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Why is it Hard to Build a Strong Civil Society in Kazakhstan?

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Abstract:

No matter how noticeable the increase in the development of intersectional relations was, Kazakhstani society is still not civil enough due to the long-lasting consequences of the USSR fallout, the struggle of grassroots organizations and independent press outlets with sustaining themselves financially, and the severe restrictions posed by the government, which hinder efforts to create a subsequent autonomous and self-sustaining society. Weaknesses of civil society should not be silenced, and the nature of poor civil society should be investigated, alongside identifying methods to build a vibrant, resistant society to progress in the socio-economic field. Via qualitative and quantitative research designs, this study gathers initial data about undermining factors of civil society from different social activists, assessing the popularity of that mindset across the country on a broader scale. It was highlighted that 48.1% of people lack information about civil society, 29,6% don't know of its existence, and 43,2% have anxiety with the current governing system. According to the replies, it was clear that allowing people more freedom within the system, fostering inclusion of the general public, and fostering social cohesiveness might all contribute to the emergence of a democratic society. These conclusions will augment Kazakhstan's current predicament in order to strengthen fragile political connections and put a stop to the nation's lengthy slump in the economy.

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1.1. Background

Civil society describes the totality of citizens who are not close to the levers of state power, their relations outside the frame of governmental and commercial structures, as well as voluntarily formed

non-profit-directed organizations and associations (Easton, 1965). Strong civil society is achieved when people can freely participate in political structures and affect the outcome of decisions in political governance, impacting all public levels, and practising sovereignty over policies while eliminating intervention of specific political groups. Peterson and Til (2018) support the idea, that ability to advocate for those victimized by unjust laws, call upon basic civil rights, call for a response from governmental actors for the consequences of their policies, and provide socially transparent stewardship of resources describe advanced civil society.

In Kazakhstan, corruption remains a fundamental problem, for the reason that even though state institutions appear to be strong, good governance has been hampered by low-level transparency and accountability of governmental processes (Democracy, human rights, and governance: Kazakhstan, 2020). Makhmutova and Akhmetova (2011) suggest, it is momentous to mention that during the Soviet period even though civil organizations were present, they were controlled in number by the Communist Party, and even after perestroika limitations on freedom of speech and public assembly were so severe, that in 1986, in Almaty civil movement against Moscow's appointment was cruelly crushed by the army. After the fall of the USSR and gaining independence, civil society organizations became more robust, diversified, and organized, at that time nearly 400 CSOs were established, saw growth in diversity, and received recognition from states till 2022, when their number today is around 22000 (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2016). Although the progress in developing intersectional relations became more noticeable, society in Kazakhstan is not civil enough due to no historic knowledge of their management and while nongovernmental organizations and independent media outlets keep on facing a complex operating environment, struggling with financial sustainability, as the judiciary system lacks independence, it will result in deterring building future independent and self-sufficient society.

1.2. Problem Statement

To date, there is still an issue our society faces because of a repressive regime, that limits freedom of expression and speech and stifles opposition. For instance, journalists are forced to deal with harassment as well as prosecution and are sentenced to arrest for carrying out their work in the public light. Another problem of our society is that the government lack experience in cooperating with civil society organizations due to having no previous historically worthy interaction with them, which is why civil societies themselves are vulnerable and easily manipulated. Moreover, Kazakhstani people do not show much interest to be a part of CSOs, as they have partially skeptical opinions on that and the majority of the population thinks negatively about being a part of such associations would undermine the country's stability.

1.3. Purpose of a Study

This research's purpose is to ascertain the infirmity of civil society in Kazakhstan and distinguish reasons for its weakness. It explores the nature of poor civil society in Kazakhstan, and its relations with history before that correlating to the restrictive political regime of communists. In this work, official data about civil society organizations is analyzed and the consciousness of the population about their freedoms, rights, obligations, and adherence to certain positions in politics will be evaluated.

1.4. Research Question

What are the reasons for the weak civil society in Kazakhstan?

1.5. Significance

Building a viable and resistant civil society at a fast and qualitative rate is obligatory for further progress in the sociopolitical field. While this compulsory element, providing modernization of the current position of Kazakhstan, is being neglected, in the world of capitalism it is, harshly saying, unfeasible to overcome long-term economic stagnation as well as to strengthen weak political relations. It stands for a reason that in a highly developed country economic, political, and civil spheres intersect and, thus, provide intricate and constant interaction. However, the turning point here is that in order to advance civil society, reasons affecting negatively the enhancement of it should be eradicated (Diachenko, 2007). This is why this research work should be considered significant in terms of general development not only for students to analyze the importance of distinguishing their freedoms but also for politicians and national economists, who will consider building civil society as a significant stage in the country's development and assess the factors weak civil society stems from.

1.6. Conclusion

This paperwork gives a rise of awareness about weak civil society in Kazakhstan, defining what civil society in the first place is, describing the characteristics of a strong one, in comparison, stating what are the weaknesses of Kazakhstani society. Initially, in the next chapters, this research describes the consequences of communist policy in Kazakhstan and how it affected the further development of civil society, analyzes data about the mindfulness of the population in terms of politics, and the power corrupted systems have over plain society.

2.1. Introduction

Developing civil society is a major factor, influencing the overall country's development. According to Nursultan Nazarbayev (2006), the first president of the Republic of Kazakhstan, it has a strong correlation with democracy in the country, as the state becomes more democratic when society becomes more civil. A government with a civil system can ensure the citizens' fundamental human rights and protection, whilst society itself can be independent and uninfluenced by unhealthy propaganda from authorities, having their voice and no one to override their opinion. It constructs a path for a healthy democracy, where different individuals are free to discuss their common goals, and interests, and implement their ideas.

In the context of Kazakhstan, a multitude of actions striving to intensify civil society's engagement with the government, increasing conceptualization of it among the population, and encouraging civil society development were taken. Neglecting the huge extent that was covered, they did not appear to be as effective as were planned, the reason for which is closely related to the system of governing, gaffes of the government, historical background, and society itself.

2.2. Examples of unsustainable civil society

Initially, it has a place to be to briefly clarify why the civil society of Kazakhstan is still described as weak. According to the Anti-Corruption Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2021), Kazakhstan reached 38 points out of 100 in Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), which is still pretty low, even though it illustrates a gradual positive rise.

On the social side, people who attempt to exercise freedom of peaceful assembly are frequently detained, fined, or given short-term jail terms by the authorities since they continue to regularly

intervene and restrict this right. Protestors are more often held in the street for 10 hours, whilst police started practicing "kettling" them (Human Rights Watch, 2022). For doing their jobs, journalists are still subject to intimidation, arrest, physical assault, and prosecution. According to what Amnesty International (2021) has ruled, during one of the attempts of Dmitry Tikhonov to report on a peaceful rally in February 2014 authorities imprisoned him.

Another example illustrates a social activist, and human rights advocate, Max Bokaev, who was sentenced to five years in jail in 2016 for peacefully opposing planned land changes, was absolved on February 4, 2021, but is still under stringent limitations (Amnesty International, 2021). For three years he was sentenced to administrative surveillance, which limited his freedom of peaceful assembly, speech, and association. To avoid leakage of information they also prevented Bokaev from seeing journalist Lukpan Akhmedyarov on February 3, momentarily detaining the latter.

There is limited opportunity for people to say something contrary or critical towards the government, without demolishing their chances to speak up. As a prominent example, police detained and questioned Kenzhebulat Esimseitov, an ambulance driver, on October 7 by Article 274 of the Criminal Code for the "distribution of deliberately false information" (Amnesty International, n.d.). He was one of 24 ambulance drivers who signed a letter to officials protesting the Ambulance Service's working conditions, especially the inability to pay workers the extra money they were entitled to as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak. The case was still open at the end of the year but wasn't being aggressively looked into. Those are the depictions confirming that the civility of Kazakhstani society still has room to grow.

2.3. Context of USSR

The period of the USSR could surely affect people's initial perception of government and civility, imprinting the Soviet mindset and deficiency of a sense of self-sufficiency. In the middle of the 1980s, when more civic engagement and democratic and environmental themes gained popularity, the communist government continued to restrict fundamental liberties including the freedom of expression and assembly in public (Pierobon, 2016, p.205). For instance, Makhmutova and Akhmetova (2011) point out that the army brutally suppressed a civic protest of employees and students in Alma-Ata in 1986 when they organized against Moscow's selection of the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Kazakhstan Communist Party (p.18). The majority of the movement's members being behind bars hindered the government from publicly acknowledging the total number of casualties, making people collectively abhor the power of the states and leaving others with crushed bravery. On the other hand, according to Bunce, "adapted behavior" emerged as a result of the exceptional Soviet state's infiltration, observation, and control of all facets of social life (1999). In this regard, the author claims that people living under the socialist system were urged to divide their personalities into a public and a conformist self, on the one hand, and a private and more rebellious self, on the other hand - a concept known as a "Nischengesellschaft," (Bunce 1999, p. 30). The Soviet citizens disengaged from civic life and relied on intense friendship networks that became a form of self-government due to their mistrust of a highly politicized and controlled public sphere and of communist organizations whose membership was required, coerced, and instrumental (Pierobon, 2016, p.205).

In a similar vein, Kazantsev (2015) emphasizes how the Soviet experience by altering the composition and operations of non-profit organizations, has established the first model of a totalitarian "uncivil society", which still has a hugely destructive and distorting influence on Central Asian civil organizations (p.28). Particularly, Soviet authoritarianism was successful in atomizing people,

weakening broad faith in society, and implementing a system of denunciations. As a result, some forms of the growth and distortions of civil society were predetermined.

2.4. Lacking education

The legal limitations in Kazakhstan, where the freedom to convene and rally has been strictly monitored and restricted recently, may best explain the abysmally low rates of political activity. One of the fundamental human freedoms, the liberty to the mass gathering, is still immensely curtailed in Kazakhstan. According to the CSI Population Survey, 80.1% of interviewees had almost no faith in political parties (Makhmutova & Akhmetova, 2011, p.24).

The conspicuous lack of participatory democracy as well as the poor level of livelihood that discourages people from participating more in civil society's activities are among the major shortcomings and challenges confronting civil society (Makhmutova & Akhmetova, 2011, p.9). Apathy toward contributing and an increase in individualism are still inhibiting societal issues. For instance, to the majority of the millennial population elections in 2019 were not interesting because they were aware of the twisting of facts and the immutability of procedures (Idn & Dick, 2019). The progress of CSOs itself is threatened by a lack of permanent human capital, and ideals are frequently compromised in the name of short-term financial survival. Controversial disclosure and accountability of public monies, when they are dispersed, pose the biggest challenge to the credibility of CSOs and, more generally, civil society. The lack of a solid social environment or philanthropic culture that would otherwise serve as a foundation for CSOs, is why they are too consumed with their everyday struggles to survive, persisting inaction in larger-scale activism (Makhmutova & Akhmetova, 2011, p.53). State agencies continue to interfere with CSOs and mistreat them harshly, which culminates in inadequate cooperation between the government, civil society, and the business sector.

2.5. Flaws of governing

One of the concerns related to establishing civil society is a flawed anti-corruption framework, society's disengagement, low level of interest in participating in policymaking, as well as state's control of social media. Moreover, the Group of States against Corruption even concluded that fundamental reforms should take place to bring Kazakhstan's institutions closer to the anti-corruption norms (2022). Another acute problem is the inaction of the government relating to different issues that have been continuously conveyed with alacrity. Speaking of which, even though domestic abuse was noted as a limiting factor and viable to overcome by Kasym Jomart Tokayev, parliament did not do anything noteworthy regarding reviewing new drafts of domestic violence, nor proposing legislation for strengthened protection of women. In the meantime, police officers and social workers are lacking training in averting, warning, and considerably responding to domestic abuse. Aware of this setback, on March 8th hundreds of women in Almaty called for gender equality and criminalization of domestic violence (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Elections for the legislature don't adhere to democratic principles either. Freedom House (2022) reports that there have been reports of irregularities such as ballot box stuffing, group and proxy voting, and voter list manipulation, and the ruling party profits from a hazy line between the party and the state. In January 2021, parliamentary elections were conducted; the outcomes substantially mirrored those of the 2016 election, with Nur Otan winning 76 of the 98 elected seats. A local nongovernmental group (NGO) alleged that their statistics revealed that the party had only won 48.30

percent of the vote, despite official results showing Nur Otan winning 71.09 percent of the popular vote. The government-approved parties Ak Zhol and the Communist People's Party won 12 and 10 seats, respectively. The National Social Democratic Party (OSDP), the sole legitimate opposition group, was forced to stay abstinent. The election lacked true competition, and there is a necessity for political change. These events with severe limitations describe states' omission and low-level civic engagement alongside inadequate authenticity toward the public.

2.6. Conclusion

In summary, considering current state-civil communications in Kazakhstan, there are several factors contributing to such a fragile relationship and the overall weak civility in the country. Briefly, it is untrustworthiness towards the government, insufficiency of aid provided to civil society organizations that eagerly try to survive, historical factors such as the USSR mindset, and people's overall apathy towards political activism.

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, further study on this topic is demonstrated through the usage of qualitative research. This study aimed to outline the struggles, which could be conquered in the strive to build a sustainable society, or faced obstacles, enervating civility of the current states, which primarily reveals societal situation, attitude towards government, and concerning matters on this theme. For those reasons, using interviews as a qualitative method was highly appreciated in this research. Phenomenological research is often said to be revealing the depth of understanding and richness of the details, allowing to develop of a more accurate understanding for the researcher (Annan, 2019, p. 27) Nevertheless, taking into account the wide scope of a research project, it caused some type of a conundrum in choosing one specific research method, which is why to maintain objectivity implementing quantitative research was what this theme required. The research design, sampling technique for particular participants, research sites, data collecting and analysis methods, ethical considerations, and a recap are all addressed in this section.

3.2. Research Design

Assessing the effectiveness of qualitative research, to refute or vindicate the hypotheses of this study interview was convenient to use, whilst investigating and comprehending the value that individuals ascribe to a societal situation, during which subjects underlined unrevealed issues regarding this theme. Alongside this, quantitative research serves as a tool for evaluating objective theories, including bias prevention measures and being able to generalize the results and repeat them. (Creswell, 2008, p. 4). This is why, as it was mentioned earlier, this study employed a mixed research method; within this method, transformative mixed methods procedures with a sequential approach came into use. This implies, as an overarching perspective, theoretical lenses, including hypotheses about the USSR's impact, pitfalls of government, and social mindset, provided a framework for topics. The mixed method in the research used both methodologies simultaneously to make a survey's maximum capacity larger than that achieved by either qualitative or quantitative research. (Creswell & Plano

Clark, 2011).

3.3. Research Sites

Platforms for instant messaging and videoconferences, such as Zoom, and Microsoft Teams were used for the interviews. Moreover, there were face-to-face interviews in the Nazarbayev (NIS PhM) in Astana, in some shopping malls, and in other amicable ambiances for the subject, priorly organized

with the discussed place and the time.

Surveys for the quantitative gathering of analytical data were conducted on Google Forms by disseminating URLs to the forms to civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, as well as governmental ones with the assistance of administrators, teachers, and curators.

3.4 Participants

The research project were conducted using a non-probability sampling method, precisely non-proportional quota sampling. There were several predetermined categories, such as age, and level of engagement in social activities, with the aid of which participants were deliberately chosen for each of the various categories impacting civil society until a certain quota was satisfied (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 69).

3.5. Data Collection

The first part of the data collection is provided by semi-structured interviews, which involve prepared in-advance questions; however, participants are allowed to ask a few open-ended questions intended to elicit opinions from the interviewees. (Annan, 2019, p. 55). The second part of the data collection is systemized through electronic questionnaires on Google Forms that were distributed in certain sites mentioned previously. This tool helped the researcher to survey a large group of the population and generalize the responses to a greater number of the population (Annan, 2019).

3.6. Data Collection Procedure

During the collection of the qualitative data, information from interviews were recorded by making handwritten notes, by audiotaping, or by videotaping, in case the recording device fails during an interview (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 183). Furthermore, each subject was asked privately in his or her natural setting to avoid any inconveniences. When the required data was gathered, a poll was created. Based on the responses previously collected, questions were posed. Participants in both surveys and interviews were given consent agreement documents to complete before being questioned.

3.7. Data Analysis

Analysis of the qualitative data was done in an inductive style, depicting a situation's complexity, outlining the personal background, provided by initially transcribing and translating interviews from Kazakh and Russian languages to English, optically scanning material, whilst arranging and structuring the data in a convenient order. A vital aspect to consider is coding the interviewees' names for them to remain anonymous. After that, similar topics were clustered together, distinguished by the uniqueness of the topic, and described with the most distinctive words. Then, while employing codes of a specific statement's owner, similarities and discrepancies of those agendas were reviewed, which had the main impact on total summarizations. (Creswell, 2008, p. 187).

A detailed evaluation of the responses of quantitative data was performed for all independent and dependent factors in a questionnaire. The means, standard deviations, and spread of values for these variables were displayed in this study. Findings were presented in the table or figures, which referred to the researcher's inferences regarding the research questions, theories, and the data's overall significance. Analyzing the results in the context of the initial theories, addressing whether the queries were backed or refuted in this interpretation, or research questions constitutes the data analysis's concluding stage (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 23)

3.8. Ethical Issues

Voluntary participation, harmlessness, anonymity, and confidentiality was ensured for the participants. Subjects in an investigation understood that their involvement was voluntary, that they were free to leave the study at any moment without suffering any negative effects, and that their cooperation or lack of participation in the project had no negative effects on them. Moreover, in this study, individuals' identities were kept in order to safeguard their interests and long-term well-being. Besides this, anonymity guarantees that people are shielded against law enforcement or other institutions who might have an interest in recognizing and following such individuals in the long term. Potential participants were also provided with disclosure, so they were aware of the purpose of the interview, deciding whether or not to enroll in this discussion (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 137-140)

3.9. Conclusion

The purpose of the study's mixed methodology strategy was explained in the ongoing part. The goal of the research was to identify the reasons for the inability to constitute a strong civil society. Residents of Astana, who express interest in politics were the target subjects for the survey. There were two phases of data gathering, which were used: an interview and a survey based on the discussion results. Statistics were used to show the information, the results of which are shown in the next chapter.

4.1. Introduction

This chapter includes a full presentation and discussion of the data analysis as well as the study's findings. The collected data are represented under the following headings: characteristics of the participants; level of engagement in civil society activities; the role of the government; commonality of the civil society among people; the readiness of the surveyed people and conclusion.

4.2. Characteristics of the participants

Respondents, mostly adults, and adolescents, were asked the same questions about the issue of weaknesses of civil society in Kazakhstan in the interviews and survey to get pertinent and varied thoughts on the subject. Individuals who variously contributed to civil society, taking into account differences in ages and language preferences as well, were specifically thus selected to lessen biased responses and investigate the issue from as many perspectives as it was possible. In all, 81 respondents answered survey questions, of whom 57 (or 70.4%) answered in Russian and 24 (or 29.6%) in Kazakh. Assessing their level of participation in social activities, 35 respondents do not actively partake in or organize such events, 51 of those surveyed answered positively, and the left 4 people were unsure about their contribution. As mentioned in the previous chapter, methodology, another predetermined category was age, which was selected to understand the patterns of similar answers according to the generations surveyed people belong. So, regarding age distinctions, there were 33 adolescents (from 14 to 17), 24 young adults (from 18 to 35), and 24 middle-aged and old people in the survey. Coming to analyze qualitative data, the investigation consists of 7 interviews, one of which was conducted with a student aged 18, coded as S, 1 was taken from a conversation with an individual, specializing in modern Kazakhstan history, coded as T, 1 interview was with a global volunteer, coded as V, 1 was an independent leader of civil society organization, coded as G, and the left three described their position as human rights defenders, coded as P1, P2, and P3.

4.3. Identifying the mass opinion on civil society

To begin with, it was derived that almost all participants in the interview were aware of civil society's role in Kazakhstan, and thus could share their opinion and prejudices on the topic. The only exception

was the fourth interviewee, G, who confirmed her unawareness of civil society prior to the interview and that she had to search for it to prepare. Overall, the opinions on the theme were multifaceted: some claimed that it is wrong to say CSOs have any impact on the country as a whole since the concept of CSO is not yet engraved in people's minds, they do not know what is represented by this term thus do not know how to interact with it, while others interviewees were out of knowledge about civil society themselves, getting to know this concept only during interview, or giving general learned from the Internet responses to the questions; some say civil society is poorly developed since it objectively and subjectively for P2 does not have any implementation in the government, using March elections as an example, while P1 clearly states people are already more openly expressing their positions or dissatisfactions according to the activities of the government, using the same event with elections as an example.

4.3.1. Level of engagement in civil society activities

When asked about the level of engagement in civil society activities 42 of surveyed proclaimed to be social activists, 35 respondents refused to be named as such, and the other 4 were not sure about their impact on society. The examples of contribution to society involved 44 responses of participating in different kinds of volunteering and charity events, 15 recordings of human rights defending works, whilst reasons for not participating in such events included lack of knowledge in 17 respondents, 7 of surveyed think they have nothing to give or do not care, and 12 people consider time as a limiting factor. All the interviewees had contributed to the enhancement of civil society since all of them were already a part of it.

4.3.2. Awareness (civil society)

Speaking of public awareness, on a bigger scale it was determined that people tend to be ignorant relating to the theme. From the questionnaire, 24 of the respondents, that is 31.9% did not know of the existence of civil society before filling out the form. Moreover, when trying to highlight its shortcomings, 37 responses underlying failings in knowledge about the government structure and 39 responses stating unconsciousness on this topic were received. That turned out to be a major problem when asked to assess the level of civil society since the standard deviation was derived to be an almost twice greater number than 1, which is 1,8658. With the mode being 5 with only 23 responses, no matter the fact that the mean rating of the development of CSOs was 5,27, because of the high standard deviation the data is considered to be widely spread out and less reliable for assessment.

Derived data only reassures that the concept of civil society is not settled down yet. People are mostly inattentive regarding it, which could be caused by a lack of information because relying upon the answers about functions of civil society that appear to be lagging respondents mostly chose social cohesion with 38 responses and advocacy and public communication with 48 responses.

Now, by the statement of Ruslan Kazkenov, Managing Director of the "Civic Peace" NGO in Astana, Kazakhstan, a huge barrier impeding the growth of that social sector is the fact that the majority of people still only acknowledge the state's strength and the crucial part it plays in meeting society's requirements, taking into account the backwardness of our culture (Ziegler et al., 2011).

Furthermore, during the interview with P3, S, and T the question of pertinence of acquaintance with civil society remained open. P3 expressed her conviction that presently there is no reason to categorically state that Kazakhstan's civil society is undeveloped, but the issue is that not everyone in

Kazakhstan understands that there is a civil society; in fact, the majority of the population “has no idea” what a civil society is, which is a very other inquiry. “There is a dearth of knowledge, nay, consciousness, among the populace, about civic society”.

Interviewee S also mentioned how there could not be any distinctive prejudices as “there's not much thought of that for the settlers” and the concept of civil society is still developing. S gave rise to the question of low engagement in CSO activities in our country by linking it to the mass ignorance of people, acknowledging that they should be more conversant and the concept should be less incognizable.

Developing a cultural understanding of the community along with the way it might evolve on its own is crucial.

4.3.2.1. March elections

There have been concerns about the quality of voter education and outreach in Kazakhstan, particularly in rural areas where access to information may be limited (Freedom House, 2021). Additionally, there have been allegations of voter intimidation and coercion in past elections, which may have undermined the ability of some voters to make a free and informed choice (U.S. Department of State, 2020). Assessing recent events, P3 claims, not the whole society is docile and illiterate, but the majority of its members are. During elections in which she participated as an independent voter, many people participated in the polls, asking how they should cast their ballots. Answering the question, P3 clearly described her perturbation of how “folks go to the polls and don't even inquire how to vote”. She continued sharing her experience, describing how people went to vote in the parliamentary elections, choosing, acting foolishly, and not even considering whom they were voting for or on which issue were they voting in general.

4.3.3. Awareness (rights, rights violation)

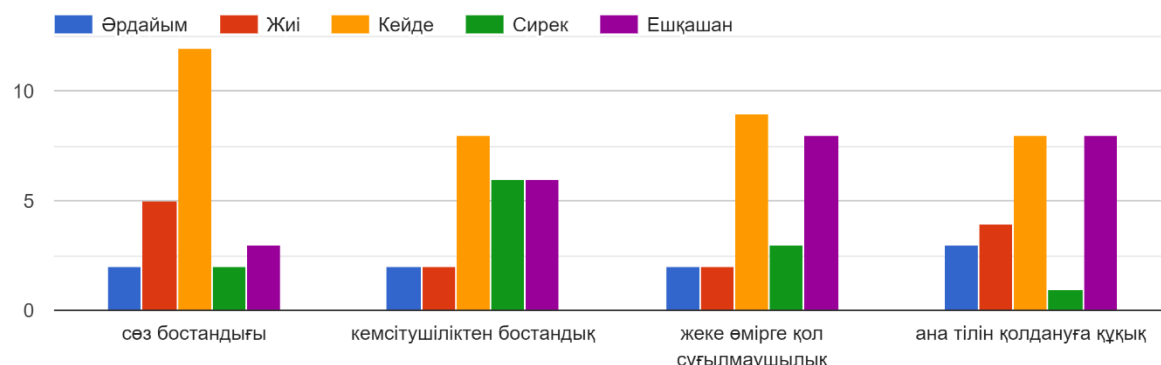
Apart from general awareness of civil society, it is worth mentioning human rights awareness and violations in Kazakhstan have been a subject of concern. According to the survey, 30% of people do not know their fundamental human rights, 66% approved the knowledge of them, while 4% of surveyed reported being totally oblivious about it. This showcases that while Kazakhstan has made some progress in improving its human rights record in recent years, significant challenges remain to be addressed (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

At the same time, there are ongoing concerns about human rights violations in Kazakhstan, including restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly, limitations on the work of independent media and civil society organizations, and allegations of torture and mistreatment of detainees. The government has also been criticized for its handling of labor rights and the treatment of migrant workers. Again, relying on the data of the survey, all four listed freedoms and rights, which are: freedom of opinion and expression, any form of equality, the right to privacy, and the right for using the mother language, have been anyhow violated. On the diagram lower four tables from left to right represent every right mentioned above in respective order. The blue color stands for rights that are always discriminated against, red for frequently, yellow for usually, green for rarely, and purple for frequently. To complement the list of discriminations respondents added other types of rights like freedom to participate in public affairs and rights for work and education; the first freedom was mentioned considerably, justified by the fact that on 8th April 2023 during the feminist march, the mayor's office of the city promised to block the road for the march, but in fact refused to do it, said Karimova (2023).

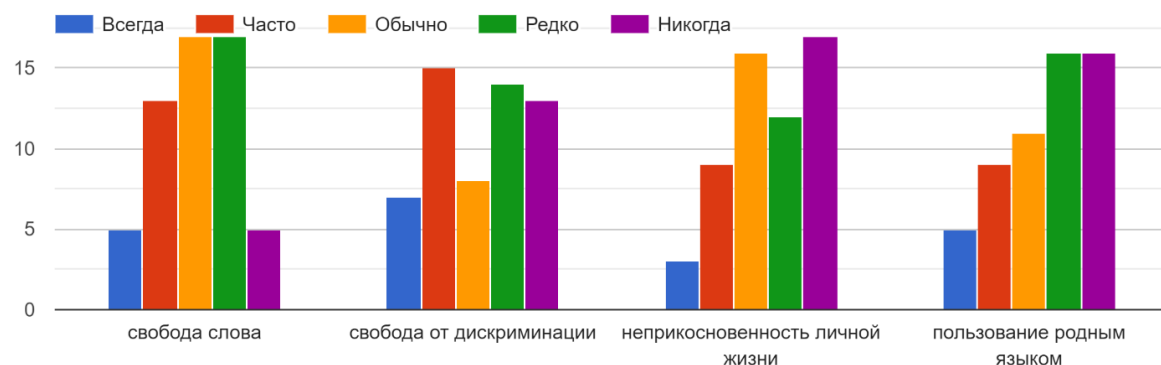
So, there are still significant challenges to be addressed to conquer inequality and human rights violation

Kazakh version	right to privacy	right for using the mother language	freedom of opinion and expression	Freedom from violation
Always	2	3	2	2
Frequently	2	4	5	2
Usually	9	8	12	8
Rarely	3	1	2	6
Never	8	8	3	6

Сіздің құқықтарыңызды қаншалықты жиі бұзады? Әдетте қандай құқықтар бұзылады?



Как часто вы сталкиваетесь с нарушением ваших прав? Какие права обычно нарушаются?



Russian version	right to privacy	right for using the mother language	freedom of opinion and expression	Freedom from violation
Always	3	5	5	7
Frequently	9	9	13	15
Usually	16	11	17	8
Rarely	12	16	17	14
Never	17	16	5	13

4.3.4. Different prioritization

Kazakhstan is a relatively young country that is still transitioning to a market-based economy, and many of its citizens are focused on meeting their basic needs, such as food, shelter, and employment, rather than on civic engagement. This has limited the pool of individuals who can devote time and resources to civil society activities. It was derived both from the survey and the interview that people prioritize other things over engagement in civil society activities, as 46 respondents reported being careless about civil society as the most undermining factor for it, regardless of the fact that the majority of surveyed were social activists. P3, answering the question of shortcomings of current civil society, elaborated on the topic of the negligibility of civil society for people. She did not claim that civil society is not developed in Kazakhstan but rather said that people are ignorant of it, rhetorically questioning why don't people know about it. "The majority of the population has a very low standard of living. 30 percent probably live below the subsistence minimum, and therefore, have completely different tasks, that is, ensuring that there is a stable job, thinking about how to provide for their family, absolutely not interested in what society they are in". P1, assessing the attitude towards civil society in his surroundings, concluded that economic interest is intertwined with political interest, referring that in many cases people are apolitical with a higher standard of living, and with a lower standard of living in society citizens are the more active.

4.4. The undermining influence of the government

Vadim Ni, Executive Director, of the civic foundation "Asian American Partnership," Almaty, Kazakhstan highlighted recent government initiatives to promote NGOs in Kazakhstan. In particular, the number of environmental groups has grown significantly over the past few years, with some even gaining important political influence (Ziegler et al., 2011). But even these environmental groups face major challenges in terms of obtaining funding and defending their independence from the state. In the following paragraphs, there are listed pitfalls of the government in cooperation with civil society such as excess bureaucracy, strict limitations on freedom of expression, and independent meetings.

As P2 noted, although everybody can post anything for the right to free expression on social media, which means it is undoubtedly feasible to speak honestly, fear affects the majority of individuals. They are worried because if they will go after something amiss there, you may claim later that you didn't know how you followed "the wrong path", and injuries will suit you and that will be that. P2 describes this trend as legally enforceable rules or some established practices, i.e., everyone is aware that there are unspoken rules like that. "For instance, if you say something inappropriately, you will receive a kick to the head".

CSOs are compelled to focus their efforts on short-term, bureaucracy-intensive financing sources that may pay for their expenses but prevent them from maintaining or investing in new infrastructure

(Makhmutova & Akhmetova, 2011, p.24). Aware of this problem, T called upon taking off a lot of bureaucratic barriers. He says that we have a lot of NGOs opened by the state which only represent the desires of the government. This point, in particular, proves that with unnecessary paperwork civil society organizations may face challenges in obtaining the necessary permits and registrations to operate legally, which can limit their ability to carry out their work effectively. Moreover, government officials may be using bureaucratic processes to harass and intimidate civil society organizations that are critical of the government.

Another undermining factor is the presence of limitations no matter how authorities claim they have been simplified. P2 cleared his point on this, saying that indeed even the requirements for managing the same rallies, have been simplified, but practice shows that even after the elections, people are imprisoned there from single pickets for 25 days. Besides that, the government can impose restrictions on public gatherings, demonstrations, and peaceful protests, limiting the ability of civil society to engage in public activism and express their grievances or demands. Constraints on civic space restrict the freedom of assembly and association, essential elements for a thriving civil society. P2 continued linking those restrictions with society's intimidation after what happened in January in 2022, which left everyone scared and with a small phobia of rallies. Here, it is important to note that Kazakhstan has taken steps to promote civil society development, such as passing legislation to simplify the registration process for NGOs. <https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/kazakhstan> However, challenges remain, and efforts to create an enabling environment for civil society in Kazakhstan continue to be important. Advocacy for greater freedom of expression, assembly, and association, as well as reforms that support the independence and effectiveness of civil society, are crucial for fostering a vibrant civil society in Kazakhstan.

NGOs in Kazakhstan often rely on multiple funding sources, including international donors, private foundations, and government grants. While government funding can provide financial stability, it can also come with certain conditions or expectations, potentially influencing the NGO's activities and priorities. P2 thus said that from the point of view of the independence of such organizations, the government should weaken its influence a little further since the constructive part of NGOs depends on the government, using grants and budgetary systems. "In our system, unfortunately, when the state finances something, it asks for something in return, at least for loyalty". From here, loyalty is already a bias, and bias leads to the fact that other NGOs will no longer be able to say what they think, but will say what is needed. The legal and regulatory framework for NGOs in Kazakhstan has evolved over the years. Certain laws and regulations, such as the Law on Non-Profit Organizations and the Law on Grants, outline the requirements and procedures for NGOs to receive government funding or operate legally. Compliance with these regulations may be necessary to access government support, leading to a level of dependence on the government's approval.

4.4.1. March elections

In the context of elections and, specifically, election-based conflict, Joanna Lillis (2020) implies that civil society has been recognized as having a significant role to play in promoting peace as it is less constrained by mandates, able to talk to several parties without losing credibility, and able to deal directly with the grassroots population.

Prior to the March elections, elections in Kazakhstan have been a subject of controversy and criticism in the past. The country's political system was dominated by the ruling Nur Otan party, and opposition

parties have struggled to gain representation in parliament. For example, according to OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Limited Election Observation Mission (ODIHR LEOM) (2021), after it assessed the parliamentary elections for their compliance with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections, as well as with national legislation, they concluded that the parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan held in January 2021 were won overwhelmingly by Nur Otan, with opposition parties failing to win any seats. Some opposition parties and civil society groups alleged that the elections were rigged, and there were reports of irregularities such as ballot stuffing and voter intimidation.

Now, according to our interviewees, P3 when asked about their position on the 19th March elections events, which for some time caused social-political resonance, claimed that he “expressed his dissatisfaction with what was happening during the election process, especially during the counting of votes, as much as I could among my entourage”. He called for action saying it is something that needs to be talked through, “you can't keep silent about it, everything should be according to the law”. Recent elections had much to do with the flawed previous ones, that is there were raised concerns about the lack of transparency, the inadequate treatment of complaints and appeals, and the imbalance in the media coverage. It was also noted that this whole cycle of restrictions on political freedoms and civil liberties in Kazakhstan throughout the years hurt the overall electoral environment. In regards to it, P2 mentioned “We are slowly turning a blind eye to it, which is why nothing will change, which is why you need to discuss it calmly but constructively”

4.4.2. Level of trust (NGOs)

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played an important role in Kazakhstan since independence, particularly in the areas of human rights, environmental protection, and civic engagement. However, NGOs in Kazakhstan have faced challenges, including restrictive government policies and a lack of public awareness and understanding of their role and activities. This has resulted in some skepticism and mistrust toward NGOs, particularly those receiving foreign funding (Independent Sector, 2022).

For example, as shared by interviewee T, in 2019, various social activists, individuals, critics of authority, and supporters of power within the populace began to emerge. Additionally, there have been moments when campaigners have not felt much public support. We must acknowledge that this epidemic occurred when we were becoming a civic society. Additionally, it appears that our population's legal literacy may use some improvement in general.

The non-governmental sector's currency is the public's confidence. One of the main causes the industry exists is the public's trust in NGOs to “do the right thing.” Understanding and maintaining trust has never been more crucial for enterprises to own their right to function, lead, and flourish in the extremely polarized climate of today. Given the enormous significance of trust, it is essential to evaluate its current state and determine how the industry might enhance its most important asset.

4.4.2.1. Level of Trust for international funding (NGOs)

The mistrust of NGOs in Kazakhstan is often related to their foreign funding. In recent years, the government of Kazakhstan has passed laws and regulations that place restrictions on foreign funding of NGOs, and some government officials have accused foreign-funded NGOs of promoting foreign agendas or interfering in the country's internal affairs (Lillis, 2020). As a result, some segments of the public view NGOs that receive foreign funding with suspicion or mistrust. These perceptions may be

reinforced by negative media coverage of NGOs that receive foreign funding. P2 expressed his opinion on this topic, stating that the government should not interfere and should not bother much about who finances civil society, especially when it comes to foreign financing. He on the spot named this trend of receiving foreign funds as fashion for foreign agents to some extent. Then divided into 2 opinions suggesting that even though we have it to a lesser extent “NGOs, public organizations, legal entities that receive funding from abroad, they must show it in the State Revenue Committee”. On the other side stated that “there is no black mark yet” implying that all financial flows are traced and passed through banking systems, and no one is “carrying the finances with suitcases”.

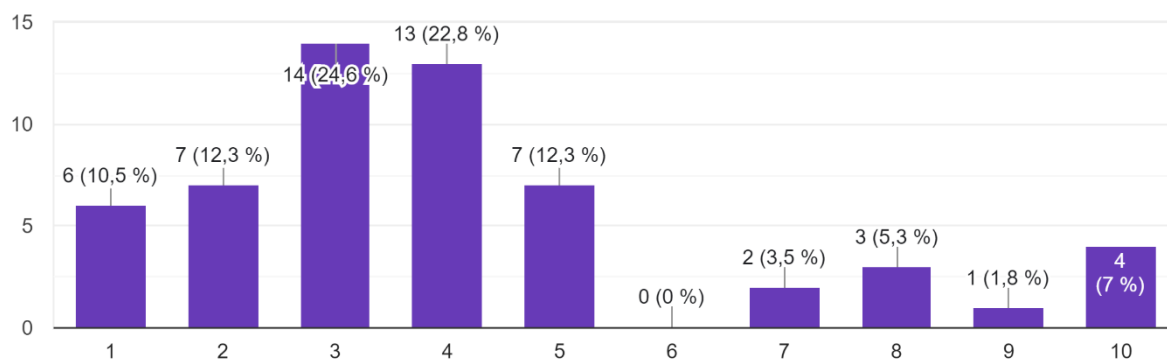
However, it is important to note that not all NGOs in Kazakhstan receive foreign funding, and some NGOs that do receive foreign funding may be transparent and accountable in their use of these funds. Additionally, foreign funding can be an important source of support for NGOs that are working to promote human rights, environmental protection, and other important issues in Kazakhstan.

Another point raised was that some people that tend to be self-nominees, and social activists tend to have selfish goals and work not for the greater good of society. According to P2, it is hard to unsee it soberly when these people are followed by large crowds because they can “shout louder”, but not say reasonable things. This could probably be the reason for 39 respondents to note that the development of future leaders who work for society, not for themselves is what we need to overcome the weaknesses of our civil society.

4.4.3. Level of trust (states)

The level of trust between the state and society in Kazakhstan is a complex issue and can vary depending on various factors. Since gaining independence in 1991, the country has undergone significant political and economic changes. Even though it has taken steps towards democratization, the government still retains a significant degree of control over the media and limits freedom of speech and assembly, which can undermine public trust.

Оцените уровень доверия между правительством и обществом. Когда уровень доверия высок, правительство может обойтись предупре...р, такие как комендантский час и наказания.
57 ответов



Level of trust	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	total
Number of people	6	7	14	13	7	0	2	3	1	4	57

Here, on this bar chart surveyed people were asked to assess on a scale from 1 to 10 the level of trust they have towards our current government. The mean number received was 4.14, where the most prevalent answer was 3 (the choice of 24.6%). By the related question of how the issue of low-level trust can be addressed, 52 out of 81 respondents were not content with accountability and transparency, 47 pointed out the significance of giving greater abilities to citizens to monitor and call out corruption, 49 chose to involve citizens in solving community and societal challenges, 26 mentioned strengthen social inclusion, 33 asked for the establishment of real commitment, 39 noted the development of future leaders who work for the greater good, not for themselves.

When asked, to outline some aspects that make them feel that civil society is poorly functioning, 34 respondents responded feeling isolated, and unheard about their concerns and suggestions, 39 of those surveyed are prone to political manipulations, 35 answers described fear, and anxiety during the current governing system. Those responses severely undermine the whole concept of civil society in Kazakhstan. Individuals should have a sense of agency and the belief that their actions can make a difference. They should feel empowered to voice their opinions, express their concerns, and actively participate in shaping the society they live in. Whereas it is vivid from the survey that not only 42% of people sense repression and censorship, 43.2% of respondents feel unsafe during the current government. Some of the surveyed elaborated on this feeling, stating that they don't feel that their rights are protected from violation and assault, particularly, women's rights, which could be related to the recent feminist march.

Interviewee S also expressed her opinion on the topic of how to make people feel freer: "The only thing our people need for now is encouraging them and just letting them be". She says that it is still not quite open what is going on in the government and that elections held in March show how our society has a long way to grow. Openness embraces freedom of expression as a fundamental right, so individuals engage in constructive dialogue and peacefully voice their concerns or dissent. It allows individuals to have access to information, understands decision-making processes, and hold institutions and leaders accountable for their actions, which is why this freedom drives social progress. Then, S concluded that it's all about trust and seeing how it's going.

4.5. Context of the USSR

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Kazakhstan struggled to transition to a democratic system of government. This led to the emergence of new forms of authoritarianism, including what has been described as "soft" or "managed" authoritarianism. Ziegler emphasized that the Communist Party's legacy remained a significant barrier to civic society. Many Kazakh residents lack a clear understanding of "how to organize" and how to forge a fresh alliance with the government because of the Soviet era's lack of a free, democratic society and concentration on state authority. Ziegler pointed out that the rise of social groups with governmental assistance has also hampered Kazakhstan's efforts to create a truly civil society (Ziegler et al., 2011). For example, through the questionnaire, it was derived that 69 respondents distinguished the kinship of weak civil society with the USSR period, mostly stating that protests were suppressed during Communist governance and that people are afraid

of expressing their opinion. Furthermore, interviewees often cited the context of the USSR after its dissolution as a key factor in the development of a weak civil society. P2 declared that there are certain signs of the totalitarian system which were present in our thirty-year history and served as a brake on the development of the non-governmental sphere, and the activation of the civic position. He blames the burden of the totalitarian Soviet past on the pitfalls of awakening initiatives in people to hold certain political opinions, claiming, “They are tired of living from endless slogans and from the belief that our new Kazakhstan is waiting for us in the future”. In Kazakhstan, the government has been criticized for limiting freedom of speech, restricting political opposition, and suppressing independent media and civil society groups (Freedom House, 2021). This again underlines the fact that the legacy of Soviet-era repression and authoritarianism continues to shape the political and social landscape of the country and the wider region.

Moreover, P3, when answering the question of the engagement of citizens in civil society, concluded that people's self-organization is weak, based on a simple example of the replacement of cooperatives of apartment owners with an association of property owners, where people who seem to live compactly in one house are difficult to self-organize. Referencing this transition of management, he underlined that this element of civil society “as a core, by and large, already affects the wider masses”. He pointed out the influence of the USSR period in this post-Soviet psychology since “there is historically some kind of imprint of the fact that they lived for many years in Soviet times, which impacts some certain generations that operate in categories as in USSR”.

Another tendency recorded by some of the interviewees was outlining the age of social activists. For example, S, P2, and P3, during their answers were constantly referring to younger generations as being groundbreakers in enhancing civil society. P2, for example, when telling about the significance of critical mass, implying younger individuals, that will give an impulse to the whole society says that “young people who did not feel did not see the Soviet Union, have a completely different perception, positively”. Whilst S highlights the involvement of the young by contrasting it to adults, whom she refers to as those, who tend to be skeptical or in disbelief that measures the government implements can result into something.

Under Nazarbayev's rule, Kazakhstan adopted a constitution that enshrined democratic principles and established a multi-party system. However, in practice, the government has been criticized for limiting freedom of speech, restricting political opposition, and suppressing civil society groups that advocate for human rights and social justice (Freedom House, 2021). This is the reason why Soviet times, by shaping the current governance form, cause a struggle in involving people in civil society activities.

4.6. The readiness of the surveyed people

Lastly, all the interviewees were asked if they would like to raise awareness about the topic. Being aware of the scope of the issue themselves, almost all of them said without hesitation that they will do so, adding that they are already influencing their relatives and close circles to actively partake in political movements, encouraging them to share their points of view. Just like that S notified that there are people following her on social media, where she tries to make a point of the significance of active civil position, highlighting activists who carry out this work. “We also discussed Western nations, so in relevance with it, since I'm heading to the US, where civil society functions, I want to learn from their experience and push that idea further in our society”. She concluded that she is working on this idea and will continue to do it.

Then, P3 expressed her delight towards the question since as she says this is an issue that is quite relevant since the average public doesn't know anything about civic society. In broad terms, Kazakhstan's population should be informed by the country's Ministry of Information and Public Development. People should know what is civil society, and what are its primary responsibilities, which is why as a genuine trade union worker she will spread awareness.

Now, P2 said something relatively controversial, stating that he does not have an exact goal to promote strong civil society patterns, in the context of various situations. He exemplified the March elections where he expressed his dissatisfaction with improper vote counting, as much as I could among my entourage. "I express my position, in this way, I make my small contribution to the development of society. Still, not everyone should adhere to my views, but only after discussions something will change"

4.7. Conclusion

Both inquiry methodologies were employed in this study to develop clear and in-depth perspectives on the subject of Kazakhstan's underdeveloped civil society. According to the results, a large proportion of respondents are conceptually acquainted with the concept and its main types, but Kazakhstan's surveillance apparatus is ineffective and negligible when it comes to troubleshooting, notwithstanding the fact that constraints on individual liberties and rights prevail in the nation.

In light of the realization that social cognition along with the buildup of trust and validation that comes from speaking up for one's fundamental freedoms are two components that dictate the development of a feasible democratic community, it is precisely for these reasons that the present investigation is helpful not solely for the authorities to reexamine the entire concept of law enforcement, but also for people to raise recognition and enlighten one another.

5.1. Introduction

The present chapter summarizes the investigation's results which are essential to the objectives and queries of the research and goes into further detail on how the study might advance the area. The presentation will also include data constraints and suggestions for more study.

5.2. Key findings

In order to improve local civil society and advocate for fewer restrictions from the government, this study sought to identify the weaknesses of the civil community in Kazakhstan, examine the dynamics of that society, and identify the causes of such weaknesses. It also aimed to raise comprehension among citizens and encourage individuals to engage in such endeavors common across people who actively voice their position. In this effort, the public's awareness of their freedoms, rights, duties, and adherence to certain political perspectives was assessed, and official data concerning civil society groups were reviewed.

Using a qualitative and quantitative examination of the general public's present perception of the nonprofit sector, the prevalence of particular constraints and potential courses of action that government entities and non-governmental organizations may take were determined. Based on the responses, it was evident that the growth of civil society might be achieved by exposing individuals to more liberty within the system, the development of public inclusion, and social cohesion.

Additionally, data on the frequency of rights violations experienced by citizens, their degree of faith in the government, pressing problems, and the effects of individuals participating in or disregarding civil

society on their surroundings were gathered. Based on their age and social engagement, each response was evaluated.

5.3. Contribution to the field

The Ministry of Information and Public Development of Kazakhstan, as well as politicians and national economists, who will view the development of civil society as an important stage in the nation's development and evaluate the causes of weak civil society, will all find this study to be essential for the purpose of nationwide advancement, not only students who thrive to analyze the significance of distinguishing their freedoms. This research tries to comprehend the necessity of swift, high-quality civil society development if sociopolitical advancement is to continue. Because of this, it will serve as a necessary component, modernizing Kazakhstan's existing situation in order to end the country's protracted economic stagnation and fortify strained political ties. It succeeds in acknowledging civil society as a crucial aspect of the nation's growth and in tackling challenges that undermine it, such as public ignorance and a lack of finance for NGOs.

5.4. Research Limitations

The study lacked the crucial amount of survey participants since only 81 responses were received through a questionnaire on such a broad topic and only 7 people were interviewed. Initially, it was vivid that the socioeconomic class of participants in the survey and interviewees is obligated to be evaluated as it also shapes the answers of respondents even in identical fields of working, living regions, same age, and other similar categories. However, it was inconvenient and inappropriate to ask them to specify their social status or level of income, which is why this aspect was ignored.

To some extent, surveyed people lacked consciousness of the topic (29.6%), and struggled with the usage of scientific terms to describe civil society, even though the majority were acquainted with civil society in practice. Due to this lack of knowledge, some answers could not be assessed right.

5.5. Recommendations for further research

Further research is required to find new, effective ways to highlight ways to cope with an issue our society faces because of a repressive regime, that limits freedom of expression and speech and stifles opposition. There should be new methods of reactivating dormant NGOs, and the government gaining experience in cooperating with civil society organizations, emphasizing the fear and the anxiety among the population, which is why reducing limitations on expression of opinion will be considered. Moreover, Kazakhstani people do not show much interest to be a part of CSOs, as they have partially skeptical opinions on that, so methods to overcome those barriers should also be reviewed.

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