



# EURASIA IV. INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND INNOVATION CONGRESS

*June 13-14, 2024*

*Nakhchivan State University, Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan*

## PROCEEDINGS BOOK

EDITOR:

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Elsevar ASADOV

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## PARTICIPATION

Keynote & Invited

## DATE - PLACE

June 13-14, 2024

Nakhchivan State University, Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan

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&

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The number of abstracts from foreign countries: **105**

The number of abstracts from Türkiye: **95**

**CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY KAZAKHSTAN IN THE DEMOCRATIZATION  
PROCESS**

**KAZAKİSTAN'IN DEMOKRATİKLEŞME SÜRECİNDE KARŞILAŞTIĞI ZORLUKLAR**

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**ÖZET**

Bu araştırma, bağımsızlık sonrasında Kazakistan'ın demokratikleşme sürecinde karşılaştığı zorlukları, siyasal reform sürecinde uluslararası yatırımların ve sivil toplumun etkisi bağlamında incelemektedir. Çalışma, küreselleşmenin demokrasi üzerindeki etkilerini, Kazakistan'ın bağımsızlık sonrası sürecini, uluslararası petrol şirketlerinin demokrasi üzerindeki rolünü ve Kazakistan'daki sivil toplumun durumunu ele almaktadır. Araştırmada, uluslararası yardım kuruluşlarının ve uluslararası olmayan kuruluşların Kazakistan'daki rolü analiz edilerek Kazakistan'ın sosyal rantçılık gibi küreselleşme sonucu ortaya çıkan bağımlılık sorunlarına dikkat çekmektedir. Ayrıca, Kazakistan'ın Sovyet dönemi mirasının, demokratikleşme sürecini etkileyen benzersiz bir faktör olduğu vurgulanmaktadır. Özetle, bu çalışma, Kazakistan'ın demokratikleşme sürecinde karşılaştığı zorlukları ve küreselleşmenin etkilerini detaylı bir şekilde ele almaktadır. Ayrıca, uluslararası yatırımların ve sivil toplumun demokratikleşme sürecine olan katkıları ve bu sürecin yerel koşullara bağımlılığını vurgulamaktadır. Bu çalışma, uluslararası politika yapımcılarının tek boyutlu bir yaklaşım yerine her ülkenin benzersiz koşullarını dikkate alması gerektiğini öne sürmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kazakistan, Demokratikleşme, Sivil Toplum, Uluslararası Yatırımlar

**ABSTRACT**

This research examines the difficulties faced by Kazakhstan in the democratization process after independence, in the context of the impact of international investments and civil society on the political reform process. The study addresses the effects of globalization on democracy, the post-independence process of Kazakhstan, the role of international oil companies on democracy, and the situation of civil society in Kazakhstan. The research analyzes the role of international aid organizations and non-international organizations in Kazakhstan and draws attention to Kazakhstan's dependency problems that have emerged as a result of globalization, such as social profiteering. It is also emphasized that Kazakhstan's Soviet era legacy is a unique factor affecting the democratization process. In summary, this study discusses in detail the challenges Kazakhstan faced in the democratization process and the effects of globalization. It also emphasizes the contributions of international investments and civil society to the democratization process and the dependence of this process on local conditions. This study suggests that international policymakers should consider each country's unique circumstances rather than a one-dimensional approach.

**Key Words:** Kazakhstan, Democratization, Civil Society, International Investments

## **INTRODUCTION**

After 1991, the newly independent republics of the former Soviet Union were regarded as the new frontier for adopting the Western way of conducting business and organizing society. Consequently, these nations were inundated with Western diplomats, business people, consultants, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) aiming to integrate them into Western norms. Western analysts believed that their influence would lead to the establishment of liberal capitalist democracies in the region. Influenced by Francis Fukuyama's widely referenced book from that era, *The End of History and the Last Man*, it was believed that liberal democracy and its economic counterpart, capitalism, were the ultimate ideals that would make the world freer (Fukuyama, 1992). Free and open markets were considered essential for initiating democracy (Friedman & Friedman, 1980), and liberal globalization was expected to transform both domestic and international politics. It was thought that states would relinquish their leading role in international affairs to international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO), as well as to multinational corporations (MNCs) and civil society organizations or NGOs (Held et al., 1999). In 2003, Gregory Gleason argued that liberal globalization was compelling Central Asian states to adopt Western ideals of liberal democracy (Gleason, 2003).

The belief that liberal democracy would inevitably expand through international connections with a country was widespread and persisted beyond the 1990s. This rhetoric has remained the official stance of most governments and international aid agencies. The 2010 edition of the National Security Strategy of the United States of America asserts that open markets and social progress have fueled globalization, which in turn has fostered more democracy worldwide. It also emphasizes that a vibrant private sector and civil society are crucial components of democratic accountability (National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2010).

Many writers argue that civil society organizations are often equated with NGOs. If this is the case, then NGOs, along with international investment and capital, are seen as the two essential factors by liberal democratic theorists for a country to develop a Western-style democracy. In this model, politics and economics are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, forming a two-part prescription. Economic globalization bolsters civil society by promoting democracy and extending the marketplace of ideas and the ideals of liberty. Echoing this model, Larry Diamond, an American scholar on democracy at Stanford University, stated that "open economies are the institutional companions of open societies and free political systems" (Diamond, 1999).

Central Asia serves as a valuable case study for examining how the liberal economic and political model of democratization has performed in practice. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the states in this region have been at the forefront of liberal globalization. This is because the post-Soviet states emerged onto the global stage during a period when globalizing processes, such as the internationalization of capital, the growth of regional trading blocs, and the widespread influence of global mass media, were reshaping the world (Smith, 1999).

Given the significant investment from Western international oil companies (IOCs) and funding from Western-based international NGOs (INGOs), Kazakhstan is an ideal case study for examining whether liberal models and norms can be successfully transferred to other states (Akiner, 2004).

Despite the economic and political integration of Kazakhstan, and the region as a whole, into the global system through investment from IOCs and INGOs, Kazakhstan has retained its non-democratic status. Reflecting on the optimism surrounding the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Shirin Akiner succinctly highlights the issue: Initially, both domestically and internationally, there was a widespread assumption that the newly independent Caspian states had already achieved such a high level of socio-economic development that transitioning to Western political and economic models would pose little difficulty. However, during the 1990s, it became increasingly evident that this transition was not occurring (Macfarlane, 1999).

Hence, the envisioned connection between liberal economics and liberal politics leading to democracy did not materialize. This study will delve into the reasons behind the failure of liberal globalization to drive democratization in Kazakhstan.

### FAILURE OF DEMOCRATIZATION IN KAZAKHSTAN

Kazakhstan's experience since gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 illustrates the complex and often contradictory effects of globalization on democratization. Despite significant efforts by Western international oil companies (IOCs) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) to promote liberal democratic values, Kazakhstan has remained resistant to genuine democratic reforms.

One of the primary factors impeding Kazakhstan's democratization is the nature of globalization itself. While globalization was expected to foster open markets and liberal democracies, in Kazakhstan, it has had the opposite effect. The influx of foreign investment, particularly from IOCs, has created a form of economic dependency that undermines the development of a robust civil society. Instead of empowering local populations and fostering democratic governance, the presence of these powerful multinational entities has entrenched existing power structures. The substantial revenues generated from oil exports have allowed the Kazakh government to maintain its authoritarian grip by using state resources to placate potential opposition groups and avoid implementing democratic reforms.

Furthermore, the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Kazakhstan has been significantly compromised. While INGOs aimed to support the development of an active civil society, they often failed to understand the local context and the entrenched Soviet-era bureaucratic structures. These organizations frequently operated within a framework that assumed Western models of civil society could be easily transplanted to Kazakhstan. However, the Kazakh government has skillfully managed to control and co-opt these initiatives, ensuring that CSOs do not become a genuine force for political change. Instead, many CSOs in Kazakhstan operate in a constrained environment where they are either directly controlled by the state or are wary of engaging in activities that might provoke government backlash.

The energy sector's dominance in Kazakhstan's economy has also played a significant role in stalling democratization. The government's reliance on oil revenues, coupled with the strategic importance of Kazakhstan's energy resources to global markets, has allowed the regime to leverage its economic power internationally. This has led to a situation where international actors, including Western democracies and multinational corporations, are often reluctant to press too hard for democratic reforms for fear of jeopardizing their economic interests. The concept of the social rentier effect is particularly relevant here, as the government uses its control over natural resources to maintain social stability and mitigate pressures for democratization by distributing rents through various social programs and subsidies.

Moreover, the international aid agencies and INGOs that sought to promote democracy in Kazakhstan often adopted a one-size-fits-all approach, failing to account for the unique historical and political context of the country. These organizations assumed that strategies successful in other parts of the world would be equally effective in Kazakhstan. However, the Soviet legacy in Kazakhstan, characterized by a centralized and authoritarian political culture, posed significant challenges to the direct transplantation of Western democratic models. Local elites and bureaucrats adeptly manipulated these global concepts to reinforce their own positions of power, rather than to democratize the political system.

In conclusion, the failure of democratization in Kazakhstan can be attributed to the complex interplay of globalization, the compromised role of civil society, and the overwhelming influence of the energy sector. While globalization was initially seen as a vehicle for spreading liberal democracy, in Kazakhstan, it has reinforced authoritarianism by fostering economic dependency, undermining the effectiveness of CSOs, and prioritizing economic interests over political reform. This underscores the need for a more nuanced understanding of how global processes interact with local political dynamics, and the importance of tailoring democratization strategies to the specific historical and cultural context of each country.

## CONCLUSION

Macfarlane observes that in hindsight, it's clear to see the overconfidence of the planners in 1991 (Macfarlane, 1999). Despite its integration into the globalized world and substantial involvement in international capital and aid, Kazakhstan has not undergone democratization. As Chris Hann contends, "markets and democracy have not, in everyday practice, brought about new moral forces comparable to those that have been displaced" (Hann, 1999).

The developments in Kazakhstan since independence demonstrate that the impacts of globalization are not uniform and are contingent upon local circumstances. While some scholars, like Augustus Norton, argue that democracy and civil society are not bound to specific political environments and can be universally applied, this assertion is evidently not borne out by the evidence (Norton, 1995). In his examination of the coffee industry in South America, Robert Bates challenges the dependency theory and classical economics, arguing that international trade does not inevitably subordinate a state to multinational corporations (MNCs). He highlights that the nature of globalization's impact on a country is largely shaped by domestic power dynamics, emphasizing that politicians often leverage MNCs to serve their own agendas (Bates, 1997). As Cummings contends, "Central Asia appears to affirm the now increasingly acknowledged perspective that globalization reshapes the state rather than signaling its demise" (Cummings, 2012).

As demonstrated earlier, the strategies devised by international aid agencies and INGOs were grounded in a framework where economics and politics were interconnected, necessitating a comprehensive analysis of both spheres. Only through examining these aspects together can one discern that in Kazakhstan, a form of dependency – both economic and social – on IOCs and INGOs emerged, a phenomenon I referred to as social rentierism. Globalization in Kazakhstan has enabled the Soviet-era bureaucracy to solidify its authority, as it can disregard demands for increased democracy and accountability.

This isn't to suggest that international investment and NGOs can't contribute to a country's democratization. The issue with the policies pursued in Kazakhstan was their adherence to a one-size-fits-all approach. Planners believed that a model successful in South America or Africa could be applied universally: a developing country is a developing country, regardless of its unique history and politics. However, each country and society possesses its own distinct characteristics, and Kazakhstan, with its Soviet social legacy, differed significantly even among the former Soviet republics. It's debatable whether a model effective in one former Soviet republic would be equally effective in another. Western policymakers presumed that a global concept of liberal democracy could be introduced universally and would replicate itself as it does elsewhere. Yet, they neglected to recognize that local societies and elites could employ this global concept for their own ends and to address their own needs.

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