

---

## The Bloody January in Kazakhstan in 2022: Genuine Popular Protest or Attempted 'Coloured Revolution'

Dr. Ranjak Katara

Department of Political Science, Ramjas College, University of Delhi

### Abstract

The January 2022 violent events in Kazakhstan commonly known as Bloody January or Qandy Qantar was one of the most severe political crises in post-Soviet Central Asia. What originally started as calm demonstrations over the drastic increase in the liquid petroleum gas (LPG) prices quickly turned into a national upheaval, violent clashes, assaults on the institutions of state, and unprecedented action on the part of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). The crisis revealed the existence of underlining socio-economic disparities, citizen discontent with the authoritarian rule, corruption, and the persistence of the political elites allied to the previous President Nursultan Nazarbayev. Meanwhile, the Kazakh government and the Russians were presenting the unrest as an attempted colour revolution backed by foreign-trained terrorists and foreign actors aiming to overthrow the regime. This paper critically looks into the conflicting accounts of the events of January 2022 by assessing whether the unrest was a true popular protest movement, elite power play, or an externally instigated destabilization effort. The theoretical approaches employed in the study to examine the interplay between socio-economic grievances and state security discourse and the regional geopolitical interests include the Realism theory, Securitization Theory, Authoritarian Resilience, and Social Movement Theory. This article claims that the crisis in Kazakhstan is not explainable by just one thing. Instead, Bloody January was a complicated combination of social unrest, political maneuvers of the elites, authoritarianism, and Russian geopolitics in the post-Soviet environment. The paper also emphasizes the ways in which the crisis changed the position of the CSTO and strengthened wider arguments about regime security, sovereignty, and regional stability in Central Asia.

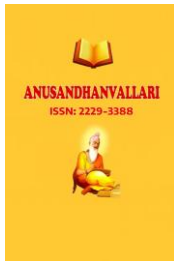
**Keywords:** Kazakhstan, Russia, CSTO, Central Asia, Bloody January, Etc.

---

### Introduction

The January 2022 unrest in Kazakhstan, also known as Bloody January or Qandy Qantar, was one of the most notable political crises in the post-Soviet Central Asia in recent decades. What started as peaceful protests against the increase in fuel prices quickly turned into a countrywide protest, violent clashes, assaults on state institutions, and a massive security crisis that rocked the principles of the Kazakh state. The turmoil has cost hundreds of lives, thousands of arrests, and the first time since its foundation in 1992 the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) had to intervene. As a result, the January 2022 events turned out to be not only a turning point in domestic politics of Kazakhstan but also in the dynamics of the geopolitical and security situation in the post-Soviet space (Kucera, 2022). The importance of the unrest is that it revealed the hidden socio-economic inequality, political discontent, and structural tensions that had been built up in the course of many years in the Kazakh society. Singh & Tripathi (2025) Although Kazakhstan was described as the most economically successful state in Central Asia, most of its citizens were still facing increasing living standards, unemployment, corruption, and lack of wealth

---



---

distribution. People became frustrated when there was a political system that had ruled decades under the reign of former President Nursultan Nazarbayev and a small ruling elite (Talan, 2022). Thus, the demonstrations were indicative of more general social justice, political reform, and accountability demands as opposed to protest against fuel price increases.

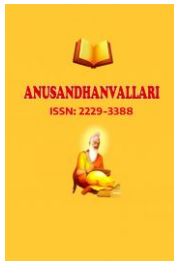
The character of the unrest, however, soon became a matter of heated discussion in Kazakhstan and in other countries as well. One of the interpretations was that the protests were a true popular uprising with valid socio-economic complaints and increased discontent with the authoritarian rule. Based on this school of thought, common people organized themselves in a spontaneous manner to fight inequality, corruption and political marginalization. The second meaning implied that the unrest had become an attempted coup with the rivalry of the elites and the power struggles in the Kazakh state apparatus (Stobdan, 2022). According to some analysts, the fast development of the violence and the temporary destruction of the state power in large cities like Almaty were caused by internal divisions between political elites and security institutions.

A third and most contentious reading of the events was an attempted colour revolution with external actors either behind it or orchestrated by them, aiming to change the regime in Kazakhstan (Cherian, 2022). The Kazakh government and the Russian officials repeatedly referred to the unrest as the activities of foreign-trained terrorists and extremist networks and external powers trying to destabilize the country. This story was indicative of wider anxieties in the post-Soviet realm about mass protest movements along the lines of the so-called colour revolutions which had taken place in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. This kind of discourse became a focal point of the government explaining the extreme security actions and applying military support by the CSTO. The Bloody January events are thus of great relevance in the study of the post-Soviet politics, authoritarian government and the regional security in Central Asia. The crisis showed how internal turmoil in post-Soviet countries could rapidly transform into geopolitical challenges of regional blocs, foreign powers, and competing legitimacy and security discourses. It has also emphasized the increasing role of stability of the regimes and collective security in Eurasian politics.

### **Understanding the Concept of “Colour Revolution”**

Colour revolutions are generally perceived to be mass mobilization campaigns that are fuelled by demands of democracy, transparency, political reform, and increased participation of the populace (Tadic, 2021). These movements are usually formed when there is political crisis, contested elections or when the ruling regimes are losing their legitimacy. Most of the protestors tend to use non-violent protests, civil disobedience, youth activism and public campaigns to oppose established political elites. Urban population, students, civil society organizations, and other opposition groups demanding democratic change were in most instances very supportive of these movements. Nevertheless, allegations of foreign aid and outside influence and especially western governments and non-governmental organisations have often accompanied colour revolutions as well (Beissinger, 2009). These charges came to the fore in Russian politics in particular, where colour revolutions were frequently characterized as foreign-organized efforts to undermine pro-Russian politics and imperfectly extend Western geopolitical control in the post-Soviet world.

A number of key examples influenced the wider perception of colour revolutions in Eurasian politics. In 2003, the Rose Revolution in Georgia caused President Eduard Shevardnadze to resign following mass demonstrations against electoral fraud and political apathy (Fairbanks, 2004). The movement was largely perceived as a successful



---

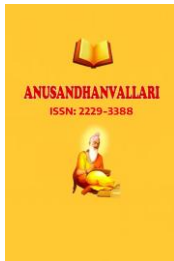
democratic revolution with the assistance of youth activism and mobilization of the civil society. Likewise, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004 arose following the presidential election alleged fraud. Huge protests in Kyiv led to a re-run of the election and the opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko was victorious (John S. Earle, 2014). In Kyrgyzstan, the 2005 Tulip Revolution toppled President Askar Akayev on the grounds of corruption, dictatorialism, and tainted parliamentary elections (Olcott, 2005). These movements, in combination, became the main elements of democratic opposition and political change in the post-Soviet space.

Although their image is democratic, colour revolutions are still a hot topic among scholars, policymakers and governments. One school of thought considers these movements as authentic manifestations of mass discontent and valid campaigns of democracy, political responsibility, and social reforms. Based on this understanding, colour revolutions were an expression of the desires of the common people who wanted to fight against dictatorship and put in place more liberal political regimes (Polese, 2009). Advocates of this opinion lay stress on the role of civil society, grassroots mobilization, and democratic participation in bringing change in politics.

Conversely, it is said by other sides that colour revolutions were not purely spontaneous democratic ones but were rather instigated or encouraged by foreign players with some geopolitical interests. Such uprisings have often been depicted by the Russian authorities and various post-Soviet governments as the means of western-sponsored anti-regime actions aimed at destabilizing the situation in the region and diminishing Russian influence (Polese, 2009). This understanding has helped to build distrust of protest movements in unfriendly regimes and has helped the governments to attribute domestic instability to larger overseas conspiracies. As a result, the language of “colour revolution has become a political instrument more and more widely employed by post-Soviet states to define the opposition movements, provide legitimacy to state repression, and consolidate security-oriented governance. The concept of colour revolution was very applicable in the situation in Kazakhstan in January 2022 since the government and the Russian authorities kept referring to the protests and violence as such (Kriener, 2023). The description of the unrest as an externally instigated destabilization effort contributed significantly to justifying extreme security actions and the CSTO intervention. Thus, the theory and political relevance of colour revolutions is crucial to the analysis of the interpretation, control, and politization of the Kazakhstan crisis in the context of post-Soviet regional politics.

### **Background to the January 2022 Protests**

The protests in January 2022 in Kazakhstan did not appear out of thin air and in a vacuum; they were the result of years of economic difficulties, political discontentment, and social disappointments which had been slowly building up over many years. Though the immediate cause of the unrest was the soaring prices of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), the pace and extent of protest actions across the country showed that there were underlying structural dissatisfactions in the Kazakh society (Cornell, 2022). Thus, the events of the Bloody January were not only about economical dissatisfaction but also about the general dissatisfaction with the authoritarian rule, inequality, corruption, and lack of opportunities to engage in social and political life. The immediate economic cause of the protests was the liberalization of LPG fuel prices at the beginning of January 2022. Kazakh government lifted the price controls and converted the fuel trading to an electronic based market system which resulted in the prices soaring up in a very short time. In western Kazakhstan where LPG is very popular as a mode of transportation and other daily economic related activities, the immediate rise in fuel prices directly impacted on the lives of ordinary citizens and workers. The demonstrations initially started in the oil-producing city of



---

Zhanaozen, which is a territory traditionally linked with labor unrest and social discontent (Kriener, 2023). The increase in the cost of fuel soon took on as its symbol the wider economic discontents of the masses.

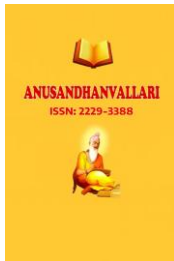
People were further angered by inflation and escalating living expenses. Having already witnessed rising food prices, decreasing purchasing power, and economic uncertainty due to the financial upheavals caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, many citizens of Kazakhstan were already grappling with a challenging situation. Despite the vast oil, gas and mineral deposits of Kazakhstan and the fact that it is regarded as the richest economy in Central Asia, economic gains were not well distributed. Much of the country was wealthy, but the political elite, business oligarchs, and networks with close ties to the ruling establishment concentrated a lot of the wealth (Chang, 2023). This led to the feeling of being left out of the economic success of the country by many of the ordinary citizens even though Kazakhstan was endowed with a lot of natural resources. Uneven distribution of oil wealth was a key issue of resentment especially among the workers and the residents of the oil producing regions who felt that they were not getting good economic opportunities and social benefits.

Besides economic complaints, the protests were based on political discontent. Kazakhstan had been ruled through a very centralized and authoritative political system that was under the rule of former President Nursultan Nazarbayev since the country acquired its independence in 1991 out of the Soviet Union (Bohr, 2019). In 2019, Nazarbayev officially stepped down as president, although he still has significant influence in the political system due to his ongoing control of security agencies, economic ties, and ruling elites. According to many citizens, the political change of President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev did not lead to any significant democratization and political reform (Talant, 2022). The political opposition was still fragile, media freedom was curtailed and elections were largely criticized as not being competitive. This led to an ever-increasing public outburst against the domination of the Nazarbayev elite, especially among the citizens who perceived the political system as being corrupt, unresponsive, and out of touch with the real social life.

The social factors played a great role in the unrest as well. The young people were very much involved in the protests which were a representation of a larger disappointment among the youth in Kazakhstan in terms of unemployment, lack of opportunities and poor social mobility. Although there were the development and modernization of the city, most of the young citizens were unable to secure an economic standing or even a significant political role. State corruption also contributed to a further loss of confidence in the government and amplified the ideas of how social progress was driven more by elite ties than by merit or opportunity (Cornell, 2022). Poor public services, inequality, and lack of representation remained unquenchable especially in most parts of the regions which were not in the major urban areas.

### **Escalation into Violence: Protest, Chaos, or Organized Insurrection?**

What started as regionalized economic protests in western Kazakhstan quickly spiraled into one of the most violent and disruptive crises in the post-independence history of the country. In several days the demonstrations in the oil-producing areas of Mangystau and the city of Zhanaozen, as well as the largest cities of the country Almaty, Aktobe, Shymkent, and the capital Nur-Sultan, were covered (Reed, 2023). The rate and magnitude at which the unrest spread displayed the level of dissatisfaction of the people in various parts of Kazakhstan. Nonetheless, when the non-violent protests turned into the violent clashes, the essence of the upheaval turned out to be more disputed and politically controversial. The January 2022 events thus sparked a heated discussion on whether the violence was spontaneous chaos, organized insurrection, or elite power politics, or an attempted colour revolution.

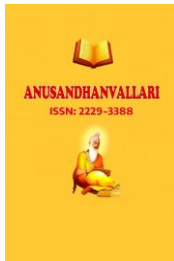


---

It was especially dramatic in Almaty, the largest city and the economical center of Kazakhstan. The peaceful demonstrations that sought low fuel prices and political reforms were soon turned into violent confrontations between the demonstrators and the security forces. Demonstrators broke into the administrative buildings, such as the headquarters of the city administration in Almaty, burned the government buildings, occupied the areas of the city. An airport in Almaty was briefly captured, and police stations, military depots, and public infrastructure were attacked (Reed, 2023). Mass looting, vandalism and destruction of property also added to the instability and fear. Security forces in some parts of the country seemed incapable or uninterested in keeping the peace and there were reports of police quitting their posts or retiring to some parts of the country. This provisional loss of state control helped to reinforce the impression that Kazakhstan was experiencing not just protests, but a wider security crisis.

The bloody twist of events instantly aroused the serious doubts of the organization and leadership of the unrest. A big controversy was whether violent groups that participated in attacks on government institutions were coordinated and organized. According to Kazakh leaders, the nation was under attack by 20,000 terrorists and foreign-trained militants who had penetrated the peaceful demonstrations to disrupt the state (BBC, 2022). President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev claimed that the protests were a disguise to launch an attack on constitutional order in Kazakhstan by organized armed groups. The government believed that the violence was highly organized, which indicated it was perpetrated by extremist or criminal groups; not necessarily by the mere anger of the people. Meanwhile, other analysts and observers have questioned whether rivalry among internal elites had anything to do with the intensification of the crisis. There were speculations of rifts in the political and security system of Kazakhstan, specifically between the people who supported Tokayev and those who supported the previous President Nursultan Nazarbayev (Talant, 2022). The abrupt removal and subsequent arrest of Karim Massimov, the previous leader of the National Security Committee on treason charges, also contributed to the suspicions that some forces within the security apparatus might have been in the power games or sabotage during the unrest. These events added weight to the claims that the crisis can have been a symptom of not only popular protests, but also rivalry between competing elite networks in the state.

An additional critical aspect was the potential involvement of criminal and opportunistic actors. Weakness of the social order in such cities as Almaty provided the grounds under which looting, organized crimes, and violent opportunism could thrive. Certain observers claimed that criminal networks used the confusion to make profits and were a source of the increased violence, regardless of politics. This complicated the task of discerning between peaceful demonstrators, political instigators, organized crooks, and so-called extremist elements (Reed, 2023). There was also the issue of foreign intervention that took centre stage in the official accounts of the unrest. The officials of both Kazakh and Russian governments repeatedly characterized the events as an externally backed endeavor to destabilize Kazakhstan, by words that linked it to terrorism and colour revolutions. Nevertheless, regardless of these assertions, the publicly available information proving the existence of mass foreign coordination or the international terrorist presence remained scarce and undisclosed. Numerous accusations of the government were not conclusively confirmed by independent research by journalists, human rights organizations and international observers. Critics thus believed that the history of foreign aggression might have been inflated to secure brutal crackdown, consolidate state power and justify the CSTO intervention. This means that the January 2022 unrest could not be explained using one explanatory model. The events evidently started with real socio-economic and political frustrations, but the next violence brought in the aspects of anarchy, self-interest, elite struggle, and securitization of the state. The absence of open inquiries and credible facts keeps on stoking opposing explanations of the crisis. Thus, the case of the intensification of violence in Kazakhstan speaks of the



---

complicated intersection of the mass protest, political instability, authoritarian rule, and geopolitical discourses in the modern post-Soviet environment.

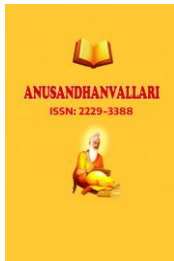
### **State Narrative: Terrorism and “Colour Revolution”**

With the January 2022 unrest in Kazakhstan escalating into a state of violence and unrest, the government increasingly framed the crisis in terms of terrorism, foreign conspiracy, and attempted colour revolution. This narrative of the state became the major argument behind extreme security actions, mass arrests, and the demand of military support of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Describing the unrest as an external attempt at destabilizing state sovereignty instead of a demonstration of domestic discontent, Kazakh authorities aimed to delegitimize the protests, and restore political authority (Kucera, 2022). The discussion of the Bloody January thus demonstrates how authoritarian regimes tend to securitize dissent by re-defining political opposition and social unrest as threat to national security.

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev was instrumental in creating the official narrative in the crisis. In a very controversial declaration, Tokayev asserted that Kazakhstan had been attacked by a group of about 20,000 terrorists who were supposedly trained in other countries and organized by outside powers (Кайсап, 2022). The government said that group militants were infiltrating peaceful demonstrations so as to destabilize the country and assault state institutions and overthrow constitutional order. The government claimed that these groups were the source of armed attacks on police stations, airports, military depots and government buildings especially in Almaty. The state media and security organs reiterated the presence of foreign-trained militants, extremist cells, and foreign involvement of terrorists to make the unrest a national security crisis as opposed to a domestic political one.

This story was very similar to the discourse of colour revolutions that has since grown in power in Russia and some of the post-Soviet authoritarian regimes. Russian officials and pro-government commentators were quick to characterize the Kazakhstan unrest as yet another case of externally inclined destabilization much in line with previous protest movements in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. (Bērziņa, 2015). Connecting the demonstrations to larger concerns of regime change and foreign intervention, both the Russian and the Kazakh governments put the crisis in geopolitical terms instead of considering the socio-economic and political factors behind the development of the discontent among people. The reaction of the state to the unrest is indicative of a more general trend of increasing the securitization of dissent in authoritarian political regimes. Securitization can be defined as the act where the governments present political, social or economic problems as existential threats that necessitate extraordinary solutions. The anti-government demonstrations and the open protests in Kazakhstan were changed not only into the issues of national security but also into the issues of the terrorism. This enabled law enforcers to legitimize emergency powers, use of lethal force, internet blockages, and deployment of foreign military support under the CSTO system. By so doing, the government became less concerned with such issues like inequality, corruption, and authoritarian rule but rather worked towards restoring order and fighting so-called external threats.

The political usefulness of external conspiracy theories is especially remarkable in the post-Soviet world. By blaming foreign intervention, authoritarian regimes can justify opposition to their governments and evade failure to manage domestic policies or plummeting political legitimacy. These types of stories also contribute to solidifying the nationalistic mood and uniting the elites to the ruling leadership in times of crisis. The rhetoric of



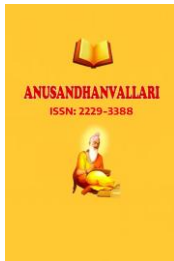
---

terrorism and foreign conspiracy in Kazakhstan supported the legitimacy of Tokayev and at the same time justified the elimination of competing elite groups and the increase of state security apparatus (Kriener, 2023). Beneath these accounts lies a more pervasive panic of democratic virulence amid post-Soviet dictatorships. Since the revolutions of the early 2000s, which have become known as the colour revolutions, governments in the region have become more and more suspicious of mass protest movements, particularly in the fear that successful protests in one country will cause the same movement to be made elsewhere successful. Russia especially, has always depicted colour revolutions as tools of geopolitical destabilization of the country as opposed to real democratic movement. Therefore, the crisis in Kazakhstan was not only seen as a domestic unrest but also as a larger conflict over political stability, power and control over geopolitical space in Eurasia. However, even with the great focus of the government on the issue of terrorism and foreign intervention, much evidence confirming most of these statements remained scarce and disputed. Foreign coordination as reported by the Kazakh authorities could not be conclusively confirmed by independent investigations and international observers (Reed, 2023). Such non-transparency has contributed to some ongoing discussions about the real character of the unrest and to the doubts that the language of terrorism and the colour revolution has been used as a tactic to legitimize oppression and foreign intervention. Thus the state narrative of the January 2022 events demonstrates not only the politics of political fears of authoritarian regimes but also the overall confrontations between security, legitimacy, and dissent in the new post-Soviet order.

### **Consequences of Bloody January**

The January 2022 unrest, often called the Bloody January, brought about extensive political, security, and social impacts to Kazakhstan. The crisis radically changed the political environment in the country and empowered President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, although the government managed to restore order with the help of the CSTO. Simultaneously, the events added to the worries about the authoritarian rule, state oppression, and the future of civil freedoms in Kazakhstan. Thus, the consequences of the unrest were a political concentration at the highest level, as well as the growing limitations of political dissent and freedom of expression (Cherian, 2022). The unification of the power of Tokayev in the system of Kazakh politics was one of the most important domestic outcomes of the crisis. Before January 2022, Tokayev had generally been seen to be acting in the shadow of former President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who continued to have significant influence despite officially leaving office in 2019. Nazarbayev still held major posts in the political system and was firmly in control of the elite groups, security agencies, and economic assets. Nevertheless, the turmoil provided Tokayev with a chance to undermine the old system of power and establish himself as a leader in Kazakhstan. In the course of the crisis, Tokayev deprived Nazarbayev of his powerful seat as the chairman of the Security Council and eliminated some of the top officials who belonged to the inner circle of the former president. Nazar, the arrest of Karim Massimov, a former chair of the National Security Committee, on treason charges, also suggested a more general purge of elites of the Nazarbayev era in major state institutions (Kucera, 2022). In turn, Bloody January hastened a significant political shift in Kazakhstan, by diluting the power of the former ruling elites and fortifying the grip of Tokayev on power structures.

Over the next few months, Tokayev initiated a set of political reforms that were purported in the establishment of a New Kazakhstan. These reforms involved the amendments to the constitution, pledges to diminish presidential authority, and steps that were aimed at dealing with the dissatisfaction of the people with the corruption and inequality. In a bid to revive the confidence of the people after the crisis, the government was focused on political



---

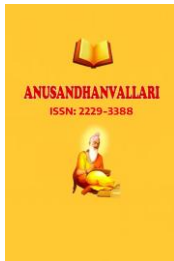
modernization and socio-economic reforms (Cornell, 2022). Nonetheless, numerous critics claimed that these reforms were also characterized by the increasing authoritarian inclination and repression. Although partial reforms were enacted, the opposition movements were still curtailed, political pluralism was still hindered and the independent criticism of the government was strictly blocked. In this way, the after-crisis environment was characterized by a mixture of selective reform and the enhanced state power.

Kazakhstan was also greatly affected in terms of security due to the unrest. The short-term collapse of the social order of the protests strengthened the government focus on the inner order and stability of the regime. This led to the intensification of surveillance by the state, the consolidation of the forces of security services, and the intensification of control over political processes and the use of the Internet. Further control of security agencies including police, intelligence services and military was given more power and resources following the crisis (BBC, 2022). The use of counterterrorism discourses was also heightened by the government which introduced draconian security-related measures as essential to ensure that countries did not destabilize in the future and that the sovereignty of the nations would not be threatened. In reality, though, such actions have led to even greater suppression of dissent and popular activism. The processes of protest movements, opposition movements, and independent media organizations were more closely examined, and the state became more securitized in its attitude to political opposition and civil society activities.

Another significant aftereffect of Bloody January was human rights issues. According to official reports, hundreds of people died as a result of the unrest, thousands were arrested or detained by the security forces. The use of excessive force against protesters and civilians was of great concern to human rights organizations and independent observers. Many claims have been raised concerning torture, abuse of inmates, arbitrary arrests, and absence of due process in the investigations concerning the unrest. Beatings and abuse cases in the detention centers created a publicity of criticism by the international human rights bodies and foreign governments (Cornell, 2022). Internet blackouts that were enforced during the crisis meant that people were further limited to access information and communication in and out of the country. Such shutdowns also not only undermined the daily life and economic activity but also rendered independent verification of events virtually impossible. As a result, the post-Bloody January demonstrated the multi-faceted and conflicting character of the political change in Kazakhstan. Although Tokayev managed to stabilize the power and undermine the Nazarbayev-era system of elite, the crisis also reinforced the authoritarian rule and increased the influence of security agencies in the political system. These selective reforms, increased surveillance, and human rights issues proved that the January 2022 events were not just a go-around crisis, but a turnaround moment that changed the inherent connection between the state power, security, and political dissent in Kazakhstan.

## **Conclusion**

The January 2022 unrest in Kazakhstan, known as Bloody January or Qandy Qantar, marked one of the biggest and most complicated political crisis in the post-Soviet world in recent times. What started as regional protests against increasing liquefied petroleum gas prices were quickly turned into countrywide demonstrations, deadly confrontations, institutional collapse, and an intervention unparalleled in the history of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). The crisis revealed underlying structural tensions in the Kazakh society such as economic inequality, corruption, autocratic rule, and increased dissatisfaction among the people with the long-



---

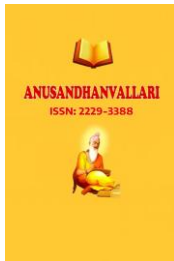
established political domination of the Nazarbayev-era elite. Simultaneously, the turmoil developed not merely into a domestic protest wave, but it became heavily interconnected with the issues of survival of the regime, stability in the region, and the geopolitics. Bloody January has shown that the upheaval cannot be explained in a single narrative or simplified explanation. At first glance, the demonstrations were a clear manifestation of actual socio-economic discontent and general discontent among common people with inflation, inequality, unemployment, corruption and lack of political freedom. The quick dissemination of protests throughout various parts of Kazakhstan indicated the presence of a deeper public discontent, which had been built up over a number of years. Social justice, accountability and political reform demands were a significant source of the protest movement and were representative of larger issues in authoritarian political systems in Central Asia.

Nonetheless, the intensification of violence, assaults on government facilities, provisional breakdown of security facilities as well as the development of armed conflicts complicated the nature of the unrest. The issues of elite rivalry, organized violence, criminal opportunism, and potential internal sabotage raised further levels to the crisis. The detention of top security officials and the destabilization of the Nazarbayev-based networks implied that the unrest could have also been based on the disputes of the ruling elite in Kazakhstan. These changes caused it to become more and more challenging to make a clear line between the spontaneous popular protest, organized political struggle and the state-centered discourse of terrorism and destabilization.

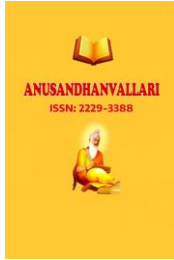
The reaction of the Kazakh government and Russia further changed the political meaning of the crisis. By presenting the unrest as an externally sponsored terrorist campaign and an attempted colour revolution, Kazakh officials securitized dissent and authorised excessive actions such as mass arrest, internet blockage, the use of lethal force, and a CSTO intervention demand. The rhetoric of terrorism and foreign conspiracy echoed more widespread anxieties among post-Soviet authoritarian regimes over democratic revolution and political contagion like in previous movements in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. The prevalence of Russia in the intervention also reflected the geopolitical aspect of the crisis strengthening Moscow in Central Asia and proving that it is serious about maintaining its sphere of influence stable. The very CSTO intervention was a breakthrough in the politics of the post-Soviet region, as it turned the organization into more of a symbolic alliance into a working security mechanism. Simultaneously, the deployment also brought up significant controversies over the issue of sovereignty, authoritarian protection and future of regional organizations in domestic political crises. The incidents also displayed how political stability in Central Asia is weak as economic disparity, dictatorial rule and a political system based on elite groups remain in place to create the environment of social tensions. Finally, the situation of the Bloody January in Kazakhstan cannot be perceived only as a spontaneous democratic revolution or a colour revolution sponsored by the foreign countries. Instead, they were the product of a convergence between real socio-economic grievances, elite politics, and the strategies of securitization of the state, as well as the post-Soviet regional geopolitical fears. The intricacy of the crisis evidences the ability of domestic protests in authoritarian countries to quickly develop into multi-dimensional conflicts influenced by the internal forces of power and security discourses as well as by the context of wider geopolitical struggles. Thus, the January 2022 heritage continues to be an essential part of the present-day politics, government stability, and security in Central Asia and the post-Soviet world in general.

## References

- [1] BBC. (2022). *Kazakhstan unrest was coup attempt, says president*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-59900738>



- 
- [2] Beissinger, M. R. (2009). Debating the Color Revolutions: An Interrelated Wave. *Journal of Democracy*, 20(1), 74-77. Retrieved from <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/debating-the-color-revolutions-an-interrelated-wave/>
- [3] Bērziņa, I. (2015). *The Russian 'Colour Counterrevolution' Model for Containing Geopolitical Expansion by the West*. Retrieved from <https://www.tjomo.com/article/the-russian-colour-counterrevolution-model-for-containing-geopolitical-expansion-by-the-west/>
- [4] Bohr, A. (2019). *Kazakhstan: Tested by Transition*. Retrieved from <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2019/11/kazakhstan-tested-transition/2-governance>
- [5] Chang, H.-C. H. (2023). Complex systems of secrecy: the offshore networks of oligarchs. *PNAS Nexus*, 2(3). Retrieved from <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10115224/>
- [6] Cherian, J. (2022). *Kazakhstan: Another colour revolution?* Retrieved from <https://frontline.thehindu.com/world-affairs/kazakhstan-crisis-another-colour-revolution/article38307411.ece>
- [7] Cornell, S. E. (2022). Learning from Kazakhstan's January Crisis. *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 1-24.
- [8] Fairbanks, C. H. (2004). Georgia's Rose Revolution. *Journal of Democracy*, 15(2), 110-124. Retrieved from <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/georgias-rose-revolution/>
- [9] John S. Earle, S. G. (2014). The Productivity Consequences of Political Turnover: Firm-Level Evidence from Ukraine's Orange Revolution. *SSRN*. Retrieved from [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2505372](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2505372)
- [10] Kriener, F. (2023). Quashing protests abroad: The CSTO's intervention in Kazakhstan. *Journal on the Use of Force and International Law*, 10(2), 271–298. Retrieved from 10.1080/20531702.2023.2266913
- [11] Kucera, J. (2022). *CSTO agrees to intervene in Kazakhstan unrest*. Retrieved from <https://eurasianet.org/csto-agrees-to-intervene-in-kazakhstan-unrest>
- [12] Olcott, M. B. (2005). *Kyrgyzstan's "Tulip Revolution"*. Retrieved from <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2005/03/kyrgyzstans-tulip-revolution>
- [13] Polese, D. Ó. (2009). *From roses to bullets: the rise and decline of post-Soviet colour revolutions*. Retrieved from <https://doras.dcu.ie/15054/1/RosesToBullets.pdf>
- [14] Reed, C. L. (2023). *Kazakhstan's Bloody January: Day 1, Zhanaozen to Aktau*. Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2023/01/kazakhstans-bloody-january-day-1-zhanaozen-to-aktau/>
- [15] Singh, A. P., & Tripathi, R. M. (2025). Trends and causal analysis of crimes of murder and attempted murder in Raipur district: A legal study (2019–2024). *ShodhSamajik: Journal of Social Studies*, 2(2), 158–166. <https://doi.org/10.29121/ShodhSamajik.v2.i2.2025.93>
- [16] Stobdan, P. (2022). *Turmoil in Kazakhstan*. Retrieved from <https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/publication/detail/turmoil-in-kazakhstan-2699>
-



- 
- [17] Tadic, D. (2021). APPLICATION OF COLOUR REVOLUTION METHODOLOGY IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL PRACTICE. *NAUKA I DRUŠTVO*, 8(1), 56-81.
- [18] Talant, B. (2022). *Kazakhstan's longtime "leader" is out, but the regime he built remains*. Retrieved from <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/kazakhstan-s-longtime-leader-out-regime-he-built-remains>
- [19] Кайсар, D. M. (2022). *On the ground in Kazakhstan's protests: what really happened?* Retrieved from <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/what-really-happened-kazakhstan-protests-january/>