asia the young generation suffers a lack of opportunities for advancement. Schools and universities in Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are primarily instrumental for ideological indoctrination.

Parallels between the republic of Central Asia and the states of the Arab Spring are found not only with respect to socio-structural factors, but also in their political systems. Political reforms in Central Asia have failed to bring much needed democratic transformation. The following section will discuss this further.

3.5 Summary

This literature review demonstrated a large amount of the existing research available following social media driven uprisings and the movements in which the new media and online participation played a crucial role.

Although a number of scholars believe in new opportunities created by the online public sphere, others found little evidence of the increased political participation through the use of new tools like social networking sites. Nonetheless, most agree that currently ideas, news and information get to travel the world in seconds, crossing the nation borders in no time.

This literature review has also demonstrated that different generation techniques are used by authoritarian states to control the content citizens create as well as get access
to. In addition, socio-economic realities of a number of states also limit ICT access of individuals, therefore, leading to the generally lack of well-established civic culture in the states mentioned above.

Although the role and impact of mass media has never been underestimated in the Soviet Union, leaders of each country were never short of censorship techniques that were applied during and after the fall of the Union. After gaining independence, some countries, like Russia, held on tightly to the techniques used to monitor the media, including the new forms of it; others, like Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, were on their path to become more democratic after a number of revolutions, however, fell back into the pre-independence state of heavy censorship and control.

Nevertheless, most states recognized the importance of social media and the impact it has on the formation of the opinion of the politically aware citizenry. As a result, countries like China, apply the most sophisticated techniques of control of the online space: such as hiring people to comment positively online to represent government and its rulers in the best online.

Such techniques have been and are applied and used by the Kazakhstani government, especially following the bloodshed events in Zhanaozen, which are discussed in the following chapters.
Chapter IV: Research Design

4.1 Introduction
This chapter outlines the overall research design and main methodological approach applied to this research. The justification for the content analysis approach is presented; which is followed by the methods of data collection (a combination of qualitative and quantitative content analysis of both traditional and online social media content). Unit of analysis is also presented and justified. The chapter concludes with the outline of ethical considerations, which needed to be taken aboard when conducting this research.

4.2 Methodology

According to De Vaus (2001), social research needs a design or a structure before data collection or analysis take place. The function of a research design, as De Vaus (2001) puts it, is to ensure that the evidence obtained enables us to answer the initial question as unambiguously as possible. Obtaining relevant evidence includes specifying the type of evidence needed to answer the research question.

This research is exploratory in nature. Exploratory research is conducted when little or no data exists and initial investigations are required to determine the boundaries of more expensive work to follow (Given, 2008). Most of exploratory studies are qualitative-data dominated, although they can be supported with descriptive statistics such as indexes, percentages, and frequency distribution if needed (ibid). This research takes a predominantly qualitative oriented content analysis approach in order to map the blogging activities. Qualitative content analysis examines significant aspects of texts that are not amenable to quantitative methods. It can also reveal evidence and patterns that are difficult to notice through casual observations (Baumeister & Vohs, 2012). By mapping and analyzing the blogging sites content and participation, the researcher identified netizens’ activities in Kazakhstan’s blogosphere.
A two-stage approach was used in this research study. The first was quantitative in nature, which applied the content analysis approach in order to identify the blogging sites and the state newspapers. Gathered data was categorized into three main groups, based on where the information came from: bloody bloggers, free bloggers, other bloggers, Kazakhstan Pravda and Golos Respibliki. This stage helped identify how much data was available on the research topic selected, and who the main news and content generators were both online and offline.

The second stage was qualitative in nature with the framing and agenda setting theories used. During this stage a number of themes have emerged which included: how the conflicts in Zhanaozen was framed, who the voice of the events was, what the story subjects of the news reports and blogs were, the sources which were used and the languages the stories were written in. Findings from this stage were used to examine whether or not political participation online has an impact on political participation in Kazakhstan.

In the course of the data collected phase of this research, privacy and anonymity was respected by the researcher, and only open-to-public blogging sites were used.

4.3 Content Analysis

Content analysis is a method of analyzing written, verbal or visual communication messages (Cole 1988). It was first used as a method for analyzing humans, newspaper and magazine articles, advertisements and political speeches in the 19th century (Harwood and Garry 2003). Today, content analysis has a long history of use in communication, journalism, sociology, psychology and business, and during the last few decades its use has shown steady growth (Neundorf 2002).

Content analysis as a research method is a systematic and objective means of describing and quantifying phenomena (Krippendorff 1980, Downe-Wambold 1992, Sandelowski 1995). It is also known as a method of analyzing documents. Content
analysis allowed the researcher to test theoretical issues to enhance understanding of the data. Through content analysis it is possible to sort words into fewer content-related categories. It is assumed that when classified into the same categories, words, phrases and the like share the same meaning (Cavanagh 1997). The aim is to attain a condensed and broad description of the phenomenon, and the outcome of the analysis is concepts or categories describing the phenomenon.

Krippendorff (2004) believes that in the field of social sciences, content analysis is one of the most important research techniques. The content analysis, he continues, is exploratory in nature, portrays data as representations of texts, images, and expressions that are created to be seen, read, interpreted, and acted on their meanings (p. 5). Furthermore, what differentiates content analysis from other methods of inquiry is the fact that texts are analysed in the context of their uses. In this research, this refers to how images and texts were used by the Kazakhstani government, those bloggers supporting them and the opposition community both online and offline.

According to Weerakkody (2009), content analysis is the method used to analyse messages sent by the mass media ‘in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner to measure and compare variable categories of the message characteristics’ (p. 144). As the principles of content analysis across media are the same, such approach can be adapted to fit other media texts – such as magazines, TV, radio, websites, blogs, video blogs, and social networking websites. The advantages of using such approach include the ability to examine the research question as well as test hypotheses. In addition, such design could also be considered a starting point when researching media effects. In other words, ‘results obtained from a content analysis of media messages can be used for future studies – field or case studies to examine what audience members think about specific media messages or the groups, issues and events depicted in the media’ (Weerakkody, 2009, p. 146).
Content analysis is a method that may be used with either qualitative or quantitative data; in addition, it may be used in an inductive or deductive way (Elo & Kyngas, 2007). This study used the inductive method, as there was not enough former knowledge about the phenomenon and the knowledge available was fragmented. An approach based on inductive data moves from the specific to the general, so that particular instances are observed and then combined into a larger whole or general statement (Chinn and Kramer 1999). Like in the case with this study, online political participation during the 2011 Zhanaozen events are looked at and applied to the political participation in a country as a whole.

According to Elo and Kyngas (2007), whether researcher is taking inductive or deductive approach, both include three main phases: preparation, organizing and reporting. The preparation phase starts with selecting the unit of analysis. Depending on the research question, the unit of analysis can be a letter, word, sentence, portion of pages or words, the number of participants in discussion or the time used for discussion (Robson 1993, Polit and Beck 2004). Graneheimer and Lundman (2004) pointed out that the most suitable unit of analysis is a whole interview or observational protocols that are large enough to be considered as a whole and small enough to be kept in mind as a context for meaning unit during the analysis process.

The next step involved in inductive content analysis is to organize the qualitative data. This process includes open coding, creating categories and abstraction. Open coding means that notes and headings are written in the text while reading it. After open coding, the lists of categories are grouped under higher order headings (McCain 1988, Burnard 1991). The aim of grouping data was to reduce the number of categories by collapsing those that are similar into broader higher order categories (Burnard 1991, Downe-Wamboldt 1992, Dey 1993). The purpose of creating categories is to provide a means of describing the phenomenon, to increase understanding and to generate knowledge (Cavanagh 1997).
Abstraction means formulating a general description of the research topic through generating categories (Robson 1993, Burnard 1996, Polit and Beck 2004). Each category is named using content-characteristic word.

Content analysis is perhaps the fastest-growing technique in quantitative research. Content analysis may be briefly defined as the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics. It includes careful examination of human interactions. Content analysis is applicable to many areas of inquiry, with examples ranging from the analysis of naturally occurring language to the study of newspaper coverage of the Greenhouse Effect.

Within the context of this research project which aims to identify the role social media plays in Kazakhstan, a content analysis approach was considered the most appropriate. Elements of the framing theory were also applied when analyzing the content of Yvision.kz and LiveJournal as well as of the content of the printed media, and the two Kazakhstani newspapers in particular: Kazakhstanskaya Pravda and Golos Respubliki as well as of its online version.

There are a number of steps involved when conducting a content analysis, some of which were vital for this research: sampling, selecting the unit of analysis, analysing data and interpreting the results which also included the use of the framing theory which was discussed in the Literature Review section of this research.

4.4 Data Collection Methods

Data for this research was collected via non-participant observations on both LiveJournal and Yvision blogging platforms. Such method of data collection is largely used in case study research, which in this instance were the events of 2011 in Zhanaozen. The role of the researcher was to enter a social blogging system to observe the interactions of Kazakhstani bloggers in order to gain a direct understanding of a phenomenon in its natural context (Liu & Maitlis, 2010).
Data from the newspapers was again collected via non-participatory methods in order to gain the understanding of how the events of 2011 were covered in the traditional forms of media.

4.5 Identifying data categories

A two-stage content analysis was conducted. The first stage was seen as the general mapping of the content and participants. The following five questions, formed by the literature, were developed for the initial content analysis which generated separate themes with sub-themes used in the subsequent qualitative content analysis:

- How was the conflict in Zhanaozen framed?
  The preliminary research identified the main sub-themes: socio-economic issues; law and (dis)order; political instability caused by the opposition in exile; political instability caused by the internal force; conspiracy; and other.

- Who was the voice of the events?
  The following were identified: national government; army; police; protesters; Kazakhstan’s Prosecutor General’s office; KazMunaiGaz; and political opposition both inside and outside of Kazakhstan.

- What/who were the story subjects of the news reports/blogs?
  The three main subjects included: discussion about social networking website; socio-economic issues; and the role of print media and TV in covering the events in Zhanaozen.

- Which sources have been used?

- What was the main language of blogging (Kazakh, Russian, or English)?

The early mapping of the content and of the participants also identified the following groups of bloggers: those selected by the government to visit the city, also known as the bloody bloggers; those who went on the trip to Zhanaozen independently, named by others as the free bloggers; and all remaining bloggers who either supported the first or the second group or remained neutral, in this research known as the other bloggers.
4.5.1 Identifying blogs on Yvision and LiveJournal

According to Weerakkody (2009), selecting the unit of analysis is extremely important when applying a content analysis approach. In print or written media, unit of analysis could either be a symbol, a word, phrase or a theme. When analysing Internet messages, the unit of analysis can be a pop-up advertisement, an entry in a blog, a webpage, chat-room discussion, a message board, or YouTube content (ibid).

In order to identify the online platforms from which data would be collected for this research, it was crucial to identify the key words and themes that referred to the riots in Zhanaozen in 2011. Having researched the event online, it was evident there were a number of topics that were discussed not only in Kazakhstan but also beyond its borders: in former Soviet Union countries and in Europe among members of the Kazakhstani diaspora. They included Nazarbayev’s reaction to what had happened, the role of one of the most prominent protesting oil workers Roza Tuletaeva and what had happened to her after the arrest, as well as the possible role of the Kazakhstani opposition, which is mainly located abroad and is made up of Kazakhstani diaspora.

In order to retrieve the list of blogs created on both LiveJournal and Yvision (available during the data collection time), a search engine was used on both websites and also though the links that were available on them using the following key words:

- Zhanaozen
- Nazarbayev
- Roza Tuletaeva
- Zhanaozen uprising 2011
- Zhanaozen protests
- Oil workers of Zhanaozen
- Mass killings of the oil workers in Zhanaozen
- Rakhat Aliyev and Zhanaozen.
In the process of identifying the blogging sites and creating content categories, it was soon realized that the *LiveJournal* platform was not used as much as expected by the Kazakhstani bloggers since it was blocked in the country and not many knew how to circumvent the restrictions by employing proxy services. Instead, the main blogging platform turned out to be the *Yvision* website. The so-called *bloody bloggers* mainly used it to write about their trip to Zhanaozen. Those who went on a separate, independent trip to Zhanaozen, were also posting their blogs and comments on *Yvision*. However, a number of Kazakhstani bloggers referred to messages posted on *LiveJournal* when reporting on events in Zhanaozen, hence, some of the *LiveJournal* posts were also taken into the consideration.

### 4.5.2 Identifying newspapers

Within the chosen methodology, analysis of the two types of newspapers is also vital, as print media still plays an important role in focusing people’s attention towards a certain issue (Tiung & Hassim, 2009). The analysis of the national newspapers also allowed me to see what impact the bloggers had on the mainstream media.

The process of identifying the traditional sources of media included searching for two national newspapers which were accessible to the majority, read throughout the country and available online due to the researcher’s geographic location outside of Kazakhstan. As a result, the state-run *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda* and the opposition-supported *Golos Republiki* were selected. During the research, the latter had been closed and re-opened a number of times which reflected on the frequency of news updates. For this reason it was decided to include *Golos Respubliki*’s online version – *Respublika*.

PDF versions of the two newspapers were used. *Golos Respubliki*’s website was included as it provided quick news updates as the events in Zhanaozen were unfolding and it was rather a useful page to use. It is also often used like a blogging platform.
where people can comment on the articles posted which added another dimension to the study.

4.5.3 Ethical Considerations

Social media websites (SMW) are increasingly popular research tools. Social media websites provide opportunities for user participation in the creation and display of multimedia data. These popular websites are increasingly emerging as valuable research tools. There are several aspects of SMWs that provide unique advantages to researchers. First, SMWs present innovative opportunities to examine the displayed online behaviour and beliefs in a context that is naturalistic, as it is part of the participants’ daily lives. Second, SMWs allow a researcher to reach out and conduct studies within the populations that may be hard to reach in traditional research, such as underserved populations. Finally, in many cases, this research may be feasible and low cost, as it can be conducted from the researcher’s office (Moreno, Goniu, Moreno, & Diekema, 2013).

Although this research involves individuals who either partnered with the government or went against it when covering the events in Zhanaozen, their messages were open to public. Unlike in the research conducted by Nuermaimaiti (2013) in which the identity of bloggers needed to be protected to prevent them from any harm, participants of my research openly identified their affiliation and were eager supporters of either the government, or the opposition.

In addition, the focus of this research was either of textual, photographic or audiovisual messages of both the blogging platforms and the two popular newspapers, not the actual users. Furthermore, when the free bloggers interviewed Zhanaozen locals, they prevented any names and other personal information leaking online to avoid the Kazakhstani government’s political persecution of those individuals.
Hence, taking into consideration the above, it is safe to assume that the issues of privacy and anonymity are not a problematic aspect of the data collection part of this research.

4.6 Summary

In conclusion, two-stage content analysis approach was used when conducting this research. First stage was quantitative in nature. During this stage, two social networking websites as well as two national newspapers were identified, which presented a sample frame for this research. Further, identifying a number of key words and phrases took place. Then with the help of search engines provided by both networking platforms, blogs that were of the most interest, were identified. However, in order to establish key articles in both newspapers required manual reading of the two as no search engine could be used.

During the second stage of the content analysis, qualitative approach was applied. A number of messages were selected from the sample frame for further analysis. Data gathered was organized into a number of categories, which included: framing of the conflict, voice of the conflict, sources for the information, and which language the information was presented in. In other words, this stage was set to provide an overall understanding of how Zhanaozen events are portrayed not only online, but offline too. Findings from this stage were used to explore the impact of online political activism on political processed in Kazakhstan.

During the entire process of data selection, privacy was respected at most and only publicly available messages were used for this research.
Chapter V: Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents empirical findings from content analysis of messages posted on the two blogging platforms - LiveJournal and Yvision, and of news stories of the two national newspapers – Kazakhstanskaya Pravda and Golos Respubliki as well as of its online edition Respublika. The process of data collection for this research was conducted in two stages: ‘mapping’ of the existing data both online and offline, and was then followed by the qualitative content analysis.

The findings chapter is organised around the following sub-themes: how the conflict in Zhanaozen was framed; who the voices of the events were; and the language the stories were written in. The first section presents findings around the sub-theme of frames of conflict. In this section, findings are grouped into two sections, mainstream traditional newspapers and online social media. Secondary sub-themes are identified like the emerging categories of bloggers (‘bloody bloggers’, ‘free bloggers’ and ‘other (neutral) bloggers’) and two newspapers (Kazakhstanskaya Pravda and Golos Respubliki, and the online version of the latter – Respublika portal).

The second section looks at the sub-theme of voice and representation. Similarly to section one, findings are grouped and presented around the two main data sources. I conclude with the findings based on section two which were established in the process of mapping: which language did the bloggers and journalists use when reporting on the events?

5.2 Framing of the conflict in the print media

Findings from the content analysis indicated that print media used the following key frames in their cover of the events: law and disorder, political instability, socio-economic and national security issues. There were some variations between as the sections below present.

5.2.1 Kazakhstanskaya Pravda
*Kazakhstanskaya Pravda* is a national newspaper which fully supports the government and is distributed daily. There are around 110,000 copies printed daily. The newspaper is also available online in the PDF format (*Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, 2014).

From the period of 16\textsuperscript{th} of December of 2011 when the riots occurred until the 27\textsuperscript{th} of March of 2012, when the first trials of the oil workers began, the events in Zhanaozen were mentioned 77 times. Peaking twice – two days after the event (16 out of 37 articles were dedicated to the event) and when Nazarbayev visited Zhanaozen and the Mangistau region himself (16 out of 80 articles covered the visit and the situation in Zhanaozen on the 24\textsuperscript{th} of December). In 43 editions during this period, the events in Zhanaozen were not mentioned at all.

![Framing of the conflict in *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*](image)

According to the graph provided above, *law and disorder* was the most prominent sub-theme and was covered in the 44 per cent of all articles. It was followed by the *political instability* – 31 per cent. *Socio-economic problems* and *national security issues* were named with almost equal amount of coverage – 12 per cent and 13 per cent accordingly.
The findings have indicated that the state authorities including President Nazarbayev himself saw the conflict in Zhanaozen and its aftermath through the prism of *law and disorder* primarily. In particular, Nazarbayev was referred to and quoted the most by the journalists of the state-run newspaper. When journalists of *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda* sought to establish the causes of the conflict in Zhanaozen, they referred to Nazarbayev, who stated that the criminal groups took the advantage of the labour dispute between the workers and the *KazMunaiGas* oil company. Hence, those responsible for the acts of *law and (dis)order* shall be found and prosecuted.

*The labour conflict of the oil workers shall not be confused with the criminal acts committed by those who decided to take advantage of the situation. We will find where the funding of such acts comes from and who is standing behind it (Nazarbayev, 2011).*

Journalists of *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda* had also quoted the President who, in another instance, again, reassured that both the locals of the Mangistau region as well as the majority of foreign experts strongly condemn the illegal actions of the criminal groups, which have led to the deaths of innocent people, hence Nazarbayev approves of the harshest measures against them. He, however, did not specify which foreign experts he was referring to. However, given close political and cultural ties, they are most likely to be the Russian pro-Putin experts who traditionally support Nazarbayev’s regime.

*The vast majority of experts, including the foreign ones, agree that the riots in Zhanaozen were the ‘planned actions of a provocative nature’. This is also supported by the fact that riots were organised and timed well (Nazarbayev, 2011).*

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6 *KazMunaiGas* – is the state-owned oil and gas company of Kazakhstan.
Nazarbayev had also indicated that the Kazakhstani political opposition, which includes his former son-in-law – Aliyev,\(^7\) as well as the former banker – Ablyazov\(^8\), who has recently been arrested as per Nazarbayev’s request by the French police, and is now in the process of being extradited to Kazakhstan, is responsible for the events in Zhanaozen by stating the following:

*We will look for those who organised the events regardless of where are hiding.*

*Trials will take place and those responsible will be punished. As for the oil workers, they shall be released that is if they were part of the crowd only and are truly innocent (Nazarbayev, 2011).*

**Political instability caused by the opposition** was yet another prominent framing sub-theme in *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*. Authors of the articles mainly pointed at the opposition-in-exile, again, supporting Nazarbayev’s initial statement in which he blamed for the uprising being orchestrated from overseas. Here, not only were the Kazakhstani state officials quoted, but also some pro-state academics and politicians from Russia who are known for supporting Nazarbayev’s ideas aimed against the opposition. The Director of the *Information Centre of Moscow State University*, Alexei Vlasov, suggested that the situation in Zhanaozen was abused by the political opponents of the current regime who were trying to manipulate the protesters and the situation from London. In other words, naming those who Nazarbayev preferred to leave anonymous - Ablyazov in particular.

*Obviously, the situation was used by the opponents of the government who were trying to manipulate the protests from London... The oil workers of Zhanaozen ended*

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\(^7\) Rakhat Aliyev – was a former senior official of the government of Kazakhstan who died in an Austrian prison awaiting trial on charges of murder. He was chief of Kazakhstan’s tax police, deputy chief of KNB state security service, ambassador to Austria, and first vice foreign minister. Until June 2007, Aliyev was married to Dariga Nazarbayeva, the eldest daughter of Nursultan Nazarbayev.

\(^8\) Mukhtar Ablyazov – is a Kazakhstani businessman, former banker, politician in exile who opposes Nazarbayev’s regime. He is currently the subject of a legal investigation in the UK High Court after he allegedly embezzled billions of dollars out of *BTA Bank* in Kazakhstan between 2005 and 2009; and now faces a jail threat for failing to comply with a High Court order to reveal his true assets. In January 2014, he was ordered to be extradited from France.
up being a bargaining chip and a tool for loosening stability in the hands of the opponents of authorities hiding abroad (Vlasov, 2011).

This very same point of view was supported by some academics in Kazakhstan as well. A number of letters written by academics including some prominent professors were published in the Kazakhstanskaya Pravda newspaper strongly opposing the events in Zhanaozen and also calling the political opposition in exile to take responsibility for the bloody events in Zhanaozen. The newspaper, for example, quoted Zhomart Koshakarov, the Dean of the Taraz State University located in the Southern part of Kazakhstan, part of the country which is traditionally loyal to Nazarbayev. Koshakarov, along with a number of other academics, blamed the conflict by stressing the fact that Kazakhstan is a peaceful oasis in the world and no opposition should take advantage of a labour conflict and turn it into a political issue.

These unprecedented acts of riots in Zhanaozen were the obvious provocation. Kazakhstan lives in peace and harmony with other nations, and is rapidly developing its economy as well as improving the welfare of its citizens. However, some cannot get over it...Hiding from the justice abroad, they are dreaming of the bloody events taking place in the country (Nazarbayev, 2011).

Young Kazakh politicians and business groups who have the support of the government by receiving the financial subsidies via DAMU Entrepreneurship Development Fund established by Nazarbayev, again blamed the third parties and the opposition in particular. In addition, the journalists of the Kazakhstanskaya Pravda newspaper themselves backed government’s assertions:

Dissatisfaction of the oil workers of Zhanaozen was used by third parties to organise the riots in town to disrupt the celebrations of the 20th anniversary of Kazakhstan’s independence and to create a negative environment (Olga Semyonova, the journalist, 2011).
Law and (dis)order, political and socio-economic instability was listed as the reason behind the events in Zhanaozen by 12 per cent of all articles only which makes it much less prominent than the previous two categories.

The head of the major government corporation Samruk-Kazyna9, Umirzak Shukeev, named the oil company’s HR department inability to see and solve the problems to be the reason behind the events in Zhanaozen. Although being the government’s representative, he clearly kept away from involving the political opposition-in-exile into the conflict. It seemed that a number of government’s representatives, especially those close to Nazarbayev, including Nazarbayev’s daughter – Dariga10 – who is an important player in Kazakhstan’s politics, opted out of blaming the opposition openly. Instead, they suggested that further work in the business sector should be done to promote the importance of healthy relationships between employers and employees.

Kazakhstan learnt its lesson after the riots in Zhanaozen, which highlighted the problems in the HR department... Despite the nature of the conflict, there is always a solution. And this is all linked directly to the professionalism of HR (Shukeev, 2011).

Despite the above, the new Kazaks or Oralmans 11(also referred to as ‘returnees’, ethnic Kazahs) seemed to become a scapegoat in some articles of the Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, accused by some to be the root of instability. Atynash Dzhaganova, former Head of the Kazakh Department of Migration and Demography, held the newcomers responsible for the events stating the Oralman decided to use the situation to their advantage and get the attention of the media, especially of the foreign one. The so-called ‘Oralman problem’ has been present in the society prior to

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9 Samruk-Kazyna – is a sovereign wealth fund and joint stock company in Kazakhstan which owns many important companies in the country, including the national rail and postal service, the state oil and gas company KazMunaiGas, the state uranium company Kazatomprom, Air Astana, and numerous financial groups. The state is the sole shareholder of the fund.

10 Dariga Nazarbayeva – is a Kazakhstani lawmaker and daughter of the President Nazarbayev. She was a head of the state-run news agency – Khabar. Dariga formed the Kazakh political party Asar, which later merged with the pro-Nazarbayev party Otan.

11 Oralman is an official term used by the Kazakhstani authorities to describe ethnic Kazahs who have immigrated to Kazakhstan since its independence in 1991. Oralmans usually come from the neighbouring countries of China, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Russia and Kyrgyzstan and also from countries with notable Kazakh minorities: Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.
the December riots in Zhanaozen due to a large number of ethnic Kazakhs immigrating mainly from north-eastern part of China and other former Soviet Union Republics. This probably would have not turned into a problem, if it was not for the fact that some newly migrated Kazakhs abused the social system by re-entering the country numerous times to ensure they get financial support for entering Kazakhstan an new settlers two-three times in a row. Some people in Kazakhstan also resent the fact that Oralmans do not learn the Russian language and/or mix with the local population to integrate better. This, again, indicates the importance of the Russian language to the majority of Kazakhs. Given that the western part of Kazakhstan is predominantly mono-ethnic (99 per cent per cent ethnic Kazakhs), it appears to be the ideal location for the newly migrated Kazakhs who can only speak the Kazakh language but not Russian. However, as the majority of immigrants do not have higher education qualifications, this limits Oralmans to apply for the low-paid, laborious jobs only. And as outlined by some journalists of the state-run newspaper, this could have resulted in the desire to organise the uprising in order to increase their payments to the level of the qualified engineers in the oil-rich area of Kazakhstan.

When I was the Head of the Agency for Migration and Demography, many people arrived into this oil-rich region; as a result, many social problems have occurred... Many could not receive the Kazakhstani citizenship... however, when the law was passed, not many wanted to become Kazakhstani... they ended up with their own plans, which sometimes weren’t that straightforward. People knew very well they are not acting in accordance with the law, nevertheless, they protected their ‘right’ desperately, and created a lot of drama around themselves to attract the attention of mass media, especially of the foreign one (Dzhaganova, 2011).

Lastly, given the heated debates that were created online, the journalists of the state newspaper felt obliged to mention the role of the Internet in the number of articles. Specifically, the President of the Kazakhstani Internet Association – Sabirov, was quoted, who suggested that some used the Internet to create the information war and, as a result, affect the national security and stability of the country.
Inevitably, someone is trying to draw our country into chaos and lawlessness. But our country will always be a model of stability and an example of a steady growth. A huge amount of wrong information is given, including the one on the Internet, where the real information warfare is taking place. And we all need to participate adequately in this process, as the majority did (Sabirov, 2011).

In his statement, Sabirov backs Nazarbayev’s ideas, by, again, highlighting the fact that Kazakhstan represents the land of stability and prosperity. And this, according to Sabirov, points at those who are willing to damage the image of such an ideal state, hence, a lot of misinformation is being uploaded online. However, Sabirov sums it up by stating that the majority of online users reacted adequately to what happened in Zhanaozen, which in the eye of a person supporting the current government means – the majority supported Nazarbayev. Sabirov refers to KazNet only, and to those online platforms which are only available in Kazakhstan. However, according to the data gathered, considering the platforms which are banned in Kazakhstan, the majority, on the contrary, object the actions taken by the Kazakhstani government and Nazarbayev in particular.

5.2.2 Golos Respubliki
Golos Respubliki is an independent newspaper which was published once a week. Over the years, the newspaper has been closed down by the Kazakhstani officials numerous times and re-opened under new names (word ‘Respublika’ was included in all versions) due to its opposing nature of the current authoritarian regime. According to Respublika’s then Editor-in-Chief, Tatiana Trubachyova, in 2010 there were 25,000 copies printed every week, but soon the publishing houses in Kazakhstan denied printing the paper in fear of being shut down by the Kazakhstani government, hence the number of copies had to be dramatically reduced as they were printed by the newspaper’s staff. In 2012, 12,500 copies were printed every week. However, almost one million people read the newspaper every month online. As of 2013, only 99 copies of the newspaper were printed per week. Such a low number of copies meant that the newspaper did not need to be officially registered with the Kazakhstan’s Ministry of
Mass Media and, therefore, the government could not stop the distribution of it in the country. Nevertheless, in the second half of 2013, the newspaper seized to exist (Tleulina & Tillmann, 2012).

Until the newspaper’s closure, Tatiana Trubachyova was the Editor-in-Chief of Golos Respubliki de jure; de facto it was Irina Petrushova, who was later forced to leave Kazakhstan due to the political pressure from the Kazakhstan’s government. Petrushova now resides in Moscow, Russia, and was therefore unable to lead the Kazakhstani newspaper until its eventual closure due the recent law that forbids the foreigners from being Editor-in-Chief of Kazakhstan’s state newspapers.

Between the 16th of December and the 27th of March of 2012, 13 issues of the newspaper were distributed. In 12 of them, the events in Zhanaozen were covered, with the peak being on the 23rd of December - 14 out of 33 published articles, which was the first issue distributed right after the bloodshed in Zhanaozen. In total, there were 98 articles on Zhanaozen out of 397 put in print.

Similarly to Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, 40 per cent of all articles framed the events to be the result of law and disorder. Another 40 per cent looked at it from the socio-economic perspective, unlike the state-run Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, with its 12 per cent of all articles only dedicated to the socio-economic issues. Both, national security and political instability seemed to be less prominent framing sub-themes in the Golos Respubliki newspaper, having 10 per cent each.
Journalists of the *Golos Respubliki* newspaper believe *socio-economic conditions* both in the region and in the country have led to the uprising in Zhanaozen. These problems were identified as social injustice, the inability of the local and state authorities to intervene and solve the emerging issues, class struggle of particular members of the society, ethnic tensions among Kazakhs and newly migrated Oralmans\(^{12}\), lack of job opportunities, poverty, control of all natural resources by a small group of elite which is close to President Nazarbayev, and the poor working conditions of the protesting oil workers.

The *Golos Respubliki* mainly held the authorities responsible for what happened in Zhanaozen due to not resolving *socio-economic issues* in the country generally and in the Mangistau region in particular. In addition, some, including the Editor in-Chief, Trubachyova, had suggested that the government, despite stating that it should not get involved in the labour dispute of the economic nature, had already done so by siding with the oil company. In addition, she claims, the Kazakhstani authorities had every possibility to force the company to compromise with the oil workers, but decided to opt out instead.

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\(^{12}\) Oralman, or “returnee”, is an official term used by Kazakhstani authorities to describe ethnic Kazakhs who have immigrated to Kazakhstan since its independence in 1991 (Kueppers, 2004)
We again are told that the government had to no right to intervene in a labour dispute. However, it has already done so by falsifying the criminal cases against the activists who were supporting the oil workers. And by doing so, the government sided with the employer (the oil company). Secondly, it is the duty of the government to be an arbitrator and to prevent such conflicts from escalating. Thirdly, AkOrda\textsuperscript{13} had every opportunity to put pressure on the employer to find a reasonable compromise (Trubachyova, 2011).

Journalists of the *Golos Respubliki* have quoted the local residents of Zhanaozen a number of times. The locals have suggested that it was Nazarbayev, who “shot” people dead by failing to resolve socio-economic problems of the region and by allowing the police to use bullets to calm people down during the celebration of the Independence Day on the 16\textsuperscript{th} of December.

The officials agreed that the existing socio-economic unrest in the region resulted in the uprising in Zhanaozen. According to the Prosecutor General of Kazakhstan, Daulbayev, social unrest in Zhanaozen and strikes of the oil workers were caused by financial theft committed by both former and current Mayors of Zhanaozen – Babakhanov and Sarbopeev. The latter, however, was soon fired, as a result of the situation in Zhanaozen. It is worth noting, that again, as in the case with Dariga Nazarbayeva’s comment given to *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, in this instance she too blamed the corruption to be the reason behind the events, rather than pointing at the opposition-in-exile.

\textit{Theft committed by the former and the current mayors of the region – Babakhanov and Sarbopeev contributed to the social unrest and the strikes performed by oil workers in Zhanaozen (Nazarbayeva, 2011)}

In addition, the Prosecutor General also saw the traces of some hooligans being involved in the clashes, which led to oil workers getting involved in the acts of law and disorder in Zhanaozen. One of the locals, whose story was cited by the journalist of

\textsuperscript{13} The Ak Orda is the official workplace of the president of Kazakhstan, located in the capital city of Astana.
the newspaper, had also framed the event as an act of *law and disorder*, however, unlike the officials, did not blame the oil workers. Instead, the local suggested it was a provocation organised by third parties and the oil workers had nothing to do with it.

A very different interpretation of the events in Zhanaozen was presented by the Head of the Investigation Committee – Serik Karamanov. He suggested that those injured by the police were the oil workers, as they were the ones who organised the riots which led to the number of deaths.

*Essentially, all of the wounded are the instigators of the riots in Zhanaozen, because they were all at the forefront of the strikers (Karamanov, 2011).*

In contrast, the oil workers themselves believed the ones behind the bloody events in Zhanaozen were foreign to town and in fact, the protesting oil workers had warned the local authorities of a number of strange people arriving on the eve of the Independence celebrations, however, the warnings were ignored. In fact, this point of view was also supported by the former leader of the *Alga – Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan*14 opposition party, Vladimir Kozlov, who stated that the oil workers would have never benefited from what happened in Zhanaozen on the 16th of December, hence, the root of the problem should be looked for elsewhere.

Nazarbayev’s daughter, Dariga Nazarbayeva, who was in charge of the state television station – *Khabar* for over 10 years before it was fully nationalised, has also led *Asar* political party. Her party later merged with Nazarbayev’s *Nur Otan* party and allowed the latter to get the maximum amount of votes in the 2007 Parliamentary elections. Dariga Nazarbayeva is now a member of the Parliament, and she was also referred to by journalists on the pages of the *Golos Respubliki* newspaper. Although Nazarbayeva confirmed there were some *socio-economic issues* in the region, she insisted that the root of the problem lies deeper than it seems. Nazarbayeva, in particular, blamed the

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14 Alga Party was founded in 2005 and is now the largest opposition party in Kazakhstan. Although Kazakhstani authorities have refused to allow the party to register as an official party, Alga has joined the Civil Society Movement Khalyk Maidany (People’s Front) in criticising the government of Nursultan Nazarbayev.
local authorities for not acknowledging the state of the problem, which was more than just a labour dispute between the oil workers and the oil company.

*The incompetence of those responsible for the events in Zhanaozen is quite obvious; the incompetence of those who allowed the situation to drift, not take into account the specifics of the regions, and its complex processes of internal and external migration. And of course, this hasn’t started yesterday. The tension was building up for quite a while. The roots of this tragedy are much deeper than they seem, and it’s more than just a labour dispute (Nazarbayeva, 2011).*

Here she, in one way, supported her father’s decision, but also stayed neutral by not blaming the opposition-in-exile openly, and rather held those in Kazakhstan responsible for what happened in Zhanaozen. This could also be due to the fact that one of the prominent members the Kazakhstani political opposition is Rakhat Aliyev, Dariga’s former husband, whom she, according to Aliyev, was ordered to divorce if she wanted to remain in Kazakhstan and stay politically active.

The idea that the riots were organised by the state officials themselves was also present on the pages of the *Golos Respubliki* newspaper. According to the relatives of those arrested in the aftermath of the events in Zhanaozen, the arson attacks on the state oil company and the mayor’s office in Zhanaozen were organised by the police, not the protesters. In fact, *Golos Respubliki* newspaper somewhat supported this claim by suggesting that the organisers could be located in Astana. This, the journalists believe, was done to gain some form of influence over the Kazakhstani society and over Nazarbayev in particular.

*This tragedy occurred as a result of a provocation, organised by the government itself or any part of thereof, by certain forces in AkOrda, which are interested in influencing public’s and Nazarbayev’s opinion in particular in order to achieve some particular goals (Golos Respubliki, 2011).*

The idea that certain members of the Kazakhstani political elite are fighting for their future after Nazarbayev has been quite popular in the country over the past few years.
In particular, journalists of the *Golos Respubliki* had suggested that there are now two main political groups in the Kazakhstani government. One led by the President, and another by Nurtai Abykayev, the head of KNB. Many have been speculating that Abykayev is trying to overthrow Nazarbayev’s regime by discrediting his actions in Zhanaozen in particular.

In addition, *Golos Respubliki* supported this preposition by stating the following: firstly, the riots in Zhanaozen could have been organised to solve the problem with the oil workers once and for all and to also scare the civic society of Kazakhstan by demonstrating that the authorities do not care about the criticism coming from abroad. Secondly, the journalists of the newspaper suggest, the riots could also have been organised by a group of the political elite from the inside to influence the current regime. The idea that some other political group could have been involved in the process had also been promoted by Nazarbayev’s representative, Ertysbayev. He, however, mainly referred to the destructive forces coming from abroad, mainly referring to the former banker turned politician-in-exile, Ablyazov.

**5.2.3 Respublika Portal**

Articles and short posts are uploaded daily to the online version of the *Golos Respubliki* newspaper – *Respublika-kaz.info*. Between the 16th of December of 2011 and the start of the trials in March of 2012, the events in Zhanaozen were covered 279 times out of 547 online publications. Although the online version of the *Golos Respubliki* newspaper mainly reiterates the ideas published in the hard copy of the newspaper, the events in Zhanaozen received a greater coverage due to the fact that the website is updated daily, and sometimes, a few times a day. Hence, the number of articles on Zhanaozen and its aftermaths is greater than in the print version of the newspaper.
In the majority of the articles (42 per cent) published online, it was suggested the bloody events in Zhanaozen were the result of political instability in both the Mangistau region and in the country. Interestingly, this was rather similar to how the conflict was framed in Kazakhstanskaya Pravda. The journalists of the state-run newspaper also thought political instability was the driving force behind the events (31 per cent). However, number of articles in the hard copy of Golos Respubliki, which looked at the event through the political instability framework attributed to only 10 per cent.

The editorial team of the Respublika portal were in solidarity with their colleagues from the Golos Respubliki newspaper by suggesting that political instability could be in the centre of events in Zhanaozen. In particular, the journalists claimed the authorities initiated the riots on the main square in Zhanaozen. A local resident, protester and a supporter of the arrested oil workers, Zhanar Saktaganova, suggested that the mayor of Zhanaozen Orak Sarbopeev, as well as the director of the local branch of the OzenMunaiGaz oil company Kiykbai Eshmanov provoked the situation by organising the celebrations of the 20th Anniversary of Kazakhstan’s Independence, despite being warned by the protesters themselves that if some radical activities were
to take place, the oil workers have nothing to do with it. In addition, Saktaganova disagrees with Nazarbayev’s statements where he blames the opposition.

Both the Mayor of the city and Eshmanov provoked it all. Eshmanov wanted it and he achieved it! We warned the authorities that no celebrations should take place here. We warned that if something happens, we have nothing to do with it. You can now hear the President saying on TV that it was all organised from abroad. But it wasn’t! The Mayor (of Zhanaozen) and Eshmanov provoked the riots! (unidentified local resident of Zhanaozen, 2011)

On the 18th of February, 2014, a new article appeared on the portal suggesting that the political insiders claim Aslan Mussin, the former chief of Nazarbayev’s administration is under house arrest for possibly being involved in the December 2011 events in Zhanaozen. Journalists of the Respublika portal also claim that Mussin’s son – Asylbek is involved with certain religious groups in Kazakhstan, which aim to overthrow the current government.

The locals in Zhanaozen might have disagreed with Nazarbayev, however, the journalists of the portal referred to the President’s advisor, Ertysbayev, who once again held the opposition-in-exile responsible for the tragic events in Zhanaozen. In particular, Ertysbayev named Rakhat Aliyev, Nazarbayev’s former son-in-law and a banker-turned-politician – Ablyazov to be responsible for the uprising in Zhanaozen. The latter, Ertysbaev stated, promised that the current political regime will eventually be swept away. Hence, K+ channel (the channel which was financially supported by Ablyazov and covered the events in Zhanaozen, but have since been closed down), Respublika portal and other forms of mass communication are actively being used in “the information war” against the Kazakhstani authorities.

Rakhat Aliyev is known to be hiding on Malta. As there is no Kazakhstan’s embassy, he, roughly speaking, is still making provocative statements from the deep underground. As for the role of Mukhtar Ablyazov, it is also very well known. Two years ago he stated that the current regime will be thrown away and has begun preparing for this actively. And in this respect, K+ channel, Respublika portal and other mass
media channels are also actively participating in the information war which was targeting the authorities in Kazakhstan, and the country itself. We must name things what they really are (Ertysbayev, 2011).

Journalist Rasov of the Respublika portal has provided a view slightly different to the one above by quoting the leader of the Centre of Social Partnership, Baineshov, who believed the opposition is responsible for what happened in Zhanaozen; however, unlike the pro-governmental representatives, Baineshov suggested the events in Zhanaozen were down to the opposition in Kazakhstan that was supported by the Americans and Europeans.

In Zhanaozen, the opposition is showering the locals with their newspapers and Internet resources, that people cannot see anything... This is the opposition which is being sponsored by the Americans. I don’t know how many there are exactly, possibly 10 or 20 people. They are being financed by the US or by the EU, and the opposition works for the money (Baineshov, 2011).

The journalist of the portal, Rasov, however, disagreed with such statements (which were also made by the Russian political analyst - Solobozov) and suggested that those who believe the events in Zhanaozen were organised by third parties to implement the Arab Spring in Kazakhstan “are simply crazy” (Rasov, 2011). Solobozov (2011), in fact, said that 95 per cent of Kazakhstani citizens support Nazarbayev and his desire to integrate with both Russia and Belarus. And this is precisely why some people in the government are unhappy due to losing the control over the Western part of Kazakhstan which is rich with oil. Hence, such drastic measures were taken to destabilise the situation.

Journalists of the KazTAG information agency who were quoted by the Respublika portal believed the events in Zhanaozen were the result of the long-term conflict amongst the local political elite, the oil company, and all of those who have access to the region’s oil, such as Nazarbayev’s family, his closest friends, and possibly, the European countries which are involved in the oil drill processes. And although the
involved parties were interested in getting the control over the financial gain, the disagreements could have the direct impact on the investment climate of Kazakhstan. Kazakhstani government’s inability to solve the occurred socio-economic problem in Zhanaozen might give an indication to both the Chinese and the Westerners that Nazarbayev is unable to control the oil-rich region of western Kazakhstan. As a result, investors might feel the need to negotiate with the local Mangistau political elite instead, which could only lead to the de-centralisation of the power in Kazakhstan.

Furthermore, the journalists quoted one of the bloggers of the Yvision.kz blogging platform who developed the ideas of political conspiracy further. The unknown blogger named the person responsible for the bloody events in Zhanaozen - Paul Murphy, the member of the European Parliament.

*Paul Murphy – Western agent who is aiming at destabilising the situation in the region and is organising another Orange Revolution (unknown blogger, 2011).*

Here, the blogger attempted to look at the problem in Zhanaozen from a conspiracy theory point of view, holding the Western countries, and the European Parliament in particular, responsible for the uprising. Such views are somewhat popular in the former Soviet Union, given the recent events in Ukraine in particular. It was suggested the US government had supported the Ukrainian opposition both during the Orange Revolution in 2007 and during the most recent political events, which resulted in Crimea becoming part of Russia. In Kazakhstan, those who support pro-Putin government believe that the West only tries to destabilise the situation in the countries of the former Soviet Union in order to benefit from its natural resources.

However, the opinions about the causes for the Zhanaozen events expressed by the Respublika portal were divided. Anatoly Ivanov (2011) had suggested that those responsible for Zhanaozen 2011 do not come from the opposition parties, but are rather close to Nazarbayev himself. This, Ivanov claims, could be justified by the fact that Nazarbayev himself admitted he was not aware of how bad the situation in
Zhanaozen was, and despite wanting to visit the region numerous times, was advised against it.

I was planning on going over there during summer, however, I was assured that everything was going well, all the problems were being solved, that people were calming down as well as provided with jobs. Then I decided to go there in September, and again, everyone, including KazMunaiGas’s top management told me there is no need in doing so as everything was being sorted. It appears that I was misled (Nazarbayev, 2011).

In addition, one of the protesters who had been interviewed by the portal suggested that President’s second son-in-law, Timur Kulibayev, could have also been involved to cover up the instances of mass theft in the region. Furthermore, the wives of the arrested oil workers were positive of the fact that the local authorities were behind the atrocities.

Lastly, the authors of the Respublika portal also covered the events in Zhanaozen from the socio-economic perspective. Kazakhstan’s prominent political scientists – Adzhar Kurtov and Dosym Satpayev, named socio-economic instability to be the main reason of the event. Satpayev (2011) also added that despite the growing discontent, the authorities would do nothing to solve the problem. And although the state representatives tend to support the official line of the conflict, a member of the Kazakhstani parliament – Kairat Mami, agreed that although the hooligans were in charge of what happened in Zhanaozen, nevertheless initially the conflict was driven by the socio-economic unrest in the region.

Another state official – Umirzak Shukeev, agreed with his colleague. In the interview given to the Russian newspaper Kommersant, which was later re-posted by the

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15 Timur Kulibayev – is a Kazakhstani public figure, and son-in-law of Nazarbayev. Kulibayev has held several positions in important state-owned enterprises that manage Kazakhstan’s natural resources, and has immense influence over the country’s hydrocarbon industry. He is the former Chairman of the Management board of Samruk-Kazyna. As of March 2011, he is the third richest man in Kazakhstan.
Respublika portal, Shukeev confirmed there were many reasons behind the dramatic events in Zhanaozen, however, the socio-economic and civil unrest lies in the centre of it. Shukeev (2011) blamed both the local government and the OzenMunaiGaz oil company in their inability to solve the addressed problems of the protesting oil workers (Shukeev, 2011).

There are many reasons which have led to the tragic events in Zhanaozen... The first conclusion which we have made for ourselves is inability to solve labour disputes. Rather than constructing a dialogue, we only made the matters worse by massively laying off the workers. To put it simply, there was lack of communication and respect for the oil workers in Zhanaozen. Once the conflict was settled and people returned to work, I met with them a number of times. They have given us some valuable advice and they also suggested ways of eradicating corruption within the enterprise (OzenMunaiGaz) (Shukeev, 2011).

The leader of the Kazakh Union of Muslims agreed with the above statements. He suggested that despite the fact that the conflict was provoked by some, the core of the conflict lies in the state’s inability to solve socio-economic problems in the region. He also highlighted the problems with the human rights issues in Kazakhstan and overall corruption the oil workers are also experiencing in the region, and which need to be addressed accordingly.

It should be recognised that no matter what provoked the situation, origins of the conflict have some very deep social roots. Excessive monopolisation of power at all levels and as a consequence, inability of citizens to influence the administration of the state, inequitable distribution of income generating horrific social contrasts, corrupt officials and the law enforcement official determined the riots in the western part of the country (Leader of the Kazakh Union of Muslims, 2011).

Dina Tokbayeva, of the Respublika portal sums up this framing of the conflict sub-theme by saying that the situation in Zhanaozen was initially driven by the socio-economic instability only, despite what others may suggest:
The situation in Zhanaozen was initially caused by purely economic problems. We can have a lengthy debate suggesting that the oil workers demanded too much, that in someone’s opinion, they earned plenty already. In any case, it was a social conflict which did not get solved. Social vulnerability of people in Zhanaozen is staring right into your face (Tokabaeyva, 2011).

5.2.4 Summary

In summary, to compare the two newspapers, which represent the interests of the opposite sides of the conflict – the Kazakhstani government and the opposition, the findings have indicated that both newspapers saw the cause of the problem quite differently. Although both Kazakhstanskaya Pravda and Golos Respubliki stated that law and (dis)order was a major contributing factor to the unrest in Zhanaozen (about 40 per cent of all articles were dedicated to that), Golos Respubliki’s another 40 per cent of news items were dedicated to the current economic and social instability in the region and in the country as a whole which led to the riots, whereas only 12 per cent of articles in Kazakhstanskaya Pravda looked at the event from such perspective. Although 31 per cent of all articles written by the journalists of the state-run newspaper sought the root of the problem to be in the political instability which was brought upon Kazakhstan, primarily by the opposition-in-exile; only 10 per cent of all articles in Golos Respubliki looked at the events in Zhanaozen through the same prism. It is also important to note, that unlike their colleagues, the journalists of the opposition media considered that the political instability could be caused by those inside Kazakhstan, not by the outside forces, the opposition-in-exile in particular. Roughly about 10 per cent of articles of both newspapers looked at the event from a national security issue point of view.

Surprisingly, the results of the Respublika portal were very similar to the ones of Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, despite it being primarily the online version of the Golos Respubliki newspaper, difference being the frequency of news updates on the portal. As a result, 42 per cent of articles looked at the riots as a result of political instability, in comparison, only 10 per cent of articles in the printed version of Golos Respubliki were dedicated to that. Law and (dis)order as well as economic and social instability
received 27 per cent of articles each. This number is, again, lower than the one in the printed version of Golos Respubliki, and are not similar to the findings based on the articles in Kazakhstanskaya Pravda either.

5.3 Framing of the conflict in Kazakhstani blogosphere

As previously stated, the two blogging platforms which were taken into account during the process of data collection are LiveJournal and Yvision.kz. LiveJournal – is a blogging and networking platform which was initially based in the US, however soon became a Russian-owned social media channel. The website was especially popular in 2011, despite having been blocked in Kazakhstan for two years by then as a result of Rakhat Aliyev’s blogging activities. Prior to its ban, LiveJournal used to be a top service that hosted popular blogs in Kazakhstan where users created communities around political topics. It is suggested that LiveJournal has been blocked due to the desire of the Kazakhstani officials to prevent its citizens from accessing particular politically-oriented blogs (Emrich, Plakhina & Tsyrenzhapova, 2013).

Yvision is a Kazakhstan-based blogging platform where users share and discuss issues related to newsworthy events. It also combines the features of web-blogging and social networks. In the early months of 2011, the websites’ ranking went from below 100th to the top 20 most accessed in Kazakhstan (Alexa.com, 2011). A number of registered users totaled 21,000, with 19,000 of them being active (ibid).

The mapping of the content and the participants of the two blogging platforms identified three main groups of bloggers: those selected by the government to visit the city, also known as the ‘bloody bloggers’, those who went on a trip to Zhanaozen independently, who named themselves the ‘free bloggers’, and the remaining members of the Kazakhstani blogosphere who either supported the first or the second group or decided to remain neutral.

There was a clear distinction between those bloggers, all ethnic Kazakhs, who went on the organised trip to Zhanaozen and appeared supportive of the current political regime in Kazakhstan (also known as the ‘bloody bloggers’) and those who acted
independently and formed an ‘opposition’ group. This group also included a few ethnic Russians. The remaining bloggers engaged in posting on this event either supported one of these groups or followed discussions from a so-called ‘neutral’ position. The latter did not openly support either of the groups, instead they would comment/reflect on the posts made by the ‘bloody bloggers’ or the ‘free bloggers’. This third group was the largest, the most vocal and posted a number of messages regarding the events in Zhanaozen, as well as actively commented on the blogs posted by others. Although the group was not brought together by either the government or those opposing it, there was a sense of unity based on the fact that only 15 or so bloggers made it to Zhanaozen, whereas the rest of Kazakhstani netizens were left behind to watch how events unfolded sitting behind their computer screens.

First the postings of ‘bloody bloggers’ will be introduced, followed by the ‘free bloggers’ and finally by the ‘neutral’ bloggers.

5.3.1 ‘Bloody bloggers’

The Kazakhstani government organised a trip for the bloggers to Zhanaozen to cover the aftermath of the events of the 16th of December. The group received the following name from the government and the bloggers themselves – Zhanaozen – through the witnesses’ eyes. The group consisted of six bloggers (Baglan Aidashov, Iskander Salikhodzhaev, Sabina Sadenova, Karlygash Nurzhanova, Zhomart Amirkhanov and Alisher Yelikbayev) and two journalists from Kazakhstani news websites Bnews.kz and tengrinews.kz (Renat Tashkinbayev and Anar Bazmukhambetova). However, the group is better known under its alternative name – the ‘bloody bloggers’ – that was assigned to them by the rest of the blogging community of Kazakhstan.
Only a small number of the ‘bloody bloggers’ stayed active online. Sabina Sadnova was one of those who posted about her trip to Zhanaozen regularly. The rest of the bloggers were either inactive, or had decided to set their Twitter and Facebook accounts to private mode so that the content was only available to their online friends.

In her first post, which was an introduction to both the trip and the group itself, Sadnova outlined that the bloggers were invited only to cover the aftermaths of the events, not to investigate what initially took place or what had caused them. However, she stated, both readers and bloggers assume that they were doing the opposite. ‘We were invited’, Sadnova continued, ‘because there are currently two channels of communication with the rest of the country of what happened in Zhanaozen: the official TV stations, according to which everything is great, and the opposition, which describes Zhanaozen as hell’ (Sadnova, 2011).

So many people believe that we are conducting an investigation there (in Zhanaozen). That is not true. I will never take such a responsibility. We were invited because two sources of information have been developed: the official, the representatives of which keep on saying everything is great, and the opposition agitators who describe Zhanaozen as hell. That is why we were asked to come. Many know us personally. I personally am thankful to everyone for their trust (Sadnova, 2011).

Here, blogger Sadnova tried to justify the selection process of the members of the pro-government group and their trip to Zhanaozen. She also ensured to state that
although organised by then the Prime Minister Massimov, the group did not represent the views of official media of the country, neither did they side with the opposition, but rather stood as the independent voice.

As stated above, the number of posts by the ‘bloody bloggers’ on the situation in Zhanaozen was limited. Therefore, it was rather hard to make the observation of how the events of the 16th of December of 2011 were framed. However, given the posts available and the short comments made by the bloggers themselves, the group mainly looked at the events through the prism of law and (dis)order. In addition, governmental bodies, the President, Prosecutor’s General office, and the local city council were the main source of information for them; hence, the voices of the state officials were reiterated by the bloggers.

Blogger Sadenova, in particular, quoted the new mayor – Sarbopeev, who confirmed that hooligans were responsible for the events in Zhanaozen, and as a result, should be punished harshly, as not only did they attack the offices of the oil company and the local city council, but they also robbed the local shops and banks.

Again, like most of the government officials, Mayor Sarbopeev stated that the events were organised well in advance otherwise the riots would have not been possible.

*What is clear is that it was a well prepared process. It is impossible to accidentally find a bottle full of kerosene with a wick or end up with a sharp object when you are not happy with what is happening on the main square. This implies certain criminal intentions. Some roles are being assigned. We’ll find this all out during the investigation process (Sarbopeev, 2011).*

Sadenova presents the events in Zhanaozen from the law and (dis)order perspective too by stating that there were around 20-25 people who were leading and managing the rest of the crowd. In addition, being one of the ‘bloody bloggers’, she supported Atynash Dzhaganova, former Head of the Kazakhstani Department of Migration and Demography, who held the newly immigrated Kazakhs responsible for the events in
Zhanaozen. Sadenova added that Oralmans could too have been involved in the protests and hence are responsible. Sadenova also highlighted the socio-economic aspect of the problem suggesting that Oralmans who usually work on a low paid positions could have been the ones protesting against social and economic inequality. In saying so, she also tried to divide the Kazakhstani society (them and us), where the former refers to Oralmans and the latter to the rest of Kazakhstan’s population, regardless of ethnicity. Again, highlighting what appears to be the problem when the new immigrants are not willing to integrate with the local population. Oralmans also not willing to improve their education in order to apply for the highly paid jobs rather than to rely on government’s support.

*There was definitely a backbone of some 15-20 people who led the whole crowd. Oralmans? It is possible. The majority of those protesting are not locals. Oralmans also work in the lower positions in the (oil) company: drivers, mechanics... It is quite possible that they played a certain role but I cannot argue that point (Sadenova, 2011).*

Another bloody blogger – Baglan Aidashev, developed the idea of the socio-economic cause of the conflict further by suggesting that the root of the problem, which led to the events of The 16th of December, lies deeply in socio-demographic problems of the entire region (Aidashev, 2011). Aidashev almost reiterated what Dariga Nazarbayeva has already highlighted about the needs to address socio-demographic problems of the region.

Alisher Elikbayev, another ‘bloody blogger’, seemed to be the only one who tried to stay very opinionated while covering the events in Zhanaozen. In his only post dedicated to the bloody events called “Great. Patriotic. Informational”, Elikbayev stated that as soon as Twitter was shut down in Kazakhstan, the main sources of information were the foreign news agencies and Russian bloggers in particular, who were rather too active. In other words, suggesting that no one could explain better what was happening in the country except for the Kazakhstani people themselves. This could also mean that Elikbayev was rather suspicious of the foreign media in
covering the events. Hence, when he received an offer from the then Prime Minister’s office to visit Zhanaozen, Elikbaev jumped at the opportunity. Elikbayev had also hoped to provide some feedback upon his return from Zhanaozen, however, failed at doing so.

... when I received the offer from the press service of the Prime Minister to go to Aktau and visit Zhanaozen, I could not dare to refuse. I have never been to that region before, and I wanted to see everything with my own eyes. I thought I will be bold in judgments after having spoken with the locals, visited the morgue and detention centre, after having spoken with the commandants and the Mayor of Mangistau region. None of that happened, and I am still very cautious and a little scared (Elikbayev, 2011).

In his only post, Elikbayev did not frame the events, but rather suggested that the opposition media is not interested in hearing first-hand what happened in Zhanaozen and what caused it. They were more focused on who the bloggers were and why those particular bloggers were selected to go on a trip to Zhanaozen.

They weren’t interested in our messages from there, and frankly, they did not care about those died, and whether or not the problem is being solved. For some, it was more important why they weren’t asked to go (to Zhanaozen) and who were those bloggers who went there and for what favours they have been chosen to go (Elikbayev, 2011).

Elikbayev also touched on the subject of the ‘independent’ bloggers going to Zhanaozen. He stated that he tried to contact the group and exchange available information but his request was ignored by the independent bloggers. The blogger suggested that the independent bloggers did so on purpose, to allow them to say that they were unable to get into Zhanaozen.
I contacted all ‘independent’ bloggers who flew to Aktau\textsuperscript{16} with a suggestion to meet and exchange all information available; they promised to ring me back but must have forgotten about us. I had all the notes after meeting people [in Zhanaozen] and all the pictures of Karla Nur\textsuperscript{17}. I think those bloggers could have benefited from that information when writing their articles. But it seems they would very much rather be persecuted and write that they were not allowed in (Elikbayev, 2011).

Elikbayev concluded his informative post by stating the following:

It is harder for us than for those who sent us nasty messages. We have real names, real jobs, and a long-ago established political position. What we hear are the dumb anonymous slogans: “Sold out!”, “Bloody!”, “Pro-government!”, “Official!” I offered to meet those who had their location set to the Mangistau region (here, he refers to online accounts), and those who accused us of corruption. I was ready to listen to their position, to debate, but none of them have responded (Elikbayev, 2011).

Similarly to the earlier post by Sadenova, here Elikbayev tried to justify the trip to Zhanaozen. Elikbayev almost became vulnerable by stating that the reason they have been attacked online by the rest of the Kazakhstani blogosphere was because unlike the rest of the blogosphere, ‘bloody bloggers’ have openly revealed their names, as well as presented their political position.

Given popularity of Elikbayev’s initial post, and the number of comments received after his message, one of the national newspaper Vremya interviewed Elikbayev. The transcript was later uploaded to Yvision.kz by a ‘neutral’ blogger, Ruslan Bahtigareev.

In the Vremya interview, Elikbayev stressed the fact that he is not supportive of any political party in the country. In fact, Elikbayev stated he is not a big fan of Karim Massimov (then the Prime Minister of Kazakhstan) either. The blogger suggested that having centrists’ and independent point of view is always harder, as everyone is trying

\textsuperscript{16} The second largest city in western Kazakhstan and the country’s main seaport on the Caspian Sea. It is located on the Mangyshlak Peninsula and is the capital of the Manghistau Region.

\textsuperscript{17} One of the ‘bloody bloggers’
to pull you to their side. However, people find it is hard to realise that one can have a good relationship with all the parties involved in the politics of Kazakhstan (Elikbayev, 2012).

This could also refer to the fact that traditionally in Kazakhstan if one desires to be politically active, he/she then needs to side with either the Nazarbayev’s regime, or be supported by the opposition, which would eventually lead to either fleeing the country, or leaving all political ambitions behind and doing something else instead.

In the same interview with the Vremya newspaper, Elikbayev also commented on the Kazakhstani government blocking Twitter, the decision he agreed with, to prevent the spread of disinformation. He justified it by pointing at the fact that although Twitter was officially blocked in Kazakhstan and no twits could have been posted from Kazakhstan, yet some people insisted they were posting the messages from Zhanaozen’s main square which means they were producing further falsification of the events.

*It [ban of Twitter] had to be done to stop the spread of disinformation. As you remember, Twitter was shut down [in Kazakhstan]. I was in Malaysia at the time. My newsfeed was quiet. However, there were twits using the “Zhanaozen” hashtag. Meaning people who posted those messages were not in Kazakhstan. However they said they were on the main square and saw hundreds of dead and injured. Are those methods fair? As a result, the authorities have deprived those people of their main weapon at that moment – which was designed to spread disinformation (Elikbayev, 2011).*

In the quote above Elikbayev could have been referring to the events of the Arab Spring in Egypt in particular as it is suggested by a number of studies that many who claimed to be twitting from the Tahir Square in Cairo were in fact physically located in Europe or in the US. Elikbayev, however, forgot that those in the Kazakhstani opposition could have learnt how to avoid the blockage of certain websites on the Internet as a result of continuous video tutorials uploaded by Kazakhstan’s bloggers.
educating those in the opposition how to do so. Hence, the messages could have indeed been posted from Kazakhstan using proxy services. In addition, one of the members of the Kazakhstan’s political opposition – Zhanbolat Mamay – flew to Zhanaozen prior to the uprising to teach the protesting oil workers how to use social media websites. He, however, was later imprisoned for such assistance and released only after promising not to get involved in politics in the future.

And Elikbayev concludes the interview by naming those, who he reckons were responsible for the events of Zhanaozen 2011. The ‘bloody blogger’ believed that blaming some third parties, namely the US, was rather inaccurate. However, the fact that some former Kazakhstanis were involved is quite possible - possibly referring to both Ablyazov and Aliyev.

The rest of the ‘bloody bloggers’ agreed with Elikbayev’s interpretation of the events adding that some ‘forces’ used the oil workers to cause havoc in the region. The bloggers suggested those ‘forces’ were trying to destabilise Kazakhstan by breaking up the society into small groups who would then question the nation’s integrity, unity and stability.

5.3.2 ‘Free bloggers’

Upon the announcement that the government was taking bloggers on an organised trip to Zhanaozen, some other members of the Kazakhstani blogosphere felt the need to cover the events from an alternative perspective, different to the one provided by the ‘bloody bloggers’. They felt that the invited bloggers may be influenced and even corrupted by the government officials. Hence, another group of bloggers was formed, which included four members: Andrey Tsukanov, Dmitry Shelokov, Dina Baidildayeva and Murat Tungyshbayev. Unlike with the ‘bloody bloggers’ who were given such name by the Kazakhstani blogosphere, this group titled their trip as - Bloggers from Zhanaozen. A different perspective. Despite the initial struggle to get to Zhanaozen due to the unwillingness of state and local officials for them to go there, bloggers
made it to Zhanaozen eventually. As a result, they were often referred to as the ‘free/independent bloggers’.

In comparison to the ‘bloody bloggers’, the ‘free bloggers’ were more active online. However, mainly though YouTube, which meant less messages and more videos were posted online. The interviews with the oil workers as well as their relatives, which were uploaded by the ‘free bloggers’ were greatly commented on by the rest of the Kazakhstani blogosphere. It is also worth noting, that the ‘free bloggers’ social media accounts were accessible unlike the ones of the ‘bloody bloggers’. Some of their posts online as well as their YouTube videos were also translated into English.

Most of the messages posted by the ‘free bloggers’ related to their struggle to get to Zhanaozen. The videos were mainly recorded and uploaded by Dina Baidaldieva demonstrating the group’s struggle to get hold of the governmental officials to seek the permission to visit Zhanaozen. The videos also showed how the officials denied the bloggers the opportunity to witness the events in Zhanaozen first hand. This triggered another ‘free blogger’, Dmitry Shelokov to analyse the reasons behind government’s desire to take only their own group of ‘famous’ bloggers to Zhanaozen.
No one in Kazakhstan believes the state media, or rather no one in Kazakhstan doubts the fact that the state media always lies, and to be even more precise, Kazakhstani people never had a chance to question the fact that state media is only capable of lying. Clearly, that is why our technologically advanced Prime Minister Karim Massimov (or his PR team, judging by the number of people in traditional media who serve him, and the number of messages posted supporting him online, he spends a lot of money on this) decided to make use of the so-called ‘well-known bloggers’ in the information campaign (Shelokov, 2011).

Once the group eventually made it to Zhanaozen, the ‘free bloggers’ mainly looked at the events in Zhanaozen from the socio-economic perspective. In particular, suggesting that the local authorities have played an important role in starting the conflict by committing the acts of massive theft and the locals could no longer accept this. The ‘free bloggers’ have also pointed at the fact that there could have been some third parties from within involved in the bloody events of Zhanaozen who tried to challenge Nazarbayev’s power balance and the access to natural resources; in other words, suggesting that political instability which occurred as a result of the riots in Zhanaozen, could have been organised from within the state. Here, the ‘free bloggers’ concur the journalists of the Golos Respubliki newspaper and its portal who suggested that the different political factions within Kazakhstan are trying to gain control of AkOrda.

Unfortunately, the ‘free bloggers’ were not as active in posting messages online as the ‘bloody bloggers’ were and I believe this was due to the following two reasons. Firstly, as Dmitry Shelokov wrote, he is more interested in attracting the international audience and therefore should write in English. Consequently, this led to less bloggers expressing their interest in his content and generating less commenting of the group’s actions online. Secondly, having seen what social media had achieved in the Middle East, Africa and Russia, the bloggers realised the power of it, however, were unable to use it. Therefore, the trip of the ‘free bloggers’ did not quite make an impact on the Kazakhstani society, as the opposition would have hoped for.
5.3.3 Other bloggers

Apart from the two groups of bloggers: the ‘bloody bloggers’ and the ‘free bloggers’, there was also a third group of ‘other bloggers’ who decided to remain neutral when discussing the events in Zhanaozen online. The ‘other bloggers’ attracted a large number of bloggers and were the most active and expressive. The 15 members of this group were selected on the grounds of not identifying themselves with previously stated groups and by being the most active when commenting on the uprising.

![Framing of the Conflict by the Other Bloggers](image)

The majority of the posts (49 per cent) written by this group of bloggers framed this conflict as a result of socio-economic unrest in both Zhanaozen and in Kazakhstan itself. These opinions were similar to the ones outlined by the Golos Respuliki newspaper, Respublika portal, as well as by the ‘free bloggers’. Although the selected members of the ‘other bloggers’ group did not share the same opinion about Zhanaozen events, their views were often opposite to one of the ‘bloody bloggers’ and equally the ‘free bloggers’.

These bloggers discussed the involvement of the Kazakhstani political opposition abroad, influence of the Kazakhstani political elite from within, and the conspiracy theories, which in this research fall under the ‘other’ category. This sub-theme
contributed to 27 per cent of all posts. Law and (dis)order as well as national security scored equally 12 per cent.

A user named subject posted one of the first messages about the conflict in Zhanaozen. In his/her post, the blogger outlined the three possible reasons behind the conflict: firstly, the uprising could have been caused by the government’s inability to solve the socio-economic issues of the region and the problems the oil workers had with their employee; secondly, the ‘evil forces of the West’ could have tried to destabilise the situation in Kazakhstan; thirdly, given almost immediate reaction to the bloody events in Zhanaozen in Vienna, London, and Berlin, the author hints that the Kazakhstani political opposition also could have been involved (subject, 2011).

Here blogger subject almost elaborated on one of the ‘bloody blogger’ Elikbayev’s posts about the immediate reaction to the events in Zhanaozen provided by some of the European nations.

Subject concludes the post by saying that the uprising in Zhanaozen was triggered by the Kazakhstani government and the oil company and their inability to listen to their employees’ concerns. And although the West most definitely supported the protesters, the blogger continues, it was not done to destabilise the political situation in Kazakhstan, but rather to support the rights of the oil workers and the company’s compliance with the requirements of the international standards of working conditions.

...events in Zhanaozen are primarily the result of the discontent of the oil workers, whose requirements weren’t met neither by the authorities, not by their employer... Of course, the support was provided by the West, however, that support wasn’t targeted at destabilising the situation in the country. Their goal was likely to support the working class of Kazakhstan (subject, 2011).

The next blogger, Alexey27, agreed with subject, but referred to the information provided by the mainstream media. Alexey27 suggested that what happened in
Zhanaozen could have taken place in any other part of Kazakhstan or even any other country.

...reasons behind this all is in the wrong relationships amongst people, in the absence of social justice and in the unequal allocation of resources. However, that should not be used as an excuse to protest, neither should it be used as an excuse to kill people (Alexey27, 2011).

The position of the blogger was rather neutral. He did support the ‘free bloggers’ in their claims that the resources were allocated unequally, but he also supported the ‘bloody bloggers’ and hence the government, which opposed the violence, caused supposedly by the oil workers.

Another very prominent blogger and a political activist both online and offline – Bakhtyzhan Toregozhina, had referred to the conflict in Zhanaozen as a result of socio-economic problems of the entire country. In one of her posts, she re-posted a message written by blogger Haym Gretz on Facebook. In it the author again highlighted the problem of social injustice and inequality in Kazakhstan. Gretz also pointed at the fact that neither the government nor the OzenMunaiGaz oil company were willing to face the issues the oil workers were dealing with, and the financial struggle the protesters were going through.

...shame on our authorities. First, for leaving this issue to get to this stage. How many times have they been asked to intervene, to arrange the negotiations, to help find the way out?. Has anything been done yet? Second, shame on you, fat, well-fed, created by the authority for what you are doing now, once it’s all happened, you couldn’t find anything better than to seal people’s mouths (so they can’t talk) (Gretz, 2011).

And although Gretz did accept the fact that the hooligans could have been behind the chaos in Zhanaozen, he, however, declined any possible involvement of the West in what he truly believed was an internal issue.
Blogger maratenok in his post referred to Dossym Satpayev, a prominent political scientist and analyst in Kazakhstan, who too agreed with blogger Gretz. Satpayev suggested that it might be easier to blame the Westerns in what happened in Kazakhstan. Still, the initial reason behind the riots was to be found within the country. And that is the dissatisfaction with the existing socio-economic conditions, dissatisfaction with the authorities that refuse to address these conditions and finally, the dissatisfaction with workers’ living conditions. Satpayev suggested those problems can be solved, as long as the government includes the civic society of the country into the process of resolving such issues.

Alexander Kudrenko (kudrenko) also blogged about the events in Zhanaozen from the socio-economic perspective. He suggested that because authorities are only concerned with organising different meetings, summits, declarations of independence, this has forced people to take more radical measures in order to be noticed. The government, Kudrenko added, had finally broken the strings of people’s patience. Another blogger - Kanzhigaliev agreed with blogger kurdrenko and suggested that the core problem is in indifference and in the fact that the interests of the common men and women are neglected. Kanzhigaliev stated that the situation could be resolved by changing the existing labour legislation, and by facilitating the dialogue between the opponents. Moreover, the blogger Timur Sakenov (iacademy) attempted to justify the actions of those driven by social and economic injustice and who set a number of buildings in Zhanaozen afire. This act, Sakenov suggested, was done to deprive the rich of their property. In addition, the blogger warned both the authorities and the citizens of Kazakhstan, that the conflict in Zhanaozen could spin off and destabilise the political situation in the entire country which would then lead to the disruption of the civil society.

Some bloggers, on the other hand, suggested that although the conflict was about the disagreement between the protesters and the oil company, some third parties were also interested in worsening the conflict; hence, the citizens should unite against those who do not wish prosperity and stability for Kazakhstan.
However, the next blogger, KostyaVox, who at the time of this research was employed by Vox Populi, the blogging website, whose editor-in-chief is Alisher Yelikbayev, one of the ‘bloody bloggers’, re-posted yet another post written by Dossym Satpayev, who did not openly support the opposition-in-exile, neither did he side with the current government. In that blog, Satpayev declined any involvement of third parties in the conflict, including the Kazakhstani political opposition abroad and even the Kazakhstani government itself, which some suggested, could have provoked the oil workers.

In my opinion, the conflict which took place in the west of the country, neither was provoked by some other countries, nor by the government, nor the opposition. It was a result of that ‘boiling pot’, as I call it, which was boiling for a very long time, and now has finally exploded (Satpayev, 2011).

Given the fact that many bloggers have exploited the idea that Nazarbayev and his government could have provoked the conflict to scare the oil workers and to make them silent, Satpayev commented on that too. In his opinion, such idea could not be justified on the grounds that the conflict in Zhanaozen very much struck the image of not only Kazakhstan, but of President Nazarbayev himself. Recently, Satpayev continued, Kazakhstan with the help of Nazarbayev, was presented as an area of stability and prosperity on the international arena. So when the situation in Zhanaozen exploded, and the world community became aware of it, it led to the confusion, primarily amongst the leadership of the country.

Although law and (dis)order sub-theme only contributed to 12 per cent of all blogs posted by the ‘other bloggers’, most of them made rather strong comments.

Blogger kreich, when describing the events in Zhanaozen, suggested that the group of former oil workers who were fired for not turning up to work, organised the riots, arson attacks and looting in the city centre. The attackers, the blogger continued, have been armed to their teeth and knew exactly where to go. Kreich suggested that the riots have been planned in advance, and the journalists of the K+ channel were aware
too, hence their timely arrival in Zhanaozen with the cameras and satellite dishes. The blogger also claimed, that Bakhytzhan Toregozhina as well as Galym Ageleulov – supporters of the Kazakhstani opposition who are located in Kazakhstan themselves, and Mukhar Ablyazov in particular, have helped with the promotion of the event (kreich, 2011).

The ‘other bloggers’ generally agreed with government measures which resulted in cutting off any form of communication to and from Zhanaozen. Moreover, kreich suggested that the authorities have won the first battle in the ‘information war’ which started against Kazakhstan. Interestingly, previously and as demonstrated in my research, the term ‘information war’ has only been used by the pro-government bloggers or those who supported the government. Kreich (2011) was almost making it very clear which group of the travelled to Zhanaozen bloggers he was supporting. He did so by identifying the groups of those, whose posts, in his opinion, were full of lies. The group includes the bloggers Bakhytzhan Toregozhina, Kerich33, and al_lashman. On the other hand, Kreich (2011) continued, there is a number of those whose messages and stories one can and should trust, and those people were: Sabina Sadenova (one of the ‘bloody bloggers’), barrellkz (who, according to kreich, is an oil worker), and MontKristov (political analyst). Kreich (2011) concluded by stating that citizens of Kazakhstan should get the Western propaganda about the non-existent human rights out of their heads.

We were attacked and those who are behind this want to take the properties and the life of ordinary citizens, in addition, no one is going to provide freedom in return for Kazakhstan’s natural resources. However, people of Kazakhstan can prevail and win this the battle (Kreich, 2011)

Blogger Alla Shabaldina (shabaldina) followed the steps taken by the previous blogger by supporting the Kazakhstan’s authorities during Zhanaozen aftermath. In her first post about Zhanaozen, Shabaldina supported the ban of Twitter and confirmed that ‘this is the first time’ she agreed with the government (Shabaldina, 2011).
Shabaldina also agreed with the official statement made by the Prosecutor’s General office, according to which the riots of Zhanaozen were viewed as the act of law and (dis)order. Further, she confirmed *kreich’s* assertions that *K+ Channel* knew in advance of the riots in Zhanaozen, hence, the journalists were in the right place at the right time. Shabaldina also becomes rather radical in expressing her opinion, by stating that those who believe the riots were the result of *social injustice* were very wrong, and that ‘these idiot protesters should have been dispersed immediately, instead of being tolerated for six months. It was obvious, it was not going to end well’ (Shabaldina, 2011).

Looking at the events in Zhanaozen through the *national security* perspective was also quite popular amongst the third group of bloggers (12 per cent of blogs discussed this issue). Alibek Datbayev (*megido*) and Adrien Viedt (*HeadologyGuy*) were the bloggers, who not only supported the authorities of Kazakhstan, but also suggested that the riots in Zhanaozen should be taken seriously as they were the result of destabilisation of the oil-rich Western part of the country by the third parties from the outside: Americans and Europeans in particular.

*I am pretty sure that none of this happened accidentally and am sure the situation has been organised by those who are willing to destabilise the situation in West (yes, yes, there, where the oil is). “Peacemakers” can’t wait to visit us...* (megido, 2011).

Blogger *ivan_prawdorub* developed the above ideas further and suggested that those who present the threat to the *national security* of Kazakhstan had started the processes a year prior to the events in Zhanaozen. They, the blogger continued, disapprove of the independent political decisions Kazakhstan makes and try to sabotage this. Amir Khasenov, *turbo*, also added that the bloody events of the 16th of December should be investigated under the magnifying glass by the KNB, as the riots posed the threat not only to the town itself, but to the *national stability and security* during the celebrations of main event for all citizens of Kazakhstan – the Independence Day.
There was a small number of that fell under the ‘other’ category and contributed to the 27 per cent of all posts. The most prominent topics were on the involvement of the Kazakhstani political opposition from abroad, conspiracy theories, the Islamisation of Kazakhstan, and the involvement of the US, China, Russia and the EU in Kazakhstan’s internal political processes.

Blogger Er Kulov (kerich33), who was previously identified as a person who supports the Kazakhstani opposition, suggested that the local authorities of the Mangistau region and their desire to be independent from Nazarbayev was the driving force behind their personal enrichment processes. The local authorities could have organised the riots, the blogger added, to then confront Nazarbayev with the problem and ask for a favour in return of solving the issue. By artificially creating a problem and forcing Nazarbayev to plea, the local political elite would most definitely have a say in Kazakhstan’s future after President’s retirement. Secondly, Kulov suggested, the US’ State Department could have organised the events. Given the US’ activities in the Middle East and in Africa, Kazakhstan became the battleground between the US, China and Russia, and most certainly none of those countries would want to loosen their control over Kazakhstan. And thirdly, kerich33 suggested the possibility of the Islamisation of the region by third parties. The blogger himself believed that the involvement of the third parties is certain. Er Kulov also proposed a set of ideas on how to solve the current problems in the region. Some of them involved the unbanning websites and making the impartial information publicly available to all citizens (kerich33, 2012). Here the blogger sarcastically named the President by his self-appointed title – the Leader of the Nation, also pointing at Nazarbayev’s numerous attempts at winning Nobel Peace Prize for what he done and achieved for Kazakhstan.

Russian political analysis, Alexander Sobyanin, who was quoted by the blogger Ruslan Bahtigareev (urchin), agreed with the previous blogger and stated that neither the US nor Russia are interested in maintaining the stability in Kazakhstan. Sobyanin proposed that Zhanaozen was just the first event, which was organised by the outside forces to test the grounds and many more will follow soon.
**Urchin** suggested that some forces are interested in creating favourable conditions for the coloured revolution in those parts of Kazakhstan which are vital for the development and livelihood of the entire state. Given the fact that Western Kazakhstan is by large is the main donor, after Almaty, to the republican budget, it is safe to assume that someone would be interested in taking over that part of the country.

Zarina Abdenova, whose blogging name is *ZarinaMerkel*, too reckoned the events could have been organised by those interested in taking over the oil-rich region of Kazakhstan, and presented this idea them from a *conspiracy point of view*.

> So, oil and gas are the most important. As is the country itself, probably, to be more precise, country’s appeal given its geographic location (and of course the country’s size) (*ZarinaMerkel*, 2012).

Abdenova suggested the two possible scenarios in her post: first being the involvement of some of the EU counties as well as of the US and their mutual project – Nabucco\(^\text{18}\) gas pipeline, and second being the rival of Nabucco, the project developed by the Russians, Italians and French – the South Stream\(^\text{19}\). As both of the projects will be bypassing Kazakhstan’s territory (the Caspian Sea) and neither have received the final confirmation, the countries mentioned the above could potentially make Caspian Sea the subject of international disputes.

Another blogger – *Krasienko*, looks at the situation from a similar perspective by suggesting that some are interested in cutting China off the energy provided by

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\(^{18}\) The Nabucco-West pipeline is a proposed natural gas pipeline from the Turkish-Bulgarian border to Austria. The aim of the Nabucco pipeline is to diversity the natural gas supplies and delivery routes for Europe, thus reducing European dependence on Russian energy.

\(^{19}\) South Stream – is a pipeline project to transport natural gas of the Russian Federation through the Black Sea to Bulgaria and through Serbia, Hungary and Slovenia further to Austria. It is seen as a rival to the Nabucco pipeline project. The project was, however, dropped in December 2014 following the Russian conflict with Ukraine over Crimea and the imposition of European sanctions on Russia as a result.
Kazakhstan, and also in weakening the southern borders of Russia, thus creating a major political headache along the world’s longest inland border, as well as the disintegration of the Customs Union and the desire to avoid the creation of the Eurasian Union.

A number of bloggers have agreed that the Kazakhstani political opposition, mainly the one in exile, should take the responsibility for the events. Doshunt and Kara Domalak, in particular, believe that Abyazov and other oligarchs, who left the country, used the situation in Zhanaozen to their advantage and were not interested in helping the oil workers at all. However, if the oligarchs intended on helping the oil workers, Doshunt continued, why did they not help the mine workers, who too were unsatisfied with the employer?

Another political analyst – Maxim Kaznacheev, who was quoted again by urchin, stated that the arrests of the political opposition in Kazakhstan and of Vladimir Kozlov in particular, had nothing to do with the situation in Zhanaozen. In Kaznacheev’s opinion, the government is simply trying to ‘cleanse’ the political field of anyone who may be affiliated with the political opposition abroad, and the situation in Zhanaozen could have been used as a great excuse.

5.3.4 Summary
Despite representing different demographics, opinions and even political sides of the conflict, there appears to be some strong similarities around the framing of the events in Zhanaozen by the online community. The majority of all messages posted on the two blogging platforms discussed the riots through the prism of socio-economic issues.

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20 Labour dispute took place in Zhezkazgan between the employees and the employer – Kazakhstan’s largest copper mining company - Kazakhmys. The dispute was swiftly resolved within three days after the management agreed to satisfy miners’ demands for higher pay and better working conditions. This strike took place less than five months after an oil workers’ labour dispute in Zhanaozen. In order to avoid the repetition of the events which took place in the Manghistau region, the company's first step was to take responsibility for the workers’ grievances. As a result, on May 7, 2012, the miners resumes work after Kazakhmys agreed to increase salaries across the board by 20 per cent, and for certain professions by around 30 per cent. In addition, Kazakhmys stated that the process of establishing a trade union of corporation workers was under way.
both in the region and in the country. This is different to the print media, which focused on the acts of law and (dis)order that resulted in riots and bloodshed in Zhanaozen in December of 2011. However, when trying to identify the reasons behind the conflict, the ‘bloody bloggers’ were quick to blame the Oralmans of the region, whereas the ‘free bloggers’ referred to the harsh social and economic conditions in the regions, and the fact that the oil workers were not being paid by OzenMunaiGaz regularly. The ‘other blogger’s too agreed that socio-economic issues could have resulted in riots, however, they were carried away by the conspiracy theories and identified the West as the potential cause of the conflict.

It appears that only 12 per cent of all blogs posted by the ‘other bloggers’ discussed law and (dis)order as the reason for the conflict, whereas the ‘bloody bloggers’ made that sub-theme the second largest with 36 per cent of all messages dedicated to that issue. Both groups – ‘bloody’ and ‘other’ made rather strong comments, blaming the opposition-in-exile.

The ‘free bloggers’, too, addressed the opposition-in-exile in 25 per cent of all articles, however, unlike two previous groups, agreed that political instability in the country led to the acts of law and (dis)order committed by people in Zhanaozen. On the other hand, the ‘bloody bloggers’, suggested that political instability which resulted in the bloodshed in Zhanaozen was brought upon by the politicians-in-exile. Hence, 9 per cent of all articles written by the so-called Kazakhstan’s famous bloggers, also known as the ‘bloody bloggers’, were dedicated to the issue. Almost a third of all articles written by the ‘other bloggers’ fell under the other category, which included the conspiracy theories as well as the possible Islamisation of the region. Although such ideas were quite popular among the ‘other bloggers’, neither the ‘bloody’ nor the ‘free bloggers’ shared similar view.

In conclusion, as expected, both groups – the ‘bloody bloggers’ and the ‘free bloggers’ – shared similar ideas, and supported the opposite sides of the Zhanaozen conflict. However, the situation was different with the ‘other bloggers’.
5.4 Voice of the events in Zhanaozen

The following section of the Findings chapter looks at who were the sources of the news and whose voices dominated the stories. This was important in order to understand whose voice the print or online media represented, which was then commented on online and written about in the two newspapers.

5.4.1 Kazakhstanskaya Pravda

![Figure 8](image)

Kazakhstan’s government was the voice of 40 per cent of news items in the state-run newspaper *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*. Initially, the plan was to separate the government from the President and other state-led organizations in order to present their voices separately. Upon the completion of the data collection stage, it became evident that not only is Nazarbayev the head of state, but he is practically leading the government and two chambers of the Kazakhstan’s parliament which have the nominal decision making power leaving Nazarbayev with the full authority. As a result, when interviewed by the media, members of the parliament and the government reiterated the ideas delivered by Nazarbayev prior. It is also important to note that the journalists of the state-run newspaper did not interview Nazarbayev, instead referred to his public speeches.
In fact, one could say that this newspaper remains to be the place for Nazarbayev to express his views and provide his explanation to the events in the country. As the events in Zhanaozen were unfolding, it became even more apparent that the President viewed the national newspaper as his ‘public’ arena to deliver the news to its citizens who entrusted him with the leadership of the country. And although *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda* did not write about the riots and shooting of innocent people in Zhanaozen on the actual day, December 16, probably due to the national celebrations of the Independence Day and possibly with a desire not to upset the Leader; the following day, the front page was dedicated to the interview with Nazarbayev and his promise to the nation that all those responsible will be found and prosecuted.

Although *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda* was the newspaper where the state officials could openly condemn the actions of those protesting in Zhanaozen and support Nazarbayev, only a few took advantage of it. Yermukhamet Yertysbayev, the Minister of Culture and Information, as well as Nazarbayev’s “wily political adviser” (Financial Times, 2005), was the only one to take advantage of it. Not only did Yerstysbayev fully supported Nazarbayev, he was very clear to blame the opposition-in-exile for what happened in Zhanaozen. In fact, he was one of the few in the government, who openly expressed such point of view.

Umirzak Shukeev, was another state official who was referred to quite frequently by the journalists of the state-run newspaper. However, unlike Yertysbayev, he did not blame the opposition-in-exile, nor did he hold responsible those inside the country. Instead, he viewed the conflict as a result of the socio-economic unrest in Zhanaozen that was the result of what was thought to be the communication breakdown between the oil company and the workers.

Naturally, the oil company – *KazMunaiGaz* and its western branch in particular – *OzenMunaiGaz*, were the voice of the 8 per cent of all articles published by *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*. Primarily, that was due to the fact that the new Head of *OzenMunaiGaz* was appointed as a result of the civil unrest in Zhanaozen. Hence, a
number of interviews were given by the state officials which highlighted the importance of addressing the current issues between the oil company and the workers by firstly increasing the pay, and secondly, by creating a union which the employees could refer to when in need.

However, as there was a need to identify those responsible for the uprising and the bloodshed which followed, the Prosecutor’s Office was the voice in 20 per cent of articles in Kazakhstanskaya Pravda. Unlike the rest of governmental officials, the Prosecutor General and his advisors were available almost at all times to be interviewed by either the journalists or the ‘bloody bloggers’ – the material was later published by the newspaper. Nazarbayev himself has also referred to and quoted the Prosecutor’s Office on a number of occasions.

And as the chart above indicates, 32 per cent of all voices fell under the other category. Here, every single voice condemned the actions, which took place in Zhanaozen and supported President Nazarbayev. The category included Russian politicians, Kazakhstan’s celebrities (actors and singers), WWII veterans and astronauts, prominent academics, professors and Deans of Kazakhstan’s top universities, young political activists and businessmen, as well as regular pensioners. Kazakhstanskaya Pravda published their letters regularly within the selected time frame of the data collection process.

5.4.2 Golos Respubliki
Unlike in Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, where the state officials, including Nazarbayev, represented 40 per cent of all voices, in Golos Respubliki that number was equal to 11 per cent only. Instead, in 59 per cent of all instances, Golos Respubliki quoted and referred to the Members of the European Parliament, foreign political analysts, members of public both in Kazakhstan and abroad, and bloggers. Most importantly, among the voices of the Golos Respubliki were the Russian journalists who arrived in Zhanaozen right after the events of the 16th of December and who were able to report on the events concurrently. This allowed Golos Respubliki to provide its readers with a reasonably independent point of view, which was not strongly influenced by the state officials, but instead was expressed by those who were not involved in the conflict directly. In Kazakhstanskaya Pravda the ‘other’ group was also rather large, but as mentioned above, only included the voices of those loyal to Nazarbayev and his regime.

Like in Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, the journalists of the independent newspaper referred to the Prosecutor’s General office. However, unlike in Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, it only happened in 7 per cent of occasions.
Political opposition was also voiced in 19 per cent of the articles; in *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda* such category simply did not exist. *Golos Respubliki* allowed those who oppose Nazarbayev’s regime to be heard by Kazakhstan’s citizens. Another category, which was not represented in the state-run newspaper, included the oil workers, protesters and their relatives. And although many of the protesters and their relatives felt threatened by the local government and the police, some still had the courage to report on what was happening on the day and advise who, in their opinion, should be held accountable for it. The interests of this group were voiced in 4 per cent of all articles in *Golos Respubliki*.

5.4.3 Respublika Portal

Amongst the voices presented in the articles on the *Respbulika portal*, again as in case with the *Golos Respubliki* newspaper, the *other* group prevailed making 43 per cent of all entries. The opinions of those referred to include the foreign experts, members of the *United Nations*, Russian political journalists who went on a trip to Zhanaozen when the local journalists were not allowed to enter the city, and, most importantly, Kazakhstan’s bloggers. Being the online edition, yet related to the hard copy of the *Golos Respubliki* newspaper, the journalists realised the importance of the bloggers. Thus, bloggers have contributed to a number of articles published online.
Another large group which was referred to quite often was the Kazakhstani political opposition both in Kazakhstan and overseas. Like in the case with the hard copy of *Golos Respubliki*, opposition had a place to express their side of the story and reach out for the audience. Given that the website was updated on regular basis throughout the day, especially as crisis was developing in Zhanaozen, the opposition was referred to in 24 per cent of all articles on the portal. Again, this number was very similar to the hard copy of the *Golos Respubliki* newspaper (19 per cent).

The protesters themselves have also been quoted on a number of occasions online, with 11 per cent of articles in total. The number is much greater than the findings of the hard copy of *Golos Respubliki* have demonstrated – only 4 per cent of all articles.

### 5.4.4 Summary

The findings about *the voices of the event* demonstrate that in the majority of articles of the state-run newspaper - *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, President Nazarbayev and other state officials were voiced the most. And although the rest of the government had an opportunity to communicate with the audience via the paper, the majority preferred to opt out, and left it to Nazarbayev. However, in both *Golos Respubliki* and online – on the *Respublika portal*, the governmental officials, including the President himself, were only voice in 11 and 14 per cent of articles respectively.

Although the number of times the Prosecutor’s Office was quoted and referred to is quite similar across the board, the opposition media allowed the protesters and their relatives to express the views using mediums. Their voices were not presented in the state-run media, where the interests and concerns of protesters were represented by either the oil company or the members of Zhanaozen city council.

Another big difference between the state-run media and those supported by the opposition lies in the fact that the bloggers have also been allowed to be present in both *Golos Respubliki* and online, using *Respublika portal*. However, the number of occasions when the bloggers were quoted or referred to was not large enough to form
a special group, as a result they fell under the other category in this findings. Bloggers’ voices were not present in Kazakhstanskaya Pravda at all.

The Kazakhstani government and its institutions were the content-generators of the 40 per cent of all the news published by the state-run Kazakhstanskaya Pravda; whereas in Golos Respubliki this number was significantly lower with only 11 per cent of articles. Given that the audience and the producers of the news of the Respublika portal were very similar to the ones of the Golos Respubliki, there the number of government and its institutions representing the voice of the events was at 14 per cent.

The largest category of 59 per cent of voices in Golos Respubliki belongs to the Kazakhstani opposition residing both abroad and in the country. In other words, opposition was quoted and referred to by most of the journalist. On the Respublika portal this number was not as great, but nevertheless was significantly important – 24 per cent of all news articles on Zhanaozen were produced by the Kazakhstani opposition. In Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, the opposition was not referred to at all.

Interestingly, the largest category – 43 per cent of all items on the Respublika portal belongs to the other category, which includes not only the Russian, or EU politicians who supported the uprising in Zhanaozen, but also involved the relatives of the oil workers, who, although remaining anonymous, expressed the concerns over the situation in Zhanaozen. This number also includes the bloggers who were quoted and referred frequently by the staff of the Respublika portal.

In conclusion, given the current political regime in Kazakhstan that tightly controls state media, the government and its institutions, and the President himself were the voices that talked about the uprising in Zhanaozen. Whereas, opposition-supported newspaper Golos Respubliki, and its edition quoted and referred the opposition in-exile, the oil workers and their families.
5.5 Languages used by the bloggers and the journalists

Identifying in which language (Kazakh or Russian) communication took place both online and offline was an important part of the data collection process. As discussed in the Introduction chapter, language is a crucial issue in the Kazakhstan’s media environment.

5.5.1 Languages used by the Kazakhstani blogosphere

Although Russian remains as the language of preference for media consumption in Kazakhstan (Emrich, Plakhina and Tryenzhapova, 2013), prior to starting the data collection, I was concerned that most of the message online will be posted in Kazakh given that the population of West Kazakhstan predominantly speaks Kazakh. I myself belong to 40 per cent of the Kazakhs who do not speak state language fluently (Dave, 2004). In addition, all of the ‘bloody bloggers’ were ethnic Kazakhs located in the southern parts of Kazakhstan, where again Kazakh language dominates over other ones. Hence, I considered the language barrier as a possible obstacle when collecting data. However, as all of the communication was in Russian, with only one ‘bloody blogger’ – Sadenova, asking readers in the comments bar to translate her messages into English.

Although in the western and southern parts of the country, population predominantly speaks Kazakh, the rest of Kazakhstani citizens speak Russian language on regular basis. Hence, covering events in Russian would lead to a greater coverage and exposure. In addition, the former Soviet counterparts could also understand their blogs. Reason for one of the ‘bloody bloggers’ wanting to translate messages into English – as some of the European press was covering events in Zhanaozen, and sources for those news were either the opposition in exile, or the Russian media which covered the uprising extensively at first. Therefore, the bloggers felt the need to cover the events from the pro-government perspective.
And though the ‘free bloggers’ communicated with the relatives of the oil workers in Kazakh, all of the conversations were translated into Russian simultaneously. Again, considering the audience the news was addressed to.

5.5.2 Languages used by the print media
Unlike with the uncertainty I had when conducting data collection of the online messages, most of the readership in Kazakhstan prefers newspapers in the Russian language. As a result, selecting the source of a print media was not an issue. Two newspapers: Kazakhstanskaya Pravda and Golos Respubliki report in Russian as it allows both to cover at least 75 per cent of the Kazakhstani population who speak Russian. In addition, both newspapers target those living in large cities, such as Astana and Almaty as both have much greater access to newspapers than those living in the regions.

5.6 Summary
This chapter presented the empirical findings from content analysis of messages posted on the two blogging platforms – LiveJournal and Yvision, and of the news articles of the two national newspapers – Kazakhstanskaya Pravda and Golos Respubliki as well as of its online edition Republika.

In-depth qualitative analysis indicated that both newspapers saw the cause of the problem quite differently. Although around 40 per cent of all articles in both Kazakhstanskaya Pravda and Golos Respubliki suggested that law and (dis)order was a major contributing factor to the unrest in Zhanaozen, Golos Respubliki’s another 40 per cent of news items considered the current economic and social instability to be the root of the problem, whereas only 12 per cent of articles in Kazakhstanskaya Pravda looked at the event from such perspective. Political instability was considered to be the cause of the problem by 31 per cent and 10 per cent of Kazakhstanskaya Pravda and Golos Respubliki respectively. It is worth noting, that unlike the journalists of the state-run media, representatives of Golos Respubliki suggested that political instability in Kazakhstan was caused from the inside, and not by the opposition-in-exile in particular as suggested by Kazakhstanskaya Pravda. Surprisingly, despite being
the online version of *Golos Respubliki*, 42 per cent of all articles posted on *Respublika portal* looked at the events in Zhanaozen from the *political instability* point of view.

As for the findings from the blogging platforms, there appear to be some strong similarities around the framing of the events in Zhanaozen by the online community. The majority of all messages posted on the two blogging platforms discussed the riots through the prism of *socio-economic issues* both in the region and in the country. This is different to the print media, which focused on the acts of *law and (dis)order* that resulted in riots and bloodshed in Zhanaozen in December of 2011. However, when trying to identify the reasons behind the conflict, the *‘bloody bloggers’* were quick to blame the Oralmans of the region, whereas the *‘free bloggers’* referred to harsh *social and economic conditions* in the regions, and the fact that the oil workers were not being paid by *OzenMunaiGaz* regularly. The *‘other bloggers’* too agreed that *socio-economic issues* could have resulted in riots; however, they were carried away by the conspiracy theories and identified the West as the potential cause of the conflict.

It appears that only 12 per cent of all blogs posted by the *‘other bloggers’* discussed *law and (dis)order* as the main reason for the conflict, whereas the *‘bloody bloggers’* made that sub-theme the second largest with 36 per cent of all messages dedicated to that issue. Both groups (*‘other’* and *‘bloody’*) made rather strong comments, blaming the opposition-in-exile.

The *‘free bloggers’*, too, addressed the opposition-in-exile in 25 per cent of all articles, however, unlike two previous groups, agreed that *political instability* in the country led to the acts of *law and (dis)order* committed by people in Zhanaozen. On the other hand, the *‘bloody bloggers’*, suggested that *political instability*, which resulted in the bloodshed in Zhanaozen, was brought upon by the politicians-in-exile. Hence, 9 per cent of all articles written by the so-called Kazakhstan’s famous bloggers, also known as the *‘bloody bloggers’*, were dedicated to the issue. Almost third of all articles written by the *‘other bloggers’* fell under the other category, which included the conspiracy theory as well as the possible Islamisation of the region. Although such
ideas were quite popular among the other bloggers, neither the ‘bloody’ nor the ‘free bloggers’ shared this view.

In conclusion, as expected, the both groups – the ‘bloody bloggers’ and the ‘free bloggers’ – shared similar ideas, and supported the opposite sides of the Zhanaozen conflict. However, the situation was different with the ‘other bloggers’.

The findings about the voices of the event demonstrate that the majority of state-run newspaper, Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, voiced the President Nazarbayev or other state officials. And although the rest of the government had an opportunity to communicate with the audience via the paper, the majority preferred to opt out, and left it to President Nazarbayev. However, in both Golos Respubliki and online – on the Respublika portal, the governmental officials, including the President himself, were only voice in 11 and 14 per cent of articles respectively.

Although the number of times the Prosecutor’s Office was quoted and referred to is quite similar across the board, the opposition media allowed the protesters and their relatives to express their views. Their voices were not present in the state-run media, where the interests and concerns of protesters were delivered by either the oil company or the members of Zhanaozen city council.

Another big difference between the state-run media and those supported by the opposition lies in the fact that the bloggers have also been allowed to be present in both Golos Respubliki and online, using Respublika portal. The number of occasions when the bloggers were quoted or referred to was not large enough to form a special group, as a result they fell under the other category in this findings. Bloggers’ voices were not present at all in Kazakhstanskaya Pravda.

The Kazakhstani government and its institutions were the content-generators of the 40 per cent of all the news published by the state-run Kazakhstanskaya Pravda; whereas in Golos Respubliki this number is significantly lower with only 11 per cent of articles. Given that the audience and the producers of the news of the Respublika
portal are very similar to the ones of the Golos Respubliki, there the number of government and its institutions representing the voice of the events was at 14 per cent.

The largest category of 59 per cent of voices in Golos Respubliki belongs to the Kazakhstani opposition residing both abroad and in the country. In other words, opposition was quoted and referred by most of the journalist. On Respublika portal this number was not as great, but is significantly important – 24 per cent of all news articles on Zhanaozen were produced by Kazakhstani opposition. In Kazakhstanskaya Pravda the opposition was not referred to at all.

Interestingly, the largest category – 43 per cent, on the Respublika portal belongs to the other category, which includes not only the Russian, or EU politicians who supported the uprising in Zhanaozen, but also involved the relatives of the oil workers, who, although remaining anonymous, expressed the concerns over the situation in Zhanaozen. This number also includes the bloggers who were quoted and referred frequently by the staff of the Respublika portal.

In conclusion, given the current political regime in Kazakhstan that tightly controls state media, the government and its institutions, and the President himself were the voices that talked about the uprising in Zhanaozen. Whereas, opposition-supported newspaper Golos Respubliki, and its editors quoted and referred the opposition in-exile, the oil workers and their families.

Chapter VI: Discussions and Analysis

6.1 Introduction

Findings have demonstrated that online activism acted as a catalyst for online discussion. It appears that without a dramatic event in Zhanaozen, its recording and then later submission of it to YouTube, bloggers in Kazakhstan would have not realized
the power online posts could have on the Kazakhstani government. Additionally, the response bloggers received demonstrated that the authorities were prepared to engage with the bloggers. Although, the Kazakhstani government made the decision to co-operate only with those bloggers supportive of the Nazarbayev regime, such move demonstrated a change in approach an authoritarian government took - online community was not ignored.

Analysis indicated that political participation in Kazakhstan depends on a number of factors, which include the construction of ethnic and national identity; the role social media plays in Kazakhstan’s authoritarian context; and the existing digital divide in the country.

This chapter is structured around these issues and their relevance to my findings with the aim to answer the main research question - “What impact did the events in Zhanaozen have on political activism in Kazakhstan?”

Kazakhstan currently presents a context with cultural complexities, migrants, diasporas, and the existing digital divide. This discussion chapter is a departing point from my findings. Rather than simply discussing the findings, I will be putting them into the context of nation-building exercise in Kazakhstan.

6.2 Framing

As outlined in the Literature review section of this thesis, it was Goffman and Bateson who first came up with the concept of framing. And although such idea is used to make sense of everyday social experiences, framing has been useful in understanding media’s role in political and social life in particular (Reese, 2001).

Studies of news ‘frames’ and ‘framing’ attend to processes of news selection and salience and how news representations are structured to promote a ‘particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation’ (Entman, 1993: 52).
According to Cottle (2011), a lot has changed since earlier studies of the framing theory. The analysis of mainstream national media now demonstrate that they portray protests and demonstrators through a dominant law and (dis)order frame, which delegitimizes the protesters, as well as aims at emphasizing drama, spectacle and violence over the reasons why demonstrations occurred in the first place (Halloran, Elliot & Murdoch, 1970; Gitlin, 1980; Murdoch, 1981 in (Cottle & Lester, 2011). This remains a generally persuasive framework to this day.

Protests and demonstrations have historically performed an integral part in struggles for democracy and contentious politics more generally (Thompson, 1991, 1993; McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2001; Tilly, 2005), and they continue to do so nowadays (Etzioni, 1970; Norris, 2002; Milne, 2005; Tarrow, 2006). Whether the media’s reporting predictions towards violence, spectacle and drama, or its structural orientation to powerful elites and their definitions of protest events (Cottle & Lester, 2011). Indeed, as the findings of this research demonstrated, the majority of articles published in both Kazakhstanskaya Pravda and Golos Respubliki framed the events in Zhanaozen through the prism of law and (dis)order. In particular, the President Nazarbayev prioritized the consequences of the disorder and their resolution over understanding what caused violence in the first place.

However, as Cottle and Lester (2011) state, although there is a continuing culture of prediction and structural orientation of the news media, there might be some opportunity for different voices and definitions of events, whether through time, across different media, in respect of different protest issues, or based on a more open theorization of the power of spectacle and protest performance. Consequently, as findings have demonstrated, being the opposition-supporting media, 40 per cent of the Golos Respubliki article framed the events in Zhanaozen through socio-economic perspective. Indeed, some of the movements not presented through the law and (dis)order frame by the Western media either. In fact, much depends on the democratic credentials of the state and oppositional movements involved as well as journalist judgments about geo-political interests and cultural outlooks (Cottle &
Lester, 2011). Such desire to frame the events from a non-law and (dis)order point of view was demonstrated by the member of the EU Parliament Paul Murphy, who looked at the events in Zhanaozen from the economic point of view.

Although traditional print and broadcasting media continue to perform a critical role in defining, framing and dramatizing protests and demonstrations, new digital means of recording, storing and disseminating information have also eased the practical cross-over of scenes of dissent into wider communication flows and mainstream media (Cottle, 2011). Indeed, mass actions can now be recorded and communicated directly by protesters or their supporters via new social media websites, as well as by the members of the general public via everyday communication technologies, which include mobile phones and cameras. When uploaded and circulated via the Internet, these new forms of “citizen journalism” can play a part in altering the balance of communicative power (McNair, 2006; Allan & Thorsen, 2009; Gowing, 2009 in (Cottle & Lester, 2011). And although the news presented online are also framed via certain perspective, the findings of this research demonstrated the events in Zhanaozen were framed through socio-economic perspective by not only the online version of the Golos Respubliki – Respublika Portal, the ‘free bloggers’ and the ‘other bloggers’, but also by those who supported the government from the start – the ‘bloody bloggers’.

In other words, traditional media tend to frame demonstrations in a way that deligitimizes them by putting emphasis on the ‘disorder’ of the society, which lead to disruptions that affect everyone including citizens and the government. Traditional media often tend to disregard the cause of the issue and have less reporting from those who are directly affected and if they let them speak. Such channels frame their stories in a way that allow the state officials to prevail in their explanations of what happened. In short, the traditional media, especially in authoritarian countries, tends to tell people that those who are demonstrating are disrupting social order and peace. The new forms of media, on the other hand, as demonstrated above, tend to go past such representation and framing of protests and their participants and focus on the causes which result in mass movements. Could this mean that new forms of media no longer deligitimizes the protesters, instead, allows them to be heard by a wider
audience? And in doing so, new framing techniques provide the alternatives to the citizens of the authoritarian states.

6.3 Digital divide and the role it played in covering events in Zhanaozen

Given the previous analysis and discussion of the role of social media in promoting political participation in Kazakhstan as a result of this particular event in Zhanaozen, evidence demonstrates that the Kazakhstani blogosphere was very active during the events indicating an undeniable presence and impact at least on the government’s way of handling the situation and an indirect recognition of how acute their awareness is on the potential role of social media on political unrest in the country. The question that now remains to be answered is: how widespread was this online participation and did it spill over the blogosphere to the everyday ordinary citizens of the country?

According to Sztompka (2011), trust online is established in relation to social proximity, creating a ‘culture of trust’ which allows the messages to be heavily-circulated amongst the like-minded. As a result, people tend to trust the online information more than the one they receive from the official sources. And this is precisely what the Kazakhstani government tried to achieve by sending a group of well-known bloggers to Zhanaozen to cover the events. As Sztompka (2011) notes, such steps could lead to the high-context of a personal connection versus the low-trust context, especially for people in the neighborhood who face the governmental officials. Social proximity and trust, however, are not affixed to location but rather a known individual.

Nevertheless, the coverage of the 2011 events in Zhanaozen by all camps did not receive the attention the Internet community had hoped for due to the existing digital divide in the region, the governmental control of ISPs in the country and the fact that online activism remains to be an elite phenomenon in Kazakhstan (Emrich, Plakhina & Tsyrenzhapova, 2013). As stated in the OpenNet (2010) initiative report, “the state uses its significant regulatory authority to ensure that all Internet traffic passes
through infrastructures controlled by KazakhTelecom, and selective content filtering is widely used” (OpenNet Initiative, 2013).

Although Kazakhstan has the highest mobile phone penetration rate of 96 per cent (Warf, 2013) in the entire Central Asian area, only 12 per cent of the Kazakhstani access the Internet via the phone (Global Customer Acquisition, 2013). There are no studies available on the use of smartphone in other cities of Kazakhstan except for Almaty, but I would suggest that the majority living in the impoverished Mangistau region do not own a smart phone, hence would not be able to use to be active members of the Internet.

The strongest growth has been recorded between 2000 and 2005, with users rising from a few hundred thousands to a million (Ghedin, 2013). According to InternetWorldStats.com, as of December, 2013, there were almost 9.7 million Internet users in Kazakhstan (Internet World Stats, 2014). 41 per cent of the Internet users in Kazakhstan live in big cities, and only 19 per cent live in rural areas (Profit, 2011). Although in December of 2010, the then Minister of Communication and Information, Askar Zhmagaliyev, announced the successful completion of Kazakhstan’s programme for bridging the digital divide as the proportion of users exceeded 20 per cent (Emrich, Plakhina & Tsyrenzhapova, 2013), in the Mangistau region, the locals have access to the Internet only in Aktau – capital of the province, and partially in Zhanaozen where the local authorities are provided with the Internet connection, as for the rest of the region, as of 2013, there were 28 so-called public Internet stations available to use (Zerde, 2013).

On top of that, according to Kapitsa (2008), Internet access in most Central Asian countries, including Kazakhstan, can be prohibitively expensive. Kapitsa (2008) continues by stating that in Kazakhstan, the unlimited dial-up Internet connection package offered by the state-run ISP cost about 86 euros per month, the unlimited ADSL connection – from 102 to 3278 euros per month, and the unlimited cable internet connection – from 9163 to 24432 euros per month. Given the average monthly salary in Kazakhstan is 500 euros (as of July 2014); it is not surprising that the
majority access Internet from their workplaces, and that some were excluded from the Zhanaozen discussions completely.

In addition, not only does the socio-economic inequality promote the digital divide, censorship in the region also has its say. Since 2009 Kazakhstan is implementing law to control both electronic and traditional media (Lambroschini, 2011). ISPs in the country must keep track of Internet activities of all its citizens. Pre-Zhanaozen, such measures were justified through the excuses of protecting public morality from Islamic extremism and combating terrorism. However, during the 2011 Zhanaozen events such measure were applied to exclude the public from what was happening in the western part of Kazakhstan by only blocking the mobile connections, but also restricting access to YouTube, Twitter as well as the websites of the opposition media.

The blogosphere has become an important part of the Internet in Kazakhstan, giving rise to new forms of participatory journalism and enlarging the sphere of public debate (Warf, 2013). In fact, the Kazakhstani government has encouraged its members to become active participants of online community (ibid), and it was doing so more actively after what happened in Zhanaozen. However, the economic, social and cultural barriers which exist between the Astana, Almaty and the rest of the country in Kazakhstan demonstrate the existing digital divide in the country – although 40 per cent of the total population has access to the Internet, users are mostly young urban participants located in the Astana and Almaty areas (Ghedin, 2013). Bloggers which were either sent to Zhanaozen by the government or decided to go there on their own were not addressing the locals of the Mangistau region, but rather those who live in economically developed regions of Kazakhstan. Even then, the primary users of Internet are aged between 16 and 30, and are well educated with a stable financial background, which could indicate that their parents represent the government somehow, hence the youth is not interested in overthrowing the government or listening to the opposition which was represented by the ‘free bloggers’. 
6.4 Online social media in an authoritarian context

Both in the repressive and more democratic nations, Internet-based communications challenge the traditional form of governance and of public communication and provide channels for citizens’ voice, expression of minority viewpoints, and political mobilisation.

According to Dalbeirt and Rohozinski (2008), countries with stronger authoritarian tendencies are more likely to apply comprehensive controls in cyberspace. The majority of the former Soviet Union states are authoritarian – a characteristic which is evident in both social and political life of present-day CIS states. As a result, independent media and journalists are intimidated and imprisoned; opposition parties harassed and are faced with suffocating regulations, like in the case of Russia, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. However, despite the increasingly constrained environments both online and offline, the Internet remains accessible to the majority of inhabitants and in some cases is relatively free from filtering. Hence, the local governments seek ways to control the content published online. And although filtering techniques are now widely used in the former Soviet states, in Kazakhstan in particular, it is worth noting that China was among the first states to add national filtering systems at the foundation of the country’s Internet (reference needed). In fact, Dalbeirt and Rohozinski (2009) refer to China as a ‘hard case’ for those who still question the ability of authoritarian states to control the Internet. Although the Chinese state has been promoting the expansion of new technologies for economic reasons, the country still maintains the strict control over the Internet and the content provided to its citizens.

Although within the CIS, ‘first-generation controls’ are practiced regularly only in Turkmenistan where blocking the growth of the Internet and imposing drastic censorship takes place and filtering is centralised on the country’s sole ISP and access is heavily monitored, Kazakhstan was another country to apply the ‘first-generation methods’ (Dalbeirt & Rohozinski, 2009). When the riots took place in the western town of Zhanaozen in 2011, the initial reaction of the government was to lock the
town away from anyone, especially the journalists. However, due to the pressure from not only the local political opposition, the governments of the European Union (major importers of the Kazakhstani gas and oil) as well as the wide coverage of the events online, the Kazakhstani government felt the need to put a group of pro-governmental bloggers and send them Zhanaozen to cover the events. However, as in the case with the China, the bloggers’ coverage was rather staged, and the drastic measures of online censorship had followed, which included the blocking of Twitter.

The next, ‘second generation control technique’ aims to create a legal and normative environment and technical capabilities to allow state actors to deny access to information resources when required, while reducing the possibility of being discovered (Dalbeirt and Rohozinski, 2009). As a result of such technique, certain content gets blocked ‘just-in-time’, when certain information has the highest value, for example, during the elections, or, as in the case with Kazakhstan, during the public protests which turned into riots.

There are a number of mechanisms which allow authoritarian states to apply such technique. One being the implementation of a number of laws which outline the set criteria of what is acceptable within the national media space leading to de-registration of sites which do not comply. In Kazakhstan, opposition websites or content providers, which carry the material critical of the current regime, are regularly de-registered from the national domain (Dalbeirt and Rohozinski, 2009). Such mechanism was applied a number of times to the Respublika newspaper, especially during the coverage of the events in Zhanaozen. In addition, the Kazakhstani government had used another mechanism to control the views of those who oppose the government, such as the expanded use of defamation to deter bloggers and independent media from posting material critical of the government. There are several cases of opposition and independent media websites in Kazakhstan being suspended for providing links to publications about corruption among senior staff officers and the President himself. And the last mechanism which is favoured by the authoritarian governments is the ability to evoke national security concerns, especially at times of civic unrest. This type of filtering occurred during the Russian-Georgian
conflict of 2008. Although the 2008 crisis may initially seem a poor example of the strategic significance of cyberspace in warfare, but in spite of the relative absence of typical information elements of contemporary warfare, cyberspace played a significant role in the conflict. The Internet played an important role as a redistribution channel for media and communications, including news, influential blogs and rumours. The impact of this media was so effective in the eyes of the Georgian authorities that they decided to censor Russian television broadcasts in major Georgian cities, and to filter access to Russian Internet sites (Crete-Nishihata, 2012).

Unlike the first two generations of content controls, ‘third generation controls’ take a highly sophisticated, multi-dimensional approach to enhancing state control over national cyberspace and building capabilities for competing in information space with potential competitors. The key characteristics of third-generation controls is that the focus is less on denying access but on counter-information campaigns that overwhelm, discredit, and demoralise the opponent. Such technique includes warrantless monitoring of Internet users and usage.

As a result of this approach, several CIS countries are creating national cyber-zones. Countries such as Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Russia are investing heavily into expanding Internet access to schools. These institutions are being tied to specific Internet connections, which limit access only to resources found in the national internet domain. These ‘national zones’ are popular among some Kazakhstan and Tajik ISPs as they allow users to have access to low-cost connectivity, due to traffic being limited to the national segment only.

In 2007, the Russian authorities came up with an idea to create a separate Cyrillic cyber-zone with its own domain space and addressing schemes. The plan was to make such cyber-zone available to the former states of the Soviet Union, and therefore, disconnecting its citizens from the predominantly English-speaking web. In addition, such cyber-zones are appealing due to the ability to use it as a propaganda tool and a place to promote cultural and historic values, something which Russia did not have control over since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Moreover, national cyber-zones
also appeal to consumers since access to them is less costly, and the resources that can be found are almost exclusively in the local language.

Certain government also post pre-packaged propaganda, *kompromat*, and disinformation through mass blogging and participation in internet polls, or harassment of individual users, including the posting of personal information. In some cases, member of the opposition or their family members were warned by cell phone not to participate in political or social rallies, or risk being taken. The latter is currently happening to Vladimir Kozlov’s\(^2\) wife - Aigul, who is currently being threatened by the authorities. In the recent article published by the *Respublika* newspaper, Aigul was warned by the members of the KNB that the state is acquiring *kompromat* against her in case she decides to stay present on social media channels. Critics believe Kozlov, his party and independent media outlets were scapegoats over the violence, a charge the government denies even while acknowledging some responsibility for mishandling the situation in Zhanaozen (Lillis, 2013).

Having conducted the research, it is evident that all three censorship techniques are applied in the present-day Kazakhstan, with the last two having become more prominent after the riots in Zhanaozen in December of 2011.

6.5 Zhanaozen - reflection of the national identity construction

Although national identity was not one of the framing options initially outlined at the start of this research, findings have demonstrated that the notion of the national identity construction was in the center of the coverage not only in the print media, but also in the messages posted by Kazakhstani bloggers under the socio-economic framing of the event. This was done by making the newly migrated Kazakhs – *Oralmans* the scapegoats and blaming them for what took place in Zhanaozen. Furthermore, *Oralmans* were named to be the reason of social and political instability not only in Zhanaozen but also in the entire country. In addition, the former Head of

\(^2\) Vladimir Kozlov – political opponent to the current regime. Throughout 2011 Kozlov was supporting the oil workers of Zhanaozen and is now jailed for seven years on charges of orchestrating fatal violence in Zhanaozen and seeking the overthrow the state.
the Kazakhstan Department of Migration and Demography – Altynash Dzhanganova, suggested that *Oralmans* are not interested in resolving, with the help of the government, any social or financial struggles they might be dealing with, instead, they used the labour dispute to their advantage to get the attention of the media. Furthermore, the public debate on the (mis)use of the existing return migration policies by the *Oralmans* has also been raised as a result of the Zhanaozen uprising.

Therefore, it is vital to understand *Oralmans*’ role in the modern Kazakhstan’s society by discussing Kazakhstan’s construction of ethnic and national identity and the role *Oralmans* play in it. The use of both Kazakh and Russian languages in contemporary society, the role of religion, identification of the differences between the Russified Kazakhs and the traditional Kazakhs – *Oralmans* has also been discussed in the chapter. Additionally, the importance of return migration policies in Kazakhstan and a need in having them has also been touched upon in this chapter.

When Kazakhstan declared independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, ethnic Kazakhs constituted a minority in the new state, first of all due to the settlement of the country by Slavs for two previous centuries. In addition, Kazakhstan was a dumping ground for individual dissidents and different ethnic groups during the Soviet period (Olcott, 1987; Laruelle and Peyrose, 2004 in Beachain and Kevlihan, 2013). In other words, Russians have influenced the Kazakhs for centuries. Indeed, as suggested by Bechain and Kevlihan (2013), it is impossible to understand modern-day Kazakhstan without reference to Russia. Slavs of Russian Empire began to colonise the Kazakh-populated steppes in the latter part of the XIX century. Between 1911 and 1913, there were 1.5 million Slavs living in Kazakhstan, which contributed towards 30 per cent of the entire population of the republic. The first Soviet census held in 1926 indicated the further increase in figures: almost 20 per cent Russians and 14 per cent Ukrainians were living in Kazakhstan at the time. In addition, Khrushchev’s ‘Virgin Lands’ campaign further undermined Kazakh numbers by bringing in hundreds of thousands of Russian volunteers. However, the trend was reversed in the later Soviet years - the results from the last Soviet census of 1989 had indicated the decline in the Slavic share of the population which then was 44 per cent (Dave, 2003; Beachain, 2007).
Although the early Soviet period saw advances for native elite in governing new Central Asian political units, by 1936, Russians had become the ‘first among equals’ and were appointed to guide the Soviet ‘family’ of nations (Martin, 2001). Alphabets in national languages have also been changed to Cyrillic in order to encourage and facilitate the learning process of the Russian language. After the death of Stalin in 1953, some efforts were made to make Russian the language of the new ‘Soviet People’. By the end of 1970s, the Kazakhs were arguably the most Sovietised of all Soviet citizens – and the majority of Kazakhs felt proud of it (Akiner, 1995), which led Kazakhs to become the minority within the Kazakh SSR.

As a result of the fall of the Soviet Union, in 1991 the Kazakhstani state was created by default not nationalism. Indeed, Kazakhstan’s leadership was the last of the Soviet republics to declare independence from the USSR. Since then, the political elite of independent Kazakhstan has embarked on the process of state- and nation-building involving a search for a new consolidating national ideology which would provide a viable alternative to the previously dominant Soviet nationhood.

In fact, Svanbert (1994) who was reporting on nationalism in Kazakhstan soon after country’s independence has highlighted an over-emphasis by the Nazarbayev regime on ethnic Kazakh identity over a more inclusive Kazakhstani identity.

The process of nationalisation post-1991 included changes to street names from Russian to Kazakh, the creation of a new national flag, currency, new school curriculum which focused on the Kazakh language and history more, and a new anthem, later version of which was written by Nazarbayev himself. According to Bechain and Kevlihan (2013), the state apparatus drifted towards further Kazakhification, although being Kazakh-dominated already; while formally state-owned companies – particularly heavy industries and mining, mainly located in the northern and central parts of the country, traditionally the domain of Russians and other non-Kazakh nationalities – suffered from economic adjustments and privatisation.
As a result of the growing nationalism in the early 1990s, hundreds of thousands of Slavs and Germans have left Kazakhstan. Between 1993 and 1999, 1,123,960 Slavs left Kazakhstan, and they were followed by almost 500,000 ethnic Germans. In the decade that followed the last Soviet Census of 1989, the combined European population of Kazakhstan (Russian, Ukrainian, German, Polish, Belarusian, and Greek) declined from 50 to 39 per cent. During the same period, the number of ethnic Kazakhs grew by 1.5 million, which brought up the number of Kazakhs to 54 per cent of total population. Kazakhs who had been forced to leave during the Stalin years were now encouraged to return (Sinnott, 2003). The 2009 census recorded the Kazakh population surpassing the 10 million mark (63 per cent of the total population) for the first time while the combined numbers of ethnic Russian and Ukrainians constituted a quarter of the population.

The Kazakhisation has also included the use of the Kazakh language in the country. Although the current Constitution forbids any discrimination against any citizen on the grounds of ‘origins, social position, sex, race, nationality, language’ (Article 14), it also makes it compulsory for the President to be able to speak Kazakh. In addition, according to another regulation adopted in 1997, ‘it is a duty of every citizen of the Republic of Kazakhstan to master the state language’ (Law on Languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan, Article 4).

Although further steps were taken to increase the use of the state language in the country, such as a 1998 Presidential decree mandating the use of Kazakh in all government documentation which was supposed to be implemented immediately, a lack of competent staff and adequate provisions for language instruction meant that the deadline has been continually extended (Bechain and Kevlihan, 2013). Although one may argue that these steps would have left non-Kazakh speakers (including the ethnic Kazakhs themselves) facing national barriers which could affect their daily lives, to date, all government paper work is presented in both Russian and Kazakh. In fact, Russian remains the language spoken by the majority living in the country. Despite the fact that in the 1999 census 99.4 per cent of Kazakhs claimed that Kazakh was their
native language, this figure should be interpreted carefully, as 40 per cent of ethnic Kazakhs do not speak their mother tongue, and make such statements to only demonstrate their patriotism (Dave, 2004).

### 6.5.1 Constructing the post-Soviet Kazakh national identity

Unlike other Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan has officially set out on a path of building a multi-ethnic nation. This path, especially if pursued more consistently that it has actually been so far, would set Kazakhstan apart from typical “nationalising states” as discussed by Brubaker (2006). Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan has been building a new state in which the key role was played by the formerly sovietised (but mostly Kazakh) elite recycled from the Soviet era and dominated by president Nazarbayev. Gradually, Nazarbayev has granted himself authoritarian powers, allowing him to initiate and sponsor, if not absolutely control, all major projects in the country, including the process on building anew nation.

According to Hilger (2009), Nazarbayev options for steering this task of nation building was determined and limited mostly by three factors: the ethnic heterogeneity of the population, the widespread use of the Russian language among the population at large (including ethnic Kazakhs), the consideration of the power-balance, and perhaps also, geopolitical considerations. Nazarbayev-controlled Kazakhstan’s ruling elite did not consider it reasonable to apply a purely ethnicity-based conception of nationhood to the newly independent Kazakhstan, as it did not seem either prudent not feasible. In addition, religion was not an instrument in creating a national ideology (Hilger, 2009).

There are some indications that intensity of national identity or nationalism is rather low for most of the Kazakhstan’s ethnic group, including the Kazakhs (Jones, 2010). Although originally being very distinct cultures: Kazakh and Russian, due to the mutual past, and the impact the Russian culture had and still has in the northern and central parts of Kazakhstan, most observers agree that Kazakh national identity and nationalism are ‘relatively weak due to the fuzzy boundaries between Kazakh and Russian cultures’ (Cummings, 2005).
Nazarbayev has often emphasised that Kazakhstan is a multi-cultural country that has been able to maintain a high degree of inter-ethnic harmony (Lillis, 2010). He designed another instrument intended to institutionalise inter-ethnic relations, the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan (APK), a unique constitutive body established by the Constitution’s Article 44 and designed to represent interests of all ethnic groups in the country. Established in 1995, the APK brings together more than 800 ethnic and cultural associations.

According to Brubaker (2011), generally there are a number of key domains of nationalisation. The first domain of nationalisation is what he calls “ethno-political demography”: discourses, policies, and processes bearing on the absolute or relative size of the core nation and significant minority ethno-national groups. By the time of the first post-Soviet census in 1999, the ethno-demographic landscape of Kazakhstan had changed dramatically. Gains by titular nation were particularly dramatic in Kazakhstan, where the Kazakh share jumped from 40 per cent in 1989 to 53 per cent ten years later. Results from the 2009 census show rapid nationalisation continuing in Kazakhstan, with the Kazakh share now reaching 63 per cent.

The initiation of the ethnic return migration policy in Kazakhstan, which privileges the titular ethnic group in a multi-ethnic state, has intensified the debate over the definition of the national identity (Oka, 2013). The titular nation Kazakhs formed a demographic minority in the country and their language and culture were far from being dominant in the territory attached to their name, despite their claims to be the original inhabitants of the territory and of the state. These factors were indicators of a difficult nation-building process for the country. Kazakhstan’s government adopted the policy of repatriation during a difficult period of political and social transformation when the new elites attempted to redefine the identity of their state. Fifteen years since the initiation of the Kazakhstan’s policy of repatriation, return migrants have been experiencing many economic and social problems of integration due to the gap between the government’s policy and the implementation of it.
6.5.2 The public debate on ethnic return migration

The public debate on return migration was result of how the events in Zhanaozen were reported. As demonstrated in the Findings chapter, the Kazakhstan bloggers have suggested that the uprising in Zhanaozen was not just about socio-economic conditions of the oil workers, but about Oralmans and the consequences of the ethnic migration on Kazakhstan. In other words, the online participants - netizens brought up and facilitated the public debate on ethnic return migration in Kazakhstan.

This debate, concerning the ethnic return migration policy, reveals much about the continuing struggle between those opposing the ethnic return migration and those supporting it (Kuscu, 2008). The ethnic return migration policy has become a major battleground for these two opposing sides, as the Oralman project implies that Kazakhstan should become an ethnic state. Ethnic return migrations are prone to create public debates because they privilege one ethnic group over another or others (Kuscu, 2008). In addition, the 2011 events in Zhanaozen had again highlighted the existing debate and divided the citizens of Kazakhstan.

The so-called ‘shared ethnicity’ plays an important role in the formation of the context of ethnic return migration (Kuscu, 2013). As stated by Kuscu (2013), homeland governments assume that the shared ethnicity will allow the new members of the society to integrate easily into the homeland’s economic and social realities. However, as cases with both Germany and Israel have demonstrated, ethnic migration can create problems of social and economic nature, which will eventually make the homeland society question the policies on ethnic migration (Hacohen, 2003; Shuval, 1998 in Kuscu, 2013). In addition, such policies may become quite controversial and exclusive as a result of providing special services and rights only to the certain member of the society – the ethnic returnees. Indeed, as indicated in the messages posted by the ‘other’ bloggers, a number of Kazakhstan’s citizens would happily take on economic and social privileges Oralmans are provided with when moving to Kazakhstan. Those include housing, social pensions, child support, subsidised health care and education.
As a result, such policies have led to the preferential treatment of the ethnic group – *Oralmans*, who claim the ownership of the territory and the state. Hence, as suggested by Kuscu (2013), in originally multi-ethnic states, the process of nation-building is affected by ethnic return migration policies, and especially the type of nation that is being created: whether it is an ethnic or a civic one. Consequently, such policies get contested quite often, and create a public debate in the homeland (Kuscu, 2013).

Despite Nazarbayev’s initiation and support of the ethnic return migration which led the to the attraction of many member of the Kazakh diaspora, the socio-economic problems of integration, partly due to the unfulfilled promises from the government’s side and partly related to the return migrant’s own difficulties in adapting to mainstream culture, reached an important level within a decade of the initiation of the policy. Furthermore, it is believed *Oralmans* have become a political embarrassment for the Kazakhstani government (Sanghera et al, 2012).

6.5.3 Opponents and supporters of migration policies and the notion of ethnicity-based citizenship

The Kazakhs of the homeland who support ethnic migration describe Kazakhs who are against the *Oralmans* as cosmopolitans who are still influenced by the Soviet psychology of colonisation (Kuscu, 2012). Not only do supporters of the return migration criticise the ethnic Kazakhs who see the *Oralmans* as a burden to the Kazakhstani society, they target anyone who underestimates migrants’ potential contribution to Kazakhstan. The supporters of such policies also emphasise the reasoning behind the formation of the Kazakh diaspora in the first place—which mainly took place during the early 1900’s as a result of the Soviet politics. This, Kuscu (2012) believes, is done as a response to those calling the diaspora members *satqyn* (traitors in Kazakh). In addition, the supporters of ethnic migration state that the measures taken by the Kazakhstani government to increase the return migration of ethnic Kazakhs should be seen as one of the great national policies which will contribute to the country’s culture and the Kazakh language itself.
Although the opponents agree that Kazakhstan can benefit from the demographic increase, the selection criteria, however, they believe, should not be based on one’s ethnicity or culture, but rather on Kazakhstan’s need in human capital. In addition, the policies are viewed by many as unrealistic, unplanned, rushed, and as a misguided initiative undertaken during the initial euphoria over independence (Kuscu, 2012). Some participants in the debate have gone as far as suggesting that such migration project is not only a socio-economic burden but also presents a huge threat to the existing social structure of the country. Those who portray diaspora members as traitors suggest that while the rest of the population was suffering at home and struggling with all the difficulties the Communist order imposed, the diaspora Kazakhs simply fled; they are now coming back just to benefit from what independent Kazakhstan has to offer, even though they did not help to build the state.

Nazarbayev’s statement during the third Qurultay in 2005 indicated he partially agreed with the opponents of the ethnic-based migration: “Our brother who is migrating to his historical homeland should not think in terms of what Kazakhstan will give him, but what he can give to his Kazakhstan” (Nazarbayev, p.2). The visible shift in Nazarbayev’s rhetoric was an indicator of how, over time, economic problems and concerns could transform ethnic migration policies (Kuscu & Bonnenfant, 2009).

The 2011 Zhanaozen event portrays that well, during which Oralmans seemed to have become the scapegoat in the articles of the national newspaper Kazakhstanskaya Pravda. Oralmans were accused to be the root of social and political instability not only in Zhanaozen but also in the country. In addition, the former Head of the Kazakhstan Department of Migration and Demography – Altynash Dzhanganova, suggested that Oralmans are not interested in resolving, with the help of the government, any social or financial struggles they might be dealing with, instead, they used the labour dispute to their advantage to get the attention of the media.

And in 2009, Nazarbayev initiated the so-called Doctrine of National Unity which was to provide a blueprint for strengthening the inter-ethnic harmony for years to come. The doctrine has not been uncontested in Kazakhstan, namely because in it
Nazarbayev envisaged Kazakhstan to become a kind of multicultural melting pot in which every citizen was first and foremost a ‘Kazakhstani’. This notion of new ethnicity-neutral citizenship, where the civic boundaries of the nation had been expanded to include all ethnic groups attracted criticism from Kazakh ‘nationalists’. The group identifying itself as the “National Patriots” has argued that the Kazakh language is losing out to Russian and should receive even more prominence in the state than Kazakhstan’s official policies permit. As a result of that, the changes were made to the final version of the doctrine (Lillis, 2010).

And in 2011, during the riots in Zhanaozen, Oralmans seemed to have identified as the scapegoat in the articles of the national newspaper Kazakhstanskaya Pravda. Oralmans were accused to be the root of social and political instability not only in Zhanaozen but also in the country. In addition, the former Head of the Kazakhstan Department of Migration and Demography – Altnash Dzhanaganova, suggested that Oralmans are not interested in resolving, with the help of the government, any social or financial struggles they might be dealing with, instead, they used the labour dispute to their advantage to get the attention of the media.

In addition, the groups of bloggers who were supported by the government suggested that Oralmans could have been involved in the riots of 2011 as a way to protest against their working conditions and low-paid jobs due to the lack of education and certain skills.

There is definitely a backbone of some 15-20 people who led the whole crowd. Oralmans? It is possible. The majority of those protesting are not locals. Oralmans also work in the lower positions in the (oil) company: the drivers, mechanics. It is quite possible that they played a certain role but I cannot argue that point (Sadenova, 2011).

6.5.4 Religion and ethnic identity
In addition to the ethnic based migration, Kazakhstan experienced a form of Islamic revival as another step in identity and nation-seeking process. As in other parts of the
former Soviet Union, the majority of post-Soviet Kazakhstani leadership members rejected the idea of keeping the Soviet-ness which was synonymous to the Russian domination, and instead turned to their pre-Soviet roots (Yemelianova, 2013). Central element of the Islamic revival in Kazakhstan is Sufi Islam which historically has been part of the Kazakh national identity. Through the process of re-establishing the national identity, Kazakhs could now re-connect with the Turkic and Islamic world – a connection which was missing during the years of Soviet years. As a result, Kazakh ethnic and Islamic symbols have been introduced into public life; and the country had experience an Islamic revival, although it was not as intensive as in neighbouring Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Nevertheless, the public display of Islamic belonging could be observed as well as a steep rise in the number of mosques, madrasas, Islamic publishing houses, hajjees to Mecca amongst the citizens, and Kazakh students studying Islam in Kazakhstan and abroad (Yemelianova, 2013). In particular, between 1990 and 2000 the number of registers mosques rose from 40 to 2300 – in Almaty along there were 24 mosques – but throughout the 1900s many of them, with the exception of Friday prayers, were sparsely attended. Nevertheless, behind the reluctance initially to demonstrate their Islamic religiosity there was a steady and significant growth of interest and commitment in the faith, especially among young Kazakhs who identified Islam as a key feature of their emergent post-Soviet national identity. By the late 1990s already over 80 per cent of ethnic Kazakhs identified themselves as Muslims, the majority young people under the age of 20. It could be argued that despite the low level of Islamism in Kazakhstan, compared with other Central Asian countries, its major causes have been pretty similar. These have included inadequate state economic policies resulting in poor conditions for the bulk of the population and a high unemployment rate among young people (Yemelianova, 2013).

Since early 1990s, over 25 per cent of your people in southern Kazakhstan had been unemployed. Many of the young people expressed frustration with the government’s reluctance to address acute ecological, agricultural and wider socio-economic problems.
In Kazakhstan this discrepancy has been exacerbated by the enormous gas and oil-related profits from the ruling political and business elite and foreign managers of BP, Chevron, ExxonMobil and other Western oil and gas companies operating in the country. In the oil and gas fields in western Kazakhstan the economic grievances of the local population have been also fueled by substantial differences in earnings between foreign and local employees of Western companies (Yemelianova, 2013). The riots of the oil town of Zhanaozen in December 2011 were triggered by protests against the low wages of Kazakh oil workers. And although it was a common practice amongst the state-supporting bloggers to partially blame Oralmans for what took place in the oil-rich region, some bloggers from the ‘other’ category have also suggested that the Islamisation of the western part of Kazakhstan is inevitable, suggesting that Oralmans are the ones who kept the Islamic traditions intact during the years of exile.

6.5.5 Language and ethnic identity
Language constitutes a second key domain for analysing nationalising discourses, policies and processes (Dave, 2007). The Kazakh language is officially recognised as the state language, while the Russian language was defined as the “language of interethnic communication”, as well as entitled in 1995 to be “equally used with Kazakh language in state institutions”. However, substantial segment of the titular population could not speak or write the titular language or simply preferred to speak Russian. Restoring the congruence between language and nationality has been difficult in Kazakhstan. The prestige of Kazakh has increased, and most Kazakhs have acquired at least a minimal competence in the language. Yet, for many urbanised Kazakhs, this competence remains rudimentary, and the use of Kazakh is largely symbolic (Dave, 2007).

Most members of the post-Soviet elite in Central Asia and the Caucasus were educated in the Soviet Union, speak fluent or near-fluent Russian, and feel far more comfortable in a Russian cultural environment than in any other foreign setting. Millions of ordinary citizens share similar feelings. Russian-language media remain influential in the former Soviet Union, most notably in Central Asia. Russian state
television is available in most of these countries, and Russian-language websites are for many residents a broader and more accessible source of information (Uffelmann, 2011).

The range of official steps undertaken to enforce the implementation of the Kazakh language included repatriation of the ethnic Kazakhs from other territories, which aimed to revitalise and enforce the national values, language and unity into the process of “kazakhisation”, which is highly discussed and represent a complicated, often controversial socio-political, naturally affecting the overall scenario of national self-identification, civil unification and nation-building in the state (Melich & Adibaeva, 2013).

The proposal on transformation of the Kazakh alphabet to Latin by 2025 became yet another contentious tangent to the language use. It created broad disputes of pros and cons of such a linguistic status and its political implications (Melich & Adibaeva, 2013). Numerous factors are used to support the arguments of both sides, again ranging from the geo-historical to the political. The Turkic origins of the Kazakh language for some specialists and experts appear to be a strong argument for following the example and experience of Turkey and Azerbaijan in regard to alphabetical latinisation. To accent the importance of such a linguistic transformation, they emphasise its necessity in terms of cultural integration and the political identity of the nation, overcoming the Russian influence, the pan-Turkic dimension, and the evolution of the language itself.

However, the unquestioned significance and impact of the Russian language in cultural, socio-economic and political arena of Kazakhstan is clear with the overwhelming number of higher educational institutions, schools, media space conversant in Russian language. The urban Kazakh elite remains heavily invested in Russian as a language of mobility and opportunity. As Dave (2007) notes, it is virtually unheard of for children of the Kazakh elite to attend Kazakh-medium schools.
The gap between policies and processes is most striking in Kazakhstan. Nationalising language policies have been weak and largely symbolic. The 1997 Law on Languages stipulated a duty of every citizen to master Kazakh, but this was a purely symbolic gesture. There has been no serious expectation that Russians would learn the language; indeed the language is widely understood as the exclusive possession of Kazakhs. And, while Russified Kazakhs have been pressured to incorporate a bit of Kazakh into their linguistic repertoire, they have encountered no ‘major economic, professional or social pressure’ to master the language or use it more actively (Dave, 2007). Instead, the Kazakh elite are investing in learning English, as the lingua franca of the business world. Furthermore, Kazakhstani authorities in 2007 attempted to enlarge the multi-language framework by a so-called “Trinity of the Languages” cultural project, including Kazakh, Russian and English into the category of the prior languages.

In fact, the riots in the western town of Zhanaozen have again demonstrated the importance of the Russian language in today’s Kazakhstan’s society. Although the so-called ‘bloody bloggers’ are ethnically Kazakh, and live in Almaty (southern part of Kazakhstan where the Kazakh language is used heavily, unlike in the northern regions of the country), their blog messages were written in Russian, as almost 94 percent of Kazakh websites have their content presented in Russian (Freedom House, 2011), therefore, it was important for both the ‘bloody bloggers’ and authorities they were representing to reach the majority of the Kazakh blogosphere. The ‘free bloggers’ also reported in Russian and in some cases even translated some of the interviews with the families of the oil workers that were originally held in Kazakh. Additionally, one of the ‘bloody bloggers’ Sadenova, in the comments to one of her posts had asked other bloggers to help translate her coverage of the events into English – a step taken not only to reach the Russian-speaking blogosphere, but also those living in the West, in particular those who support the Kazakh political opposition abroad.

**6.5.6 Institutional nationalism**

Another domain in which nationalising discourses, policies and processes are at work includes the informal nationalisation of recruitment practices. After the Independence,
there was a substantial over-representation of Kazakhs among government and administrative personnel, especially in the Russian-dominated north. Informal economic nationalisation has been particularly pronounced in Kazakhstan. The neo-patrimonial Kazakhstani regime has exercised close control and supervision of all key industries; major business and financial groups are dominated by Kazakhs with close ties to the President. Mass emigration has, of course, contributed to economic nationalisation, but emigration is itself in part a response to the pervasiveness of information nationalising practices (Brubaker, 2011). It is also argued that the transfer of the capital from Almaty, located in the Kazakh-dominated south, to Astana, city in the Russian-dominated heartland, was dictated by the desire to enhance the power and status of the favoured group and channelling the movement of young Kazakhs primarily to the new capital (McGarry, 1998). The motivation for transferring the capital also included securing the loyalty of Kazakhs in the north that had been under-represented in governmental positions; desire to locate the capital further from border with China, seismic threats in Almaty. However, the desire to exercise a greater vigilance over the Russian-dominated regions, including the need to secure the loyalty of the Russified Kazakhs in these territories, appears to have been a crucial stimulus (Dave, 2002).

In Kazakhstan, the process on nation-building has been mostly directed from above and followed the vision of President Nazarbayev. Some argue that almost every element in and the policy of nation-building as a whole is an exclusive design of President Nazarbayev who imposes his articulate vision on the whole society but does not care much about feasibility of his projects as long as they suit power interests of his and his closest relatives and loyalists (Melich & Adibaeva, 2013). The socio-economic tensions in the western part of Kazakhstan, however, have demonstrated that some nationalisation policies such as the ethnic-migration which was designed to decrease the Russification of the country might not work as the traditional Kazakhs and the Russified Kazakhs might be too different to unite.
6.6 Summary

Indeed, the issues around national identity, its construction and the public debate around it, the role of online social media in authoritarian context as well as the existing digital divide are all the aspects which play a significant role in political participation in Kazakhstan.

When referring back to the main research question - “What impact did the events in Zhanaozen have on political activism in Kazakhstan?”, it is important to keep in mind that given Kazakhstan’s historical background, socio-economic and cultural present, its ethnic mix-up, it is safe to say the overall impact was indicative of the potential, however, due the existing digital divide and the complexity of the post-Soviet national identity construction, the impact was limited. In other words, the impact was not great enough for the government to change its approach towards a number of the existing problems and challenges Kazakhstani face on daily basis.

Chapter VII: Conclusion

7.1 Restating the significance of this research

Content analysis approach was applied in this research to explore the content of both social media networks and of the two national newspapers as it was considered the most appropriate approach to be used when analyzing written, verbal or visual communication messages (Cole 1988). Hence, a lot was explored and gained by looking at the content and messages shared by the Kazakhstani blogosphere as well as by the journalists, oil workers and their families, state officials and the management of the oil company with regards to how events in Zhanaozen were covered in between
2011 and 2012; and what impact those events had on the political activism and political processes in Kazakhstan.

7.2 Conclusion of Findings

The findings have demonstrated that although there is a large number of newspapers and TV stations available in Kazakhstan in Russian, Kazakh and English languages, all forms of media, including the social one, are still heavily monitored, censored and in many cases self-censored. This is despite Nazarbayev clearly stating that “Kazakhstan is firmly set on becoming a Western-style democracy” (Lillis, 2013). In addition, his European colleagues agree with such statement by “continually supporting the implementation of further reforms to strengthen democracy in Kazakhstan” (Kazakhstan, 2015). The Nazarbayev administration insists it is committed to upholding democracy and human rights. Yet, long before the post-Zhanaozen crackdown, detractors noted democratic shortcomings, pointing out that Kazakhstan has never held an election judged free and fair by credible international observers and that is parliament contains no genuine opposition parties (Idrissov, 2012; Lillis, 2011).

Although Erlan Idrissov, Kazakhstan’s Foreign Minister, claimed (Idrissov, 2012) that during the investigations of the uprising in Zhanaozen, the government and its bodies strived to meet the highest international standards by allowing NGOs, foreign media and observers to visit Zhanaozen, findings of this thesis state otherwise. The alternative trip organized by the representatives of the Kazakhstan blogosphere not loyal to the government was done for this very reason: lack of information and ability to access information about and from Zhanaozen. In fact, the journalists of the opposition-led media and of Novaya Gazeta stated the same. Elena Kostyuchenko of Novaya Gazeta, was one of the first journalists to cover the aftermaths in Zhanaozen, but was then asked to leave the town. This, in turn, has led to all news generators online to cover events from different perspectives and frame them accordingly.

Although the literature review of the previously conducted research demonstrated that a number of scholars believe in new opportunities created by the online public...
sphere, the extent of online participation in Kazakhstan during the Zhanaozen uprising was not as great as it was in the countries of the Arab Spring movement or Ukraine and Georgia. However, as the ideas, news and information get to travel the world in seconds, crossing the nation borders in no time, Kazakhstani bloggers did have some impact on political participation. Indeed, it was enough to provoke a response by the Kazakhstani government that sought to organize a group of pro-governmental bloggers to cover the events in Zhanaozen indicating that the state was taking notice of what was happening online and was aware of the need to not simply cut off information flow from the city but negotiate or as others might say manipulate even in a limited way the online space. This was done as an alternative to the rest of the blogosphere who opposed the government and whose reports were at times blocked by state’s “just-in-time” censorship techniques. Such techniques are used by authoritarian states to control the content citizens create as well as get access to. One could say that this was very similar to techniques applied by the Chinese government in which people are hired to comment positively online on behalf of the ruling regime. Furthermore, research findings also indicated that the impact of such political participation could have been greater if it was not for the low Internet penetration rate amongst Kazakhstani, and in the western part of the country in particular. This raises the issue of the digital divide and political participation.

Although the ‘bloody bloggers’ travelled to Zhanaozen with a pre-defined agenda there appeared to be some strong similarities around the framing of the events in Zhanaozen by Kazakhstani online community, regardless of which side they represented. As stated in the Findings chapter of this thesis, the majority of all messages posted on the two blogging platforms discussed the riots through the prism of socio-economic issues, both in the country and in the region. Not only did Nazarbayev’s daughter, Dariga, a very influential political figure in the country, shared the same opinion about the roots of the conflict, so did Kazakhstan’s Foreign Minister, Erlan Idrissov. In a message, posted on the first anniversary of the bloody events in Zhanaozen, Idrissov stated that as a result of the conflict, new investments have been made in homes, kindergartens and hospitals with hundreds of new permanent jobs created for doctors and teachers. He also stated that the conflict acted as a major
shake-up, too, of local government so that now it is more responsive to the concerns and priorities of the local community (Idrissov, 2012). In addition, Idrissov (2012) stated, the problems exposed were not restricted to Zhanaozen of the Mangistau region but were more widespread and common in those towns dependent on a single industry or company.

The bloggers might have framed the events in Zhanaozen similarly, but one of the most unexpected findings highlighted the problems around national and ethnic identity and ethnic return migration in Kazakhstan. When trying to identify reasons behind the bloody events in Zhanaozen, the bloody bloggers were quick to blame the Oralmans who seemed to have become the ‘scapegoat’ in this case. The notion of “them” and “us” was created, which was noticed and then addressed not only by the government and city officials, but also by the President of Kazakhstan himself. On the contrary, the free bloggers as well as a number of other bloggers referred to the existing social and economic conditions of the regions. Some members of the Kazakhstani government, including the Foreign Minister, have also supported this view. In other words, what occurred in Zhanaozen is a reflection of what is currently happening in the country.

7.3 Recommendations

Political activism and the techniques used to spread it or involve citizens in it evolve over time. So does the impact it has on political processes, especially in newly independent and post-authoritarian states in particular. Although, the situation in Zhanaozen forced the government to respond to activism online very quickly by at first preventing the users from accessing it and then sending off the group of bloggers to post on government’s behalf, the existing censorship situation as well as the lower levels on internet penetration in the regions could potentially slow down further development of Kazakhstanis increasing online participation. However, as the Internet penetration rate is on the rise, currently standing at 54 per cent, a new generation of digital citizens could create a basis for future studies on the impact of online political processes in Kazakhstan.
In addition, this research is only the beginning of an empirical study on the exploration of social media usage, online spaces, ethnic and national identity construction of Kazakhstanis. This research aims to set the foundation for further studies. Qualitative studies of interviews with the members of the Kazakh diaspora both in Kazakhstan and outside of its borders could shed more light on the understanding of the Oralmans and the impact they have on the modern interpretation of the national identity building in Kazakhstan.

7.4 Limitations

One of the difficulties I faced was during the data collection stage. Although there were enough articles published in both newspapers: Kazakhstanskaya Pravda and Golos Respubliki, as well as in the online version of the latter – Respublika portal, there did not seem to be much available in the blogs. Neither the ‘bloody bloggers’, no the ‘free bloggers’ or the rest of the Kazakhstani’s blogosphere were particularly active at first. At the same time, journalist of the Respublika portal often referred to the messages posted by one of the groups, and by the ‘bloody bloggers’ in particular. I then decided to look in to the commentary section of each post, where the discussion was in fact taking place. Looking there allowed me to collect the sufficient data for this research.

Another difficulty included the separation of the researcher’s personal and academic identity. As my close family lives in Kazakhstan, it was particularly interesting to observe their tendency to apply self-censorship even in my personal communication on the phone with them. I knew all along that the events in Zhanaozen and what followed affected my family. So did the personal desire to see what would happen in the country of my origin if activism were to move from kitchens to streets. Therefore, being objective, no allowing my own feelings or personal opinions to interfere, was not an easy task when analyzing the data. However, non-participant data collection method allowed me to distance myself from the discussion topics online. At the same time, having the same ethnic and linguistic background has helped me to interpret
data and uncover what is happening in regards to the notions of ethnic and national identity construction and the notion of ‘them’ and ‘us’.
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Name of candidate: Dila Beisembayeva

This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project entitled Exploring the impact of online political activism on political processes in Kazakhstan: the Zhanaozen uprising is submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of Master of International Communication

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