

РАЗВИТИЕ ЭЛЕКТРОННОГО ПРАВИТЕЛЬСТВА КАК СТРАТЕГИЯ ЛЕГИТИМИЗАЦИИ: КОНТЕНТ-АНАЛИЗ

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Аннотация. В данной работе показано, что развитие электронного правительства может быть использовано в качестве стратегии легитимации. Одной из ключевых функций электронного управления является предоставление официальной информации общественности и средствам массовой информации. Используя примеры двух государств Казахстана и России, исследование показывает, как легитимация происходит и через официальные правительственные сайты. В данной статье используется контент-анализ для оценки того, какие стратегии легитимации используются Казахстаном и Россией. Полученные данные подтверждают заявления более ранних исследователей о том, что недемократические режимы стремятся продемонстрировать высокие отраслевые показатели. Акцентирование внимания на высоком экономическом развитии, подчеркивание достижений для каждого министерства стали способом продемонстрировать свою легитимность.

Ключевые слова: электронное правительство, контент-анализ, легитимация, политические режимы, правительственные сайты.

ЭЛЕКТРОНДЫҚ ҮКІМЕТТІҢ ДАМУУ ЗАНДАСТЫРУ СТРАТЕГИЯ- СЫ РЕТІНДЕ: КОНТЕНТ-АНАЛИЗ

Әсем Қалқаманова

Аңдатпа. Бұл мақалада электронды үкіметті дамытуды заңдастыру стратегиясы ретінде пайдалануға болатынын көрсетеді. Электронды үкіметтің негізгі функцияларының бірі – халықты және БАҚ-ты ресми ақпаратпен қамтамасыз ету. Қазақстан мен Ресейдің екі мемлекетінің мысалдарын пайдалана отырып, зерттеу мемлекеттік ресми сайттар арқылы заңдастырудың қалай жүзеге асатынын көрсетілген. Бұл мақалада Қазақстан мен Ресей қандай заңдастыру страте-

гияларын қолданып жатқанын бағалау үшін автор мазмұндық талдау қолданған. Зерттеу нәтижелер демократиялық емес режимдер саланың күшті көрсеткіштерін көрсетуге тырысады деген бұрынғы зерттеушілердің пікірлерін растайды. Жоғары экономикалық дамуға ден қою, әрбір министрлік үшін қол жеткізген жетістіктерді атап өту олардың заңдылығын көрсетуге айналды.

Түйінді сөздер: электронды үкімет, контент-талдау, легитимизация, саяси режимдер, мемлекеттік веб-сайттар.

E-GOVERNANCE DEVELOPMENT AS A LEGITIMATION STRATEGY: A CONTENT ANALYSIS

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Abstract. This paper demonstrates that the development of e-governance can be used as a legitimation strategy. One of the key functions of e-governance is the provision of official information to the public and mass media. Using the cases of two states Kazakhstan and Russia, the study shows how legitimation claims are conveyed through the official governmental websites. This paper uses content analysis to assess what legitimation strategies are used by Kazakhstan and Russia. The findings confirm earlier researchers' claims that all non-democratic regimes strive to demonstrate high sectoral performance. Stressing high economic development, praising the achievements for each ministry has become the way to demonstrate their legitimacy.

Keywords: e-governance, content analysis, legitimacy, political regimes, governmental websites.

Introduction

Rapid expansion of the information and communication technologies and success of e-governance in post-Soviet Eurasia, specifically Kazakhstan and Russia, has been observed since recently.

The United Nations E-government Survey was started in 2001. At the very beginning of the 21st century, it demonstrated that highest ranks of the E-Government Global Index of above the medium point were reached only by developed industrialized countries which already had the access to information and more participatory governance in general. [4, p.3] However, since around 2010 leading positions in the development of E-Governance are no longer shared by advanced democracies only. Developing nondemocratic states started entering the group of countries with high EGDI in 2008. As a result, scholars embarked on the investigations into the causes behind this phenomenon.

Rapid growth of e-government is a global trend now. [23, p.4] Post-Sovi-

et region is of particular interest. Since 2018 Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia have been in the group of countries with **very high** E-Government Development Index. Moreover, Kazakhstan is in the 3rd quartile of the group with very high EGDI in 2020 (meaning that the index is higher than half of its very high EGDI group). Russia, Belarus are in the 2nd quartile of the group with very high EGDI in 2020. [23, p.5] Earlier, in 2014 and 2016 Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia belonged to the group of high EGDI. So, we can observe a stable development of e-governance in these countries since 2010.

Legitimation is considered to be a major reason why nondemocratic regimes develop e-governance. [17]

Most popular explanation of the development of e-governance is to acquire external legitimacy or, in other words, appraisal by the international community.

This article unites e-government with the notion of legitimacy by investigating the use of governmental websites for investigating legitimacy claims in Kazakhstan and Russia. To our knowledge, there is no academic paper that approaches e-government as the carrier of legitimation claims.

Content analysis reveals that both Russian and Kazakhstani governments extensively use official governmental Webpages to demonstrate legitimation claims.

The data include the articles and main news parts of the homepages of federal ministries of Russia and republican ministries of Kazakhstan.

Most importantly, governmental websites appear to be a good platform for legitimation claims of governments. Jaeger (2005) states that “An e-government Web site is neither neutral nor free of opinion. The way in which it is designed, the information presented and how that information is presented all affect the messages conveyed by the Web site and, as such, by the government.” [12, p.703] So, how the information is presented should affect the viewpoints of citizens about political and social issues.

In this sense the internet and governmental websites, social media represent a solid platform for communicating these legitimation claims and narratives.

Our research seeks to contribute to the comparative studies of e-governance in post-Soviet region: Russia and Kazakhstan.

Our main **research question** is whether governmental websites reflect legitimation efforts in political regimes of Kazakhstan and Russia. To be specific, we investigate what kind of legitimacy claims are propounded by national ministries and the cabinets in the analyzed cases. The discussion of these research questions will allow us to conclude on the role of e-government in legitimation of political regimes of Kazakhstan and Russia.

Research hypotheses allow us to concretize the research question stated in the introduction. So, our research hypotheses include:

H1: Performance-based legitimacy claims are expected to be most frequent for any regime. All states' governmental websites should possess approximately equal amounts of performance legitimation.

H2: Kazakhstan as a Central Asian country will show more personalistic claims of legitimacy than Russia.

H3: Russian governmental websites exhibit more international legitimacy emphasis than Kazakhstan.

Using content analysis we investigate if any legitimation strategies are realized in e-government of two post-Soviet states Kazakhstan and Russia.

Our study focuses on the legitimacy claims in the content of governmental websites not on the overall state of e-governance as in the papers by Maerz (2016) and Johnson and Kolko (2010). These studies used categories: “1) access to information; 2) services and interaction; and 3) agenda setting.” [17, p.20] In our opinion, these kind of investigations are getting obsolete as the technical elements are comprehensively captured and analyzed by the E-Governance Development Reports.

We suggest that e-governance and its elements affect legitimation in a double way. On the one hand, e-governance is a performance element of legitimation claims. The definition of e-governance stresses performance aspect: “The public sector’s use of information and communication technologies with the aim of improving information and service delivery, encouraging citizen participation in the decision-making process and making government more accountable, transparent and effective.” [9]

On the other hand, e-governance serves as an intermediary for other legitimation strategies. Many authors agree that international appraisal is the most important factor for developing e-governance in autocracies. Obviously, attracting foreign investments for developing economies is easier if they demonstrate high ICT development and modernization. [2, p.148]

Case selection of Russia and Kazakhstan is justified for several reasons. Both Russia and Kazakhstan exhibit democratic features along with some autocratic tendencies. V Dem Project ranks both Russia and Kazakhstan electoral autocracies.¹ Electoral autocracies hold “de-facto multiparty elections for the chief executive, but they fall short of democratic standards due to significant irregularities, limitations on party competition or other violations of Dahl’s institutional requisites for democracies.” [16, p.61] In total, four regime types are distinguished by the Varieties of Democracy project established by the University of Gothenburg —closed and electoral autocracies; electoral and liberal democracies. V Dem Project is the most up to date typology. Most importantly, it accounts for longitudinal measures.

Still, advanced e-governance in Kazakhstan and Russia poses a question if they are moving towards the rare cases of successful autocracies. As we mentioned earlier, according to the 2018 UN cross-national study, Russia and Kazakhstan appeared in the list of countries with very high E-governance development index. [23, p.89]

¹ Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project classifies political regimes. It covers 177 countries from 1900 to 2020.

It is generally considered that the driving factor of e-governance in the analyzed states is a strong institutional capacity. The institutional capacity of the two states is expected to be similar. Not surprisingly, the common communist history of these countries and the demise of the Soviet Union defined that state-building took place simultaneously there.

Also, Kazakhstan and Russia fall under resource-abundant authoritarian regimes meaning oil-exporting and mineral resources rich countries. Resource abundance for the two states may appear to be an important factor towards the increase of the role of government. The WDR 1997 describes how oil price shocks at the beginning of 1970's facilitated a greater expansion of the role of these state oil exporting countries: "For the oil exporters they created a bonanza, which many threw into even greater expansion of state programs. As long as resources were flowing in, the institutional weaknesses stayed hidden." [24, p.23]

Next section provides a comprehensive literature review on legitimacy and the role of e-government in legitimization processes. Afterwards, we deliberate on research design and methodology. Most importantly, it includes research hypotheses and theories they are based upon. Second section is devoted to the results and findings of our research. Finally, we conclude and discuss current limitations and future research recommendations.

Literature review

E-governance starts with the provision of information. The very basic function of e-government is online information-sharing which importance increased many-fold during the pandemic times 2020-2021: "During a national crisis, reliable and transparent information enables Governments to act decisively, support people in making informed decisions about their daily routines, and give them a sense of support, which builds public trust." [23, Addendum 8]

E-governance encompass paying parking tickets, paying taxes online, registering complaints about local communal services, other online transactional services. The UN E-Government Survey states that nearly all of the countries have a national e-government portal automating administrative functions. [23, p.33] Marche & McNiven (2003) define concisely that "E-government is the provision of routine government information and transactions using electronic means, most notably those using Internet technologies, whether delivered at home, at work, or through public kiosks." [18, p.76]

The majority of literature on e-government in post-Soviet region constitute single case studies or multiple case studies. The article by Maerz (2016) investigates e-government in four Central Asian countries. O'Connor, Janenova, and Knox (2019) study the implementation of open government program in Kazakhstan. Elements of e-governance are also examined on specific examples. Working paper by Gorgulu & Sharafutdinova (2020) shows that the use of IT technologies increased the margin of victory for the incumbent in Moscow county. To be

specific, authors used electronically applied pothole complaints and connected them to the voter turnout and local governor elections' results. E-governance is a tool for participatory governance in this case. It positively affected the image of local administration. So, e-government constitute a variety of services. This article is focused on the information provision function of e-government.

The discussion of legitimacy of any political system starts with the reference to the seminal works of Max Weber, Lipset (1959), Easton (1965), and Beetham (1991). Weber's approach that legitimacy is determined by people's beliefs in legitimacy is criticized by Beetham (1991) for the absence of objectiveness and incomprehensiveness which makes it hard to measure and test. He asserts that actual characteristics of a political regime are not considered in this definition of legitimacy.

Martin Lipset (1959) elaborates in the same vein as Weber by defining: "Legitimacy involves the capacity of a political system to engender and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate or proper ones for the society." [15, p.86] According to Lipset, people consider the political system legitimate if its' values fit with their own values.

Beetham (1991) extends legitimacy concept in a significant way and includes three dimensions. [3, p.13] The first dimension is procedural legitimacy or legal validity of a regime. Second dimension overlaps with Lipset's concept: it implies the justifiability of the rules of the state in terms of the beliefs and values of the given society. The example of the third dimension, legitimation through expressed consent, is voting in elections which is an action that demonstrates consent of people.

Burnell (2006) distinguishes internal and external sources of legitimacy. Internal sources include economic performance, material well-being of the people. External legitimacy is played out when the rulers make up a common threat to the nation which requires people to unite and support state. Also, hereditary traditions like those in Iran and Saudi Arabia, political ideology like communism and rigged elections, or in other words, imitation of democratic processes also constitute legitimacy in nondemocratic regimes. [6, p.548] Often, autocratic regimes promote their "claimed ability to secure order and stability in society rather than prosperity" as the reason for staying in power, thus, being the only savior for the nation." [6, p.558] They demonstrate that only the current regime is capable of sustaining such security.

Scholars investigating post-Soviet region incorporate the aspects of state-building into traditional political concepts. For example, Aubakirova (2016) investigated the institutionalization of governance or state power and legitimacy (of the newly established bodies). [1]

Alternative interpretation of legitimacy is given in the paper of Bulukhtayev: "For the government to be legitimate, society has to accept its goals, regime, and leaders relating them to common principles of moral, ideology and law." [5, p.6] Moreover, the author states that long-term goals are primal for the legitimacy

as was the case with after-War period growth in Germany, Japan, economic breakthrough of Singapore and Malaysia which are state-building stages of development.

Particular interest causes the study of Kazakhstani sociologist Zabirowa who raises legitimization issues specific to the post-Soviet republics. After the demise of the Soviet Union, legitimization process also lay in legitimating kazakh ethnicity for the state building. The identity of kazakh ethnicity was diluted during the Soviet epoch: the annihilation of the lower status of kazakh nation took place in 1990's. [25, p.118]

However, these researchers confirm that initial legitimization of the newly independent states Kazakhstan and Russia finished by the end of 1990s. So, today we can discuss legitimacy concept in its more traditional understanding.

Legitimacy shapes power relations ("structures of domination"), a regime's means of rule and stability. [22, p.80] Dukalskis and Gerschewski (2017) note that autocratic legitimization affects "regime resilience, challenger-state interactions, the procedures and operations of elections, and the texture of everyday life in autocracies." [7, p.2]

The erosion of legitimacy in any political regime may lead to revolutionary mobilisation, riots, protests, coup d'état. Technically, legitimacy implies obedience "legitimacy provides them (subordinates) with moral grounds for cooperation and obedience. Legitimate power or authority has the right to expect obedience from subordinates, even where they may disagree with the content of a particular law or instruction..." [7, p.26]

Since recently scholarship is turning towards empirical research of legitimacy claims. Empirical research of von Soest and Grauvogel (2017) is based on the component of legitimacy propounded by Easton (1965). Specifically, they develop six dimensions of legitimization in authoritarian regimes: ideology, foundational myth (like nationalism, specific societal order, and religion), personalism (a ruler is a charismatic leader), international engagement, procedural mechanisms, and performance. [20, 21]

So, literature review on the legitimacy of political systems show that researchers treat legitimacy as a multi-dimensional concept.

Many researchers² differentiate between claims to legitimacy and legitimacy itself which is in our opinion warranted.

Legitimacy in democratic states is relatively clear and easy: we have "the centrality of the rational-legal type". [22, p.80] Guriev and Treisman (2018) notice that legal procedures such as elections may render secondary to other legitimization strategies in modern "informational autocracies": "If information manipulation has successfully inflated the autocrat's reputation, elections can be used to distill popularity into legitimacy. The appearance of democracy can be added to the image of competence." [11, p.122]

² See, for example, Dukalskis and Gerschewski (2017); von Soest and Grauvogel (2016); Tannenbergs et al. (2021)

Undoubtedly, legitimacy claims in nondemocratic regimes are more diverse. However, democracies with the rule of populist governments are very much prone to exhibiting legitimacy claims, also.

Logically, e-governance should result in better governance and public administration: improved decision-making system, more efficient bureaucracy, and improvement of overall political institutions. However, research results are controversial. Empirical study of nondemocratic regimes in years 2003-2008 by Linde and Karlsson (2013) showed that e-participation does not improve the control of corruption and does not change the quality of governance.

There are other possible explanations for the absence of the impact of e-governance on overall quality of governance. The EGDI index used in statistical research does have limitations in what it assesses: “the assessed features of government portals and websites relate more to the provision of information than to citizen consultation, and more to citizen consultation than to citizen involvement in decision-making, which is relatively difficult to characterize.” [23, p.117]

If the development of e-governance positively impacts international ranking of the country, then international appraisal is a clear motive for the advancement of e-government.

Therefore, it raises the question of why some authoritarian regimes would facilitate the development of e-governance? O'Connor, Janenova, and Knox (2019) claim that initially authorities genuinely desired to improve transparency and effectiveness of public services provision, so they set up conditions for e-government. Using qualitative methods, interviews of different tiers of political officials and civil society representatives, they conclude that Kazakhstan strived to develop e-government with the purpose of fulfilling the strategy of getting into 30 most developed nations. Again entering the international rankings is clearly international engagement component of legitimacy.

A problem of reverse causality exists in the studies of the relationship between e-governance and institutional quality, economic growth, and other factors.

Research on the opposite relationship: the effect of different factors on e-governance is confusing. There are both proponents of the positive effect of democratic institutions on e-governance and those who do not find any relationship. Stier (2015) used the Online Services Index which is a subindex of the EGDI in his cross-sectional regressions as dependent variable. Democracy/autocracy variable, government effectiveness, human capital development, internet users per 100 citizens, population size were used as independent variables. So, using regression analysis on cross-sectional data he identified the positive impact of these variables on the online services provision.

These two papers analyzing the same relationship from the opposite directions clearly indicate that there is reverse causation problem. So, it might be the case that either e-governance affects government effectiveness, economic

growth, infrastructure, or these other factors might affect the development of e-governance in the country. Here comes a significant shortcoming of Stier's (2015) methodology: in case of reverse causality, cross-sectional data do not give adequate results. Even regression analysis on panel data have to be diligent and use lagged variables.

Åström et al. (2012) implements analogous study on the sample of 31 non-democratic political systems. They take the same independent variables as Stier (2015) but add economic globalization variable: democracy/autocracy variable, government effectiveness, human capital development, internet users per 100 citizens, population size. They showed that economic globalization makes the strongest significant impact on e-participation. The authors used the sub-index on economic globalization from the KOF Globalisation Index (KOFGI). [2, p.145] It contains the components of trade flows (trade in goods, services, trade partner diversity).

The results of this study allow us to make conclusion on the importance of the international component of legitimacy claims in authoritarian regimes. Nations striving for international appraisal for any reason, be it foreign investments and trade deals or just a recognition on the international arena will facilitate e-governance.

Research Design, Conceptual Definitions, and Operationalization

Recent studies measure what legitimacy claims governments use to justify their regime over wide array of countries and over a long period of time: von Soest and Grauvogel 2017; Tannenberg et al. 2021. The common feature is that these studies used country expert surveys to evaluate the use of different legitimacy strategies. They also attempted to identify the relationship between the type of a political regime and legitimization claims used there.

The assessment of technological infrastructure is provided by the UN E-Governance surveys. The methodology of the Index is such that it reveals supply side of e-governance not the demand side: "the EGDI is used to measure the readiness and capacity of national institutions to use ICTs to deliver public services." [23, p.XX] However, the EGDI does not measure the contents of e-government. The largest part of e-governance is providing information on public policies and what governments are doing. The global trend is sharing public information on governmental websites: "It is increasingly common to find sector-specific information, policies and programmes on dedicated government websites." [23, p.34]

The provision of information for e-government is a crucial part of e-governance. Maerz's research shows that governmental websites are used for both external legitimacy and performance legitimacy in competitive authoritarian regimes. However, the assessment of e-governance from this standpoint already exists within the comprehensive E-Governance Development Index. According to Maerz (2016) competitive authoritarian regimes of Russia and Kazakhstan

actually successfully provide public services through ICT. Unsurprisingly, these two states are in the group of very high EGDI.

However, content analysis is the most appropriate for studying legitimations claims present on dedicated government websites. While expert surveys may mix up legitimacy claims and the perception/acceptance of these claims, content analysis looks purely at what is stated by governments. Neuendorf (2001) insists that a content analysis can only describe substance characteristics of the content of the messages and relationships among these characteristics. So, it is important to limit the conclusions only to the content being studied. Dukalskis and Gerschewski (2017) propose that discourse and text analysis allow to evaluate legitimacy claims in a systematic, valid and reliable way. [7, p.11]

In our study we use primary sources of governmental websites including sector specific which produce objective and stable data.

No doubt, operationalizing the concept of legitimacy is a subjective and cumbersome process. For such concepts like legitimacy, case studies are useful: they help to reveal the mechanics of legitimation within a particular institutional context. Three countries have the majority of factors.

To analyze web content and context of the governments of the three post-Soviet countries, we apply qualitative content analysis and formulate six analytical categories which are based on the six dimensions of legitimacy claims propounded by von Soest and Grauvogel (2016; 2017).

Von Soest and Grauvogel (2016; 2017) propose six dimensions of legitimation in authoritarian regimes: foundational myth, ideology, personalism, international engagement, procedural mechanisms, performance. Ideology, foundational myth, and personalism are identity based claims: these are concepts which develop sense of community.

Foundational myth is also referred to by Levitsky and Way (2013), Clapham (2012), and Schedler (2013), Schatzberg (2001).

Ideology is defined as “narratives regarding the righteousness of a given political order... belief system intended to create a collective identity and, in some cases, a specific societal order.” [21, p.290] Nowadays, ideology includes references to nationalism, religion. Nationalism is a wide concept. In its extreme level it implies ethnic exclusiveness. However, all examples of nationalism are mentioned in the codebook.

Personalism means reference to two factors. The ruler, ruler’s qualities, extraordinary personality, leadership qualities, charisma and other glorifying descriptive features are emphasized. In addition, references to the ruler’s centrality to achievements, .

Procedural legitimacy is the one inherent to democratic systems. In terms of Beetham (1991) it is legal validity which means that power acquisition takes place according to legal rules accepted by all citizens. [3, p.4]

Performance legitimacy was developed from the notion of specific support of Easton (1965) which implies satisfying the needs and requirements of citi-

zens. This category emphasizes achievements in the analyzed sector, increase in corresponding indicators of performance, economic growth. It is important that the text should contain not just statement of the fact, particularly, in figures. The emotional stress or verbal expressions such as *increased, improved, expanded, implemented more than before, plan to expand* should be present. This indicator includes mentioning both current achievements and future successes and promises of the government.

International recognition and engagement: the recognition from other states and the state's international role, engagement in international and regional negotiations, humanitarian acts are important.

Important methodological step is developing a codebook. Each category includes several variables and, thus, a range of questions to code a corresponding category. As we mentioned earlier, the categories of the variables were constructed based on the studies of von Soest and Grauvogel (2017) and Tannenberget al. (2021). Specifically, the supplemental material of the Tannenberget al. (2021) was used to develop Ideology, Performance, Personalism, and Legal-Procedural Legitimation variables.

The first category of variables in our codebook is Ideology. It includes nationalism, religion, anti-western nationalism, and other nationalism variables. The category international recognition and engagement include two variables: international recognition and international engagement. The category Performance includes four variables: economic performance, social policy performance, ICT development, and public administration effectiveness (including e-governance). Other categories consist of a single variable.

Content analysis of governmental websites will allow me to find out the extent to which the government references its performance, foundational myth, ideology, the leader or the ruler, legal procedures, and international appraisal in order to justify the regime.

Data include a country's national e-government portal, the president's website, and websites of all federal ministries for the case of Russia, or all republican ministries for the case of Kazakhstan. So, it means that the entire population of governmental websites is studied which renders our method a census content analysis. The first page of these websites was analyzed. If necessary, next pages are opened to analyze a full article.

Each website has so called *feature news stories* which are located on the homepage. Feature stories and featured news term comes from newspapers and magazines.

The majority of official governmental webpages publish the *latest* news on the homepage like the Russian Ministry of Healthcare and Ministry of Emergency Affairs. Others like the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Ministry of Culture publish *featured news* stories. For example, the Ministry of Internal Affairs arranges their feature news stories under the headline "*In the focus*". The Min-

istry of Economic Development has the section *Most important* on the homepage. The ministry of the Far East and Arctic highlights featured stories on their homepage as *Important*. Also, some ministerial homepages constitute the speech of the corresponding Head of Ministry to a specific group of people.

The importance of the webpages of federal and republican ministries is that they represent one of the channels of communication with the media. Often, like the website of the Foreign Affairs Ministry of Russia has the disclaimer that this is the official information provided for mass media. So, journalists and news portals are the ones who retransmit the news stories from the webpages. News are reported by journalists with the reference to the source, for example, “with the reference to the official page of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan”. As a consequence, how stories are formulated and conveyed depend directly on how they are provided on the official webpage.

What is so important about the content of feature news stories’ section of the national ministries and agencies’ homepage? We assume they constitute the content the corresponding ministry officials are willing to highlight and convey to the public.

As the analyzed countries have highly developed e-governance standardized features on their website are present.

The websites were analyzed during October 2021. All items in the legitimization battery were coded by two coders.

Unit of data collection and unit of analysis is the same in our case. So, the units to which I wish to generalize is the homepage of the official governmental website. Our unit of sampling is the first page of the official websites of governmental bodies at federal level for Russia and republican levels in Kazakhstan.

For Russia there are 21 federal ministries of Russian Federation, the website of the president of Russian Federation and the website of the Government of Russian Federation.

There are 18 ministries, one website of the president, one website of the first president, and one website of the prime-minister in Kazakhstan.

We underline that even one sentence may contain several variables or even several categories. The content analysis reveals the strength of six legitimization claims. Moreover, performance legitimization, ideology legitimization provide more detailed picture. Ideology distinguishes nationalism, religion, anti-western nationalism and other. Performance is subdivided into sectoral performance, social redistribution and state support, technological development, and governance quality.

To assess intercoder reliability, Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for each variable. Correlation coefficient for Russia ranged from 0.76 to 0.81 and for Kazakhstan it ranged from 0.78 to 0.83. Variables that were scores as 0 by both coders were dropped from our analysis. These are foundational myth and other ideologies variables.

Results and Findings

It should be noted that the websites of Kazakhstani ministries share a common design. While the Russian ministries are very diverse: each state organ has its own structure and design.

In addition, explorative analysis suggests that Russian ministerial websites contain more articles and news stories in general. If the number of sectoral performance mentions on Kazakhstani websites is 117, this number is 329. Furthermore, Ministry of Healthcare in Kazakhstan seems to utilize their website for only coronavirus statistics without any textual content.

Performance-based legitimation is important for all kinds of political regimes. The examples of Russia and Kazakhstan confirm this assumption. Sectoral performance were emphasized stronger than all other claims by all ministries and government except for Ministry of Justice in Russia and Ministry of Healthcare of Kazakhstan.

The second most frequent legitimacy claim in Russia is international engagement. International engagement refers to the statements on the humanitarian aid to Siriya, talks with Turkey, several African countries. International recognition is much less mentioned by Russian authorities. Often it is interconnected with informational and digital technologies development. One of the typical examples of the urge for international recognition is the program for the development of technology on genetics. Russian Ministry of Education website states that “a particular attention is paid to research programs to achieve global leadership and solution of new global issues”.³

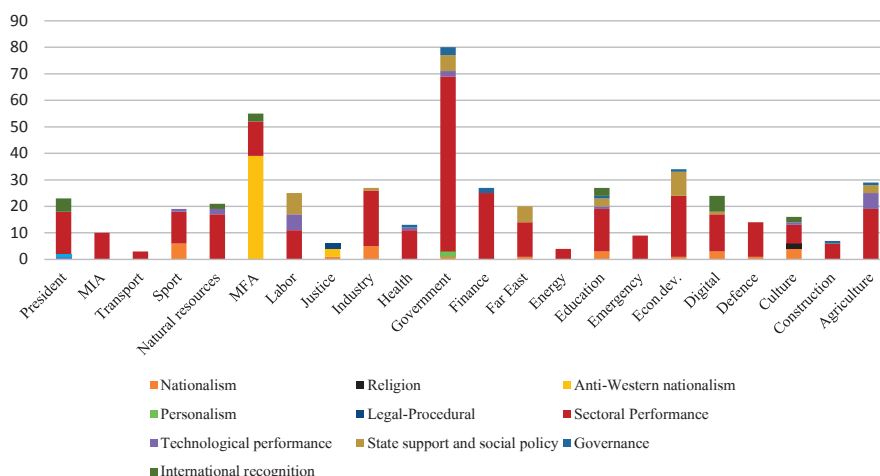


Figure 1. Legitimation claims distribution by Sectoral Ministries in Russian Federation, October 2021.

Source: compiled by the Author

³ Ministry of Science and Higher Education of Russian Federation Official Website: <https://minobrnauki.gov.ru/>

Legal procedures are mentioned rarely by the Russian government. In spite of the fact that data were collected in the aftermath of the elections into the Russian parliament, the news about legal procedures, elections were mentioned only twice at the Ministry of Justice of Russia.

In general, Russian governmental websites provide information for journalists on a larger extent than Kazakhstani websites. So, they are more informative and contain more textual data. Ministry of Foreign Affairs prefer to communicate with journalists through websites by clearly referring that the information provided is presse release and intended as the official position of the Ministry.

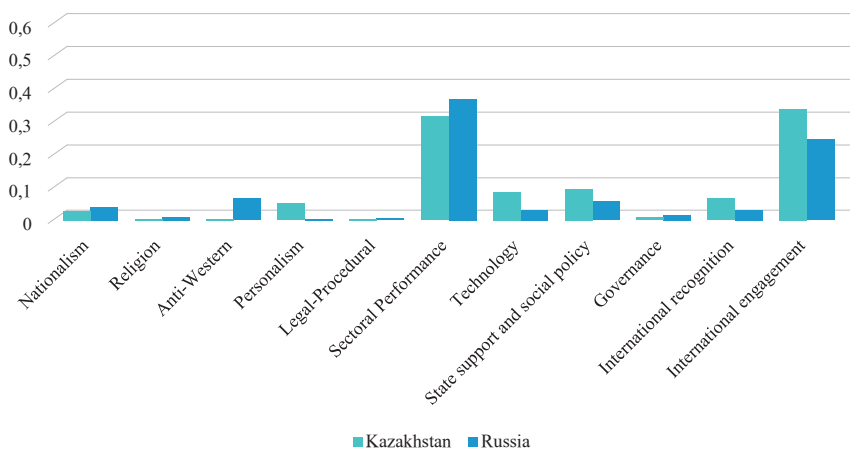


Figure 2. Comparison of percentages of legitimacy claims in Kazakhstan and Russia.

Source: compiled by the Author

Under anti-Western Ideology, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs likes to mention Ukraine: threat from the Ukranian authorities to the Russian minorities, noncompliance with the Minsk agreements. Furthermore, the USA failure in Afghanistan is also a frequent issue on the ministerial website. Along with the affairs of Russian diplomacy, the wrongdoings of Baltic states are mentioned.

Nationalism ideals are of wider use by Russian government. National feelings, traditions, and the russian language are mentioned twice more often by Russian ministries than by Kazakhstani.

Comparison between Russian and Kazakh legitimacy claims reveals stark difference in personalism claims. Figure 2 shows that personalistic claims in Kazakhstan stand out considerably which actually coincides with the general viewpoint of scholars on the system with a strong presidential power in

Kazakhstan. All nine mentions relate to the first president Nursultan Nazarbayev who holds the title of the Leader of the Nation (Yelbasy). Basically, one person, N.Nazarbayev, represents a separate political institute which can be treated as a political innovation. It is not just a title given to one person, it is political institution with all necessary provisions. In general, it is not a rare case that presidential systems exhibit personalistic features.

One of the reasons for personalistic features in Kazakhstan can be social redistribution policies. Guriev and Treisman (2019) noticed that Kazakhstan's president (first president nowadays) focused on fair social redistribution and welfare support much more than his counterparts in nondemocratic political systems. Figure 3 shows that the authorities in Kazakhstan stress their social policies and state support to the small and medium businesses. Social policies and support for small business are rarely mentioned by the Russian government.

So, the qualitative content analysis of the governmental websites allowed to reveal several trends in the legitimization strategies of Kazakhstan and Russia. Our analysis confirms the conjecture that governments use their webpages as a platform to communicate their legitimization claims to the public.

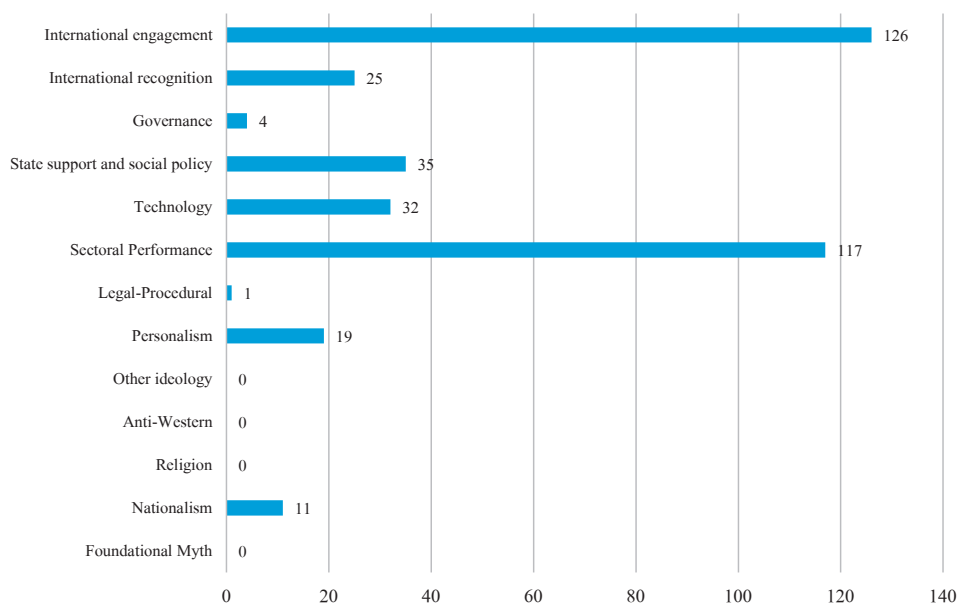


Figure 3. Legitimacy claims in Kazakhstan, October 2021.

Source: compiled by the Author

Conclusion

The explorative analysis suggests that governmental websites are widely used for conveying legitimacy claims in Russia and Kazakhstan.

Since 2008, post-Soviet region, specifically, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and

Russia entered the group of countries with very high e-governance development as reported by the UN E-Governance Development Index reports. E-governance development is considered to be a strong factor towards legitimization of a political system. Moreover, diverse and content-rich governmental websites can be used as a platform to communicate to the public. We analyzed the content of governmental webpages for the presence of legitimization claims using the theoretical framework of von Soest & Grauvogel (2017).

First of all, both Kazakhstan and Russia use their economic and sectoral performances more often than any other legitimization strategies. Nationalism ideals are more often exhibited by Russian agencies than Kazakhstani ministries. Support for the head of state and first president is prevalent in Kazakhstan and almost absent in Russia.

Further research should continue by investigating the effect of various legitimization strategies on citizen-state relationship, civil society characteristics.

The uniqueness of this study is that distribution of legitimacy claims are analyzed deeper, across different sectors of state. The second outstanding feature is that legitimacy claims are more specific than in the papers by von Soest and Grauvogel (2017); Tannenberget al. (2021).

However, for a full picture this analysis should be accomplished not just for one time period, but monthly for at least a year. The publications on official websites reveal how they build their communication with the public and, thus, how they legitimate themselves.

Results obtained are certainly limited to Russia and Kazakhstan. However, the approach will be of interest to comparative sciences. Revealing the crisis of legitimacy may predict disruptive collective actions. Most importantly, comparative analysis of a political system in various stages of its lifecycle may allow to find out the threshold when the gap between legitimacy claims and legitimacy beliefs becomes critical.

The future research should establish a quantitative measure of the gap between what governments say and what citizens perceive.

Limitations

There are certain difficulties in coding scheme. Performance variable that contains sectoral indicators and achievements are often intertwined with the performance indicators that imply governance and government effectiveness. The reason is that often sectoral figures and plans are implemented within state programs. State programs or public policy programs imply the efficient financial resources allocation and organization of procedures. The texts often stress that for the fair implementation the ministry obliges to organize a competition with the committee members from different areas, for example. So, a coder has to be sensitive to such nuances.

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