Keeping Receipts: Lessons on Civic Engagement in Autocratic States from Kazakh Advocacy for Xinjiang

Accepted version of an article published in Central Asian Affairs: Colleen Wood. "Keeping Receipts: Lessons on Civic Engagement in Autocratic States from Kazakh Advocacy for Xinjiang", Central Asian Affairs 9, 1 (2022): 94-118.

Colleen Wood | orcid: 0000-0002-7158-9647
PhD Candidate, Columbia University, New York, USA
c.wood@columbia.edu

Abstract

How do civil society actors in authoritarian states use the internet to mobilize and advocate for rights claims? The internet has changed the patterns of political communication for civil society actors, but the range of tactics used in autocracies remains undertheorized. In this paper, I analyze the activities of Atajurt Eriktileri, a group that petitions the Kazakhstani government on behalf of co-ethnics detained in Xinjiang, China. Empirically, I complement five semi-structured interviews with an interpretive analysis of 3,272 petition videos (an original dataset) posted to Atajurt's YouTube channel. I identify four visual–discursive patterns and three scripts that characterize the petitions, which speak to Atajurt's strategy of atomized collective action; this approach helps avoid the repression that comes with more traditional forms of mass mobilization. The hypervisibility of Atajurt's social media presence challenges the dominant literature on civil society and resistance in authoritarian regimes that emphasizes hidden forms of contention.

Keywords

Kazakhstan – Xinjiang – contentious politics – digital activism – YouTube

1 Introduction

Civil society actors use many different tactics to mobilize toward collective action and engage with the state. The advent of internet communication technologies (ICTs) has expanded the multiplicity of options available for

interacting with the state, including formal channels where the state invites criticism and concern and informal spaces for airing grievances. Even in autocratic contexts, where the risk of repression or cooptation of dissent is high, civil society actors have a variety of options to direct rights claims and advocate for reform. However, the range of strategies and the conditions under which groups in non-democratic contexts pursue them are undertheorized. This raises a relevant descriptive question: How do civil society actors in authoritarian states use the internet to mobilize and advocate for rights claims?

To answer this question in a specific context, I draw insights from the case of a civil society group that facilitates Kazakhstani citizens' submission of formal and informal petitions to Kazakh authorities on behalf of ethnic Kazakhs detained in Xinjiang, China. The organization, called Atajurt Eriktileri (translated from Kazakh, "Volunteers for the Fatherland"), has built a digital archive of testimonies that describe the extent of human suffering caused by China's repressive campaign to detain and imprison Muslims in Xinjiang. Empirically, I complement participant observation and five semi-structured interviews with an interpretive analysis of an original dataset of more than 3,000 petition videos posted to Atajurt's YouTube channel. This analysis stems from six years of field experience in Central Asia, during which time I have built Kazakh-language skills and developed an awareness of and sensitivity to local cultural and political norms.

The petition videos present evidence of ethnic Kazakhs' experiences with state violence in Xinjiang. I find four dominant visual–discursive patterns in the videos: the use of photographs to assert the truthfulness of petitions and memorialize loved ones; an emphasis on Kazakhstani citizenship; a multiscale approach to claim-making; and "keeping receipts" of documents that demonstrate attempts to advance rights claims to Kazakhstani authorities and international organizations. Furthermore, my analysis suggests that these videos follow one of three additional "scripts," that is, videos are either one-on-one interviews, group testimonies, or recordings of telephone calls or videos taken outside the Atajurt office. The form of these scripts serves two functions: the videos are testimonies of human rights violations in and of themselves, and they also serve to coach viewers on how to navigate the bureaucratic process of submitting formal petitions to Kazakhstan's government. I argue that these visual–discursive patterns reflect Atajurt's strategic argumentation, while the video scripts mirror the form of Atajurt's hypervisible, atomized collective action. Atajurt's strategy of hypervisibility contrasts with expectations from the literature on civil society and resistance in authoritarian regimes that emphasizes hidden forms of contention (Fu 2017; Wedeen 2015; Scott 1985).

In this paper, I make no causal claims about the effectiveness of Atajurt's digital and analog activities; Atajurt's audience and the detained people they advocate for represent a skewed sample of the total population of those suffering in Xinjiang. Moreover, the tense nature of diplomacy over the camps between Kazakhstan and China makes it difficult to ascertain how many Kazakhs have been released from Xinjiang directly as a result of Atajurt's advocacy. However, my goal is not to address the efficacy of the campaign, but rather to dig into the goals and tactics motivating Atajurt. I focus primarily on discursive practices with the hope of identifying how civil society actors use the internet to collectively make contentious claims in an autocratic context. The findings presented here contribute to scholarship on contentious politics and state–society relations in Kazakhstan specifically and non-democracies more broadly.

The paper is organized as follows: I discuss the literature on contentious politics in repressive regimes and lay out a decade-long scholarly debate on the internet's potential as a tool for political communication in autocracies. I then introduce the case study, offering background on the mass detention of Muslims in western China and Atajurt's approach to advocating for ethnic Kazakhs who have suffered state violence in China. Next, I discuss the methods I used to research and write this article; I situate my inductive, interpretive approach to analyzing Atajurt's YouTube archive against other methodological options. I then lay out my findings from having watched and categorized Atajurt's video petitions, adding context from ethnographic observation and Kazakh-language interviews with Atajurt volunteers in Almaty conducted in February and March 2020. I interpret Atajurt's use of YouTube as a form of atomized collective action, in which Atajurt assists individuals through the process of petitioning the state; this allows citizens to communicate with state authorities without triggering repression that can follow more conventional forms of contention, such as public picketing (CurrentTime 2020). Contrary to assumptions about the dominance of hidden contention in repressive contexts, I find that Atajurt pursued a strategy of hypervisibility through its online activity, which served to build an audience and shield Atajurt's founder from incarceration. I conclude by framing the implications of these findings and calling for additional research on the visible, legible forms of contention in autocracies.

2 Contentious Politics and the Internet in Non-Democracies

Even where regimes heavily restrict the freedoms of speech and free association, we see contentious politics, defined as instances where citizens collectively

engage the government to make rights claims in ways that directly bear on the government's interests (Tilly 2008: 5–6). Most contemporary authoritarian states allow civil society actors to operate, allowing citizens to come together and engage in some activities beyond the state's control (Lewis 2013). This is not to say that civil society in autocracies faces no resistance from authorities; state actors draw on a range of tools to contain dissent, including coercion, cooptation, and manufacturing consent (Lerner 2021; Chapman 2018; Schatz 2009; Levitsky and Way 2010).

Some have argued that the public institutions that give voice to citizens' concerns are merely "window dressing" (Moustafa 2007: 7), and that civil society actors in autocracies which are allowed to operate are somehow coopted (Wilson 2005). One implication of this is assumption is that citizens and civil society actors who wish to voice grievances must do so in secret through "hidden transcripts" (Scott 2008). This emphasis on hidden forms of contention appears in research on authoritarian countries across the world, including Fu's work on disguised collective action in China (2016), Wedeen's research on subversive cartoons in Syria (2015), Joo's exploration of North Korea's shadow economy (2014), and Scott's study of everyday resistance like foot-dragging and feigned ignorance among poor Malaysian villagers (1985).

The advent and expansion of digital communication technologies has opened new spheres for associational life. Democratic and autocratic states alike have adopted e-government platforms to facilitate communication, including online platforms that allow citizens to request public information, consult with officials, and deliberate on public policies and services. While some have argued that it contributes to transparency and accountability, others perceive e-government in autocratic states "to be either underdeveloped or as relating to sham or mere routine interactions" (Maerz 2016). A similar debate has emerged about the mobilizing potential of the internet for social movements and civil society actors.

A large facet of this scholarship considers the internet's role in facilitating mass mobilization and protest, with a debate between cyber-optimists and -pessimists flourishing over the last ten years. On the one hand, optimists argue that social media enables collective organization (Earl and Kimport 2011) by lowering the costs for organizing, sharing information, and participating (Carr and Hayes 2015). On the other, skeptics have claimed that any benefits to collective organization are overstated (Morozov 2011) and that digital support for a movement is incredibly difficult to translate into change enacted through formal political institutions (Beissinger 2017). Moreover, attempts to mobilize collective action through digital channels are easily thwarted, either by outright suppression – for example, crude blackouts and blocking websites

(Gunitsky 2015) – or by coopting social media to frame public discourse in a favorable way (Lewis 2016) and counter-mobilize (Sanovic et al. 2018).

Much of the analysis of social movements – in autocracies and democracies, online and off – centers the efficacy of organizers' tactics. However, it is also important to understand the form and content of contentious politics. Recent scholarship has considered mobilizational tactics that are less extraordinary than revolution, such as hashtag campaigns (Bonilla and Rosa 2015; Casas and Webb Williams 2018) or memes (Moreno-Almeida 2021). Additional research is necessary to understand how civil society actors navigate between digital and in-person mobilization in repressive contexts. This research agenda stems from several questions: How do civil society actors use the internet to achieve their goals and mobilize collective action in autocratic contexts? How do ICTs support offline organizing efforts? When and why do groups pursue strategies of anonymity or hypervisibility online? To address these questions, I present a case study of Atajurt Eriktileri, a Kazakhstani civil society group that advocates for ethnic Kazakhs who have been imprisoned in Chinese detainment camps. Atajurt's use of social media to facilitate collective action both on- and offline suggests that hypervisibility – such as, in this case, the presentation of observable transcripts of petitioning state actors – serves both strategic and affective purposes.

3 Case Background: The Kazakh Diaspora and Mass Detention of Muslims in Xinjiang

Atajurt Eriktileri (Kazakh for "Volunteers of the Fatherland") is a small organization based in Almaty, Kazakhstan, that has worked to record human rights violations in Xinjiang since 2017. Atajurt was founded with the goal of raising awareness about the situation in Xinjiang, where experts estimate that at least a million people – largely Muslim residents of Xinjiang, mostly Uyghurs but also Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Hui people – have been detained in Xinjiang since early 2017 (Zenz 2019; Roberts 2018; Bunin 2019).

After years of denying the existence of camps used to detain Muslim residents of Xinjiang, in late 2019, officials changed their approach and began justifying the camps as "re-education centers" (BBC 2019) and as an anti-terror initiative (Xinhua 2019). The obfuscation of data about the scope and purpose of mass detention has made it difficult to verify the human rights abuses happening in Xinjiang. Some detainees have escaped abroad and recounted episodes of horrific physical and psychological violence, including torture, forced

sterilization, rape, family separation, prohibitions of religious expression, and being forced to speak Mandarin.

Many of those who have escaped are ethnic Kazakhs who came to Kazakhstan expecting to be protected from a state that has asserted responsibility for its ethnic diaspora in the past. The July 2018 trial of Sayragul Sauytbay, an ethnic Kazakh woman with Chinese citizenship who escaped from Xinjiang and testified about the extent of violence taking place in the camps, was a flashpoint for broader international attention toward mass detention in Xinjiang (Synovitz et al. 2018).

Like Sauytbay, Atajurt's founder, Serikzhan Bilash, is an ethnic Kazakh who was born in China; Bilash gained Kazakhstani citizenship through a government repatriation program founded in 1991. This repatriation program, called Oralman ("Returnee" in Kazakh), offered financial and bureaucratic incentives to repatriate and settle in specific provinces (Dukeyev 2017). Since 1991, approximately one million ethnic Kazakhs from China, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Iran, and Turkey have repatriated to Kazakhstan. The repatriation program reflected anxiety over Kazakhstan's legitimacy as a "titular state," or a political entity that represents the ethnic group for which it is named. This was a holdover from Soviet-era administrative organizing; each of the fifteen republics was "for" the ethnic group that gave the state its name. But when Kazakhstan became independent in 1991, it was the only republic whose ethnic namesake did not make up a majority of the citizenry; in the 1989 census, only 39.7 percent of its population was ethnically Kazakh (Dave 2004). The Oralman program served to assert the Kazakhstani government's responsibility for coethnics in the diaspora, regardless of citizenship; it leveraged the Kazakh diaspora of four million people as one strategy to boost Kazakhs' representation in the population.

About one quarter of the Kazakh diaspora in Eurasia – some one and a half million Kazakhs – live in Xinjiang, China's largest and westernmost province. About 133,000 Kazakhs repatriated from China between 1991 and 2015 (Radio Free Europe 2015), but the logistical difficulties of participating in the repatriation program mean that families and communities are divided by citizenship and borders. Atajurt worked with the transnational community of Kazakh families that live between Xinjiang and Kazakhstan to raise awareness of state-sponsored violence against Muslims in China. While the group has worked with some Uyghur families, their efforts in domestic advocacy are targeted at assisting ethnic Kazakhs, some of whom have Kazakhstani citizenship themselves or have family members who are Kazakhstani passport holders. To that end, Atajurt records testimony of people looking for loved ones who have gone

missing in Xinjiang and coaches Kazakhstani citizens, through raising awareness about their legal rights, to submit formal petitions to their government on behalf of family members in China.

As global awareness and concern about Xinjiang grew, marked first by a United Nations statement issued in August 2018, so did international attention on Atajurt's work. Kazakhstani authorities attempted to undermine Atajurt's activities by fining the group for working without formal NGO registration and by putting Atajurt's leader, Serikzhan Bilash, under house arrest (Radio Free Europe 2019a). In spite of the pressure, Atajurt doubled down on its social media strategy and organized a global hashtag campaign to draw attention to Bilash's arrest. Following this campaign, which amassed several thousand tags on Instagram and more than a thousand video submissions uploaded to YouTube, authorities eventually freed Atajurt's leader under the condition that he would not engage in political activism for seven years (Feng 2019).

During the months of the Atajurt leader's legal troubles, the organization split into two factions; one group successfully secured registration from the government in September 2019 in a move the other faction framed as evidence of cooptation by the state (Pannier 2019). Since September 2019, both the registered and unregistered Atajurts have used similar tactics to conduct their mission.[1] They both try to raise awareness of human rights violations in Xinjiang worldwide. To this end, they both collect and record testimonies of those who escaped from the camps or are looking for family members who remain in China. Additionally, both groups advocate for ethnic Kazakhs stuck in bureaucratic limbo seeking asylum status or Kazakhstani citizenship. As a result of the intense social schism, however, the groups do not cooperate or coordinate, even though their offices are a ten-minute walk from one another near Almaty's Green Bazaar.

Both groups rely heavily on digital messaging to organize and conduct their work. One key platform is WhatsApp, which is used for setting up meetings with people who are interested in recording testimony, and Facebook is used for small essays and livestreams. YouTube is the cornerstone of Atajurt's work, which is somewhat surprising given that Instagram is the most popular tool for digital activism in Kazakhstan (Kudaibergenova 2019). YouTube's technological architecture offers Atajurt several advantages over Instagram: it is difficult to upload videos to Instagram from a desktop, and Instagram limits videos to 60 seconds, which is far shorter than Atajurt's shortest petition videos.

1 Despite the rift between the two groups, I refer to them as a collective unless specified otherwise given that they have the same name, work toward the same goal, and use almost identical tactics.

The intensity of Atajurt's online activism is impressive, given the relatively recent expansion of internet access in Kazakhstan. As recently as 2007, only 4 percent of Kazakhstan's population was online; by 2010, 31 percent had internet access. Indeed, as recently as 2015, scholars argued that social media in Kazakhstan was marginal and not a site with any potential for political organizing (Anceschi 2015: 7). However, by 2019, more than 70 percent of Kazakhstan's population was connected to the internet (United Nations Human Development Reports, 2018), largely through wider access to smartphones and mobile data. This expansion has created space for creative uses of social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and even 2GIS, a navigation app popular in the Russian-speaking world; social media has become an intensely political space in Kazakhstan (Wood 2019). Exiled opposition members communicate via Facebook livestreams; Instagram meme accounts circulate subversive memes and expose election fraud; quasi-organized social activists post videos on YouTube criticizing environmental damage and frequent internet blackouts (Kosnazarov 2020).

A case study of Atajurt's advocacy – one that considers how the group uses digital and analog modes of petition to contest official narratives and facilitate collective action – is analytically appropriate for the research question at hand. Kazakhstani authorities frequently restrict online and offline association, which makes Atajurt's activism from 2017 onwards an unlikely success story of civil society actors being able to organize contention. Although it is difficult to measure the *effect* of Atajurt's activism, the visibility and legibility of their tactics offer ample data for analyzing discursive patterns in their advocacy online and offline.

4 Data Sources and Methods of Analysis

This article is informed by two methods of data collection and analysis. Taking inspiration from Bonilla and Rosa's 2015 study of #Ferguson and Pietrobruno's 2013 study of practices for archiving Turkish cultural heritage on YouTube, my main field site was the YouTube channel "ATAJURT KAZAKH HUMAN RIGHTS Serikzhan Bilash."[2] In order to systematize the digital field site, I created a dataset of 5,739 videos posted between February 25, 2018, and June 21,

2 Until the split in September 2019, this channel was where all Atajurt's videos were posted; following the rift, the unregistered group took control of this particular channel (signaling this by adding "Serikzhan Bilash," the name of Atajurt Eriktileri's founder, to the channel name), pushing the registered group to create their own (almost identical) social media presence.

2019.[3] I extracted the following information from the YouTube channel for each video: video title, upload date, thumbnail image, the length of the video, and engagements (including the number of views, likes, dislikes, and comments as of June 21, 2019). Figure 1 illustrates the number of videos posted each month. When viewed over time, there are two peaks for the frequency of video uploads: December 2018 and March 2019.

Scholars have raised concerns about the ethics of using automated approaches to categorize and analyze individuals' experiences with state-sponsored violence, especially when individuals have risked their personal safety to share this data (Subotić 2021; Agarwal 2016). Conscious of these concerns, I took an inductive, interpretive approach to watching and sorting the videos. I began by watching the ten most-viewed videos (ranging from 193,540 to 615,978 views, as of June 2019) and least-viewed videos (ranging from 0 to 6 views, as of June 2019). I then watched a random selection of 30 clips to look for visual and discursive patterns. I identified four types of videos: petitions, in which people testified on behalf of family members in Xinjiang; campaigns focusing on drumming up support and sharing news on the court cases of whistleblower Sayragul Sauytbay and Atajurt founder Serikzhan Bilash; updates on Atajurt's activities, such as donating food and clothes to repatriated family; and broad interest videos about Kazakh identity and geopolitics.

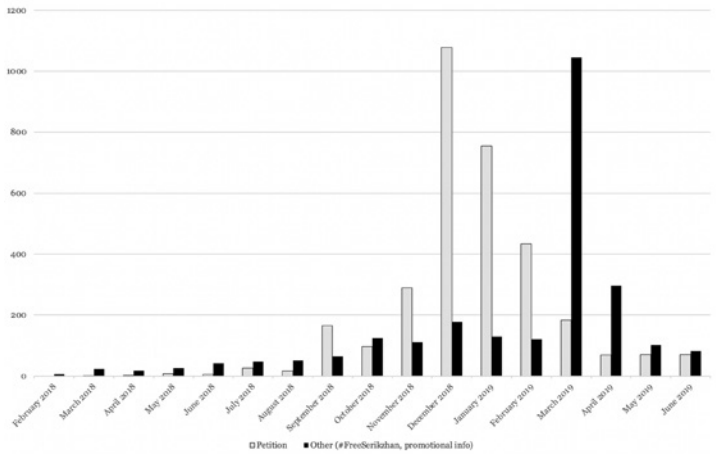

Figure 1 Number of Uploads Per Month to YouTube channel "ATAJURT KAZAKHSTAN HUMAN RIGHTS Serikzhan Bilash"

3 Some of the videos have since been deleted subsequent to my scraping of the channel in June 2019. I did not ask interviewees why the videos were deleted. When searching for specific videos from the dataset I scraped in June 2019, it appears that videos where leaders of the now-registered Atajurt made speeches, as opposed to appeal videos, have been deleted.

Of the 5,739 videos in the dataset, the modal type was "petition," with 3,272 videos. Petition videos involve the presentation of an *aryz*, the Kazakh word for "petition" or "appeal." Working with this subset of only petition videos, I watched 100 *aryz* videos chosen at random to develop a sense of the videos' visual–discursive patterns and forms. I took an inductive approach in classifying the themes and scripts,[4] drawing on theories from film studies and documentary analysis to study the interplay between visuality and discourse (Baudry et al. 1986; Nichols 1992).[5] Rather than analyze just the plot of a film, studies of documentary consider the function served by image and sound, which are edited together to create a message. As filmmaking practices have evolved over time, different modes of representing reality have emerged. I read Atajurt's YouTube archive as a collection of videos created in the reflexive mode of representation (Nichols 1992: 33), in which the goal is to raise consciousness without hiding the fact that the filmmaker is using technology in a specific way to communicate. Reflexive representation has been made more accessible with the emergence of technology that allowed filmmaking and distribution with fewer technical skills and less capital (Erens 1988).

To analyze the content and vehicle of the message organizers were trying to communicate, I identified four visual–discursive themes in the dialogue and visuals of the petition videos, in addition to three "scripts" that framed the presentation of petitions. In the next section, I present and analyze the four visual–discursive themes – the use of photographs, a multi-scale approach to claim-making, and an emphasis on Kazakhstani citizenship – before turning to the three scripts for petition videos. Analyses of the videos are complemented with observations and interview data; in total, I conducted five interviews with Atajurt staff, in Kazakh, without an interpreter, in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in February and March 2020.6

4 That there is an interactive effect between researcher and subject (a central tenet of interpretivist research) makes reliability of replication difficult, and of course my take on these videos is likely different from that of someone with different field experience, language skills, and cinematic repertoires. My methods are falsifiable in the sense that they can be challenged by watching videos from the dataset and extending or challenging the coding rules I developed.

5 My first exposure to theories of film analysis was in Rochona Majumdar's module at the Institute for Qualitative and Mixed Methods Research at Syracuse University in June 2019. The idea to conduct this project stemmed from that module, and my interpretive approach to analyzing the videos stems from her lectures and conversations that happened during the Institute.

6 All interviews were conducted in person before any cases of COVID-19 were detected and verified in Kazakhstan.

5 Interpreting Atajurt's YouTube Archive: Visual–Discursive Themes and Petition Scripts

I observed four visual–discursive themes in the 3,272 petition videos; these themes shed light on how citizens of authoritarian states make petitions to advance rights claims. The four themes are: the use of photographs to assert the truthfulness of petitions and memorialize victims; an emphasis on Kazakhstani citizenship; a multi-scale approach to claim-making; and "keeping receipts" of documents that demonstrate attempts to advance rights claims to Kazakhstani authorities and international organizations. These visual–discursive themes are relevant insofar as they uncover the angles of argumentation in Atajurt's YouTube videos.

First, testifiers present photographs of missing family members and loved ones. Some people hold large, poster-size photographs; others hold up small photos, left over from passport applications or school documents.[7] Some of the photographs are candid – a woman leaning back in a chair with her hands folded over her stomach, a woman with her arms around the shoulder of a younger man looking at the camera with a smile uncharacteristic of normal practice in the region – while others are staged, slightly photoshopped and used for passports or ID cards. These photos are presented in different ways; some are printed on massive posters, others are taped onto sturdy paper, and some are carried in flimsy plastic document protectors. Many of these posters include additional information, most often the missing person's name (in Mandarin or Kazakh, with Kazakh written in either Arabic or Cyrillic scripts, the former reflecting written traditions for those who came from China).[8] Other common text on these posters includes the number of months since this person was last seen or heard from and a WhatsApp number to contact with any updates.

There are strategic and affective reasons for making, filming, and broadcasting these photos. Concrete evidence about state-sanctioned violence is often scarce, and when the state is silent on the effects of violent repression, "history must be cobbled together from fragments: photos, memories, and stories" (O'Keefe 2009: 519). Collecting proof of suffering that contradicts official narratives can be incredibly taxing for survivors and their family members, but the

7 "Қос ұлдарын Қытай еш жазықсыз Саяси түрмесіне қамап отыр" [His two innocent sons are held in a political prison], YouTube, September 27, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qR6EPULVEw8.

8 "Қытайдың Іле Қазақ автономиялы обылысы Шапшал ауданы(3) баспасөз МӘСЛИХАТЫ ӨТТІ" [Press Conference of Shapshal district of China's Kazakh Autonomous Region 3], YouTube, November 29, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RlfWQZeZGL4.

work of finding and recording the extent of violence can be a way to reclaim a sense of efficacy and agency. As historian Monica Muñoz Martinez reflects in her study of lynchings in the Texan borderlands, "Recovering the names of the dead and the names of those who brought them harm is a crucial and ongoing effort in the struggle against state violence" (Martinez 2018: 9). These efforts exist on a spectrum of formality, with some governments having developed "bureaucracies of victimhood" (Cronin-Furman and Krystalli 2020) including state archives and monuments to victims of past repression, while others willfully ignore the amateur archives, memoir collections, documentary films, and tapestries that present the stories of victims of state violence.

At the registered Atajurt office, I was told that photos are necessary to demonstrate the veracity of the petition. "If I say, 'Hello, I'm so and so, here is my story,' how do you know this is me? How do you know who I'm talking about? The photos and documents are facts to prove who we are. It's to find people faster," one Atajurt representative said.[9] These photographs are a truth claim; in putting these images online for their co-nationals and the rest of the world to see, Atajurt engages in a politics of sight (Pachirat 2011) that makes the suffering in Xinjiang – which Chinese and Kazakhstani authorities have consistently denied – observable.

Second, videos consistently emphasize testifiers' (and, when accurate, victims') status as Kazakhstani citizens. In almost every video, testifiers begin by showing their Kazakhstani passport or ID card to the camera; some also verbally cite the ID number and list dates relevant to their repatriation to Kazakhstan, as in the video titled "2018 24 October."[10] As explained in the background section of the piece, Atajurt was founded by ethnic Kazakhs born in China who claimed Kazakhstani citizenship as part of a state-sponsored repatriation program. The repatriation program was part of Kazakhstan's assertion of responsibility for co-ethnics, even those who have lived outside Kazakhstan's territory for generations. As beneficiaries of the program, Atajurt's volunteers are highly aware of their citizenship status, including the documents that embody that status as well as the rights it confers. Atajurt leverages testifiers' citizenship and emphasizes cases of Kazakhstani citizens who have gone missing in Xinjiang. The group does so in order to justify demands on the Kazakhstani government to intervene in China on behalf of family members making petitions and to condemn the mass detention of Muslims (with an emphasis on co-ethnics) in Xinjiang.

9 Interview, Almaty, March 3, 2020.

10 "2018 ж. 24 қазан" [October 24, 2018], YouTube, October 24, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InRn2461jYg.

Third, Atajurt adopts a multi-scale approach (Hahn 2016) to leverage Kazakhstan's government to intervene on behalf of co-ethnics detained in Xinjiang. The above-mentioned emphasis on testifiers' citizenship status reflects an acute awareness of formal domestic channels to petition the Kazakhstani state, which has maintained a policy of responsibility for co-ethnics with and without citizenship since independence. Atajurt draws on this civic authority to directly address domestic politicians in videos, including the first president (Nursultan Nazarbayev), his successor (Kassym-Jomart Tokayev), and representatives from the Ministries of Foreign and Internal Affairs. For example, in a video uploaded on November 27, 2018, before explaining the details of her husband's detention, a testifier says: "To the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, Dear Leader of the Nation (*Elbasy*), I am Parida Kabylbek, a citizen of Kazakhstan."[11]

However, petitioning state authorities to do something directly in their power to deliver is analytically distinct from asking the state to take up a cause with a foreign government. An Atajurt representative told me, "The Kazakh government can't say anything (*aita almaidy*) because they understand that without China, the economy is in danger," reflecting an understanding that Kazakhstan's strategic menu for intervening in Chinese domestic affairs is very limited.[12] Given this constraint, the group invokes a sort of boomerang effect (Keck and Sikkink 2014) to influence policy in Xinjiang by communicating directly with global leaders, international organizations, and media outlets. Videos frequently open with flowery appeals to the United Nations or the International Court of Justice, as in a video uploaded in October 2018 that lays out a strategy for communicating with international organizations.[13]

In addition to international bodies, testifiers have often listed leaders of foreign countries – such as Vladimir Putin or Donald Trump – next to domestic authorities. Some videos go beyond making abstract petitions by visualizing direct communication with foreign officials. In a four-minute video uploaded in September 2018, an American diplomat speaks in English with an Atajurt representative outside the U.S. Embassy about meeting with several

11 "Елбасы Н.Ә.Назарбаев Назарына" [Attention to the leader of the nation], YouTube, November 27, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M4sQIAgeYTc.

12 Interview on March 3, 2020.

13 "Халықаралық Гаага сотына шағымданайық Қытайдан қорлық көрген қазақтар!" [Kazakhs who have been insulted by China, let's petition to the International Court of Justice in the Hague!], YouTube, October 29, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=54lp08XmtUw&t=54s.

testifiers.[14] The diplomat hints at moving away from the crowd and camera several times, but one young woman holding a baby comes forward to speak with the diplomat on behalf of her four family members, prompting those in the crowd to start calling out "Please, please, listen to me." The rest of the video captures disagreement over who should be allowed to go into the embassy to speak with the diplomat. This strategy of appealing to U.S. authorities may have paid off in the end, as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met with Atajurt and five testifiers during his visit to Kazakhstan in early February 2020 (Radio Free Asia 2020), and as of June 17, 2020, the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act began an investigation on human rights abuses in Xinjiang.

In addition to petitioning powerful foreign governments, Atajurt also sees international media as playing an important role in assisting individual victims and achieving the broader goal of shutting down oppressive systems in Xinjiang. Atajurt has been profiled by international media; they then repost videos or share their own videos that capture the process of filming a documentary. Although Atajurt's work is not always cited directly (Kaşıkçı 2020), it has nonetheless played an important role in generating usable visual clips for media and human rights NGOs. One video shows Atajurt's media team film a team of German journalists who visited Atajurt's office in January 2019.[15] Atajurt has also uploaded other outlets' coverage directly to their channel.[16] These media clips in turn have pushed (mostly Western) governments to speak out against China's human rights violations in Xinjiang.

Finally, Atajurt's testimony videos emphasize the importance of "keeping receipts," or obtaining and preserving paper documentation that proves a testifier has gone through formal channels to communicate with state officials. Testifiers hold up photocopies of letters submitted to government bodies, documents proving identity and familial ties to those who are missing, and forms related to repatriation and gaining Kazakhstani citizenship. In some videos, the camera just zooms in to show the documents; in others, the video has been edited to include an overlay of scanned versions of the document. The February 2019 video "Terrible news from China" is a representative example

14 "Америка елшілігі" [American embassy], YouTube, September 25, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AtZXYTDXrM8&t=198s.

15 "Германиятілшілері Алматыда.(09.01.2019)"[Germanjournalistsin Almaty(09.01.2019)], YouTube, January 10, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzIqoTofyVY&t=93s.

16 "Eurasianet's short video documentary about a few of Atajurt testimonies. 'China pursues Muslims into," YouTube, February 26, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vt6xuhCCBI8.

of a video edited to overlay copies of the documents directly.[17] Documents include a copy of the testifier's Kazakhstani ID and a series of documents translated between Mandarin and Kazakh that show the testifier's attempts to locate four family members.

These four visual–discursive themes appear in different ways across the 3,272 petition videos in the dataset. In addition to tracing patterns in the *mise en scene* to identify *what* Atajurt is arguing through its YouTube channel, I also identified patterns in *how* the group does so. Next, I turn to describe three "scripts" for petitions before interpreting how Atajurt uses these scripts to mobilize collective action and advance rights claims toward the Kazakhstani government.

6 Scripts for Testimonies and Petitions

Videos posted to Atajurt's YouTube archive fall into three of what I call "visual scripts." First, and most common, 2,559 of the 3,272 petition videos were one-on-one, in-person interviews with Atajurt volunteers. In interview petitions, the volunteer conducting the interview usually does not introduce themselves (though after watching several hundred of these petitions, the viewer comes to recognize the Atajurt staff), and the testifier explains their citizenship status and their relation to the person on whose behalf they're testifying. The camera zooms in on the testifier's presentation of their own Kazakhstani passport or ID card. The testifier holds up photographs of their loved one. For example, one video shows Serikzhan Bilash sitting next to a young woman in front of a banner that reads "Kazakh Human Rights watch" and lists Atajurt's email address.[18] Both Bilash and the woman testifying sit with their hands folded on the table. A tented piece of paper lists the name, date of birth, and Chinese ID card number of the testifier's mother, who was detained in January 2018. The young woman tears up when Bilash switches into Kazakh after very briefly introducing her testimony in English. Throughout the video, Bilash and the young woman go through her mother's identity documents and stamped papers that evidence her attempts to locate her mother.

Of the petition videos, 260 of 2,372 were group testimonies. This type of video tended to begin with a press conference speech from Atajurt leadership;

17 "Қытайдан жеткен сұмдық хабар" [Terrible news from China], YouTube, February 8, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wJzyJnyg6o&list=PLoI2cyIeeuSpyypfVyXEPB35Q8jm4TCXB&index=1.

18 "Анасы Қытайда қамалған қыздың зары" [Tears of a girl whose mother was detained in China], YouTube, September 6, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yN0hCsBUVWE.

if the speech was a separate video, I did not code this as a petition. These conferences tended to be organized in whatever room the group was using as an office in Almaty at the time, though Atajurt made several trips to rural districts outside Almaty and Astana where communities of Kazakhs repatriated from China live. Some group testimony videos are edited as short clips, with each person in the room standing up to speak on behalf of their family members who remained China. What differentiates a group testimony from an interview petition is whether the group is visible in the room. As one person testifies, the viewer can see others in the room, waiting for their turn to speak, holding a poster with their missing loved one's photograph, with additional text flagging how long the person has been missing, their name, or a phone number to contact if anyone has information about the missing person's whereabouts. In a video uploaded in September 2018, a woman in a dark green dress and a light silk headscarf stands to deliver a statement.[19] In the frame, two women remain seated on her right, and a woman, a man, and a child sit on her left. A large photograph and name card stand in front of each person at the table. The woman in green speaks about her son; a minute into explaining his detention and treatment in Xinjiang, her voice cracks, but she does not cry as she continues to describe how she realized he had gone missing.

Of 3,272 videos, 442 were recordings of phone calls or self-recorded videos. About thirty videos of this type involve no visual component beyond a text description of the person making the call. In these testimonies, the volunteer – usually Atajurt founder Serikzhan Bilash – begins the call by confirming that the caller knows who they're talking to; they proceed to describe their petition and their missing family member. The selfie videos are recorded by petitioners and then sent to Atajurt by email or WhatsApp; they are filmed in a variety of contexts, from people's kitchen tables to popular spots in large cities. In an August 2018 video, a woman reads from a piece of paper to describe her father's detention in China; as she speaks, she adjusts so that one arm is holding the camera phone and the other holds a photograph of an older man in a skullcap.[20] In another video uploaded in September 2018, it is difficult to hear the woman's testimony over the wind blowing in Astana; she holds her own ID card and a photocopy of her husband's passport.[21] She is standing in the square

19 "Әбен Оралхан" [Aben Oralkhan], YouTube, September 12, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bnrj98TbFbY.

20 "Еш қылмысы жоқ Қарт әкемді Қытайлар не үшін қамап ұстап отыр" [Why are the Chinese detaining my old father who committed no crime?], YouTube, August 9, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zgTJ6fNOt0E.

21 "8 сентября 2018 г." 8 September 2018], YouTube, September 8, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L361LQJiajc.

in front of the presidential palace in Kazakhstan's capital and implores the Kazakh people to help find her husband, who has been missing for ten months. Neither of these videos went through additional editing from Atajurt, but some of the videos in this category were edited to include subtitles, translations, or overlaid images to document the speaker's citizenship status or a record of formal petitions they've filed. The vast majority of the selfie videos are recorded in Kazakh, including both of the examples mentioned above, but a small number have been dubbed to translate the testifier's petition into another language (usually English but also Turkish, Russian, Arabic, and German).

These three scripts – one-on-one interviews, group testimony, and recordings submitted to Atajurt – speak to Atajurt's strategic use of the internet and social media to mobilize collective action and make rights claims on the Kazakhstani government. Atajurt leverages its online presence to do more than just document a human rights tragedy that has been difficult to study systematically. Atajurt's YouTube activity also serves to advertise the group's services in assisting Kazakhstani citizens in submitting formal, printed petitions to the Kazakh government on behalf of detained family members in China. Additionally, Atajurt's online activities foster international prominence that shields its members from domestic repression. This illustrates how hypervisible online mobilization can facilitate atomized collective action offline.

7 "Keeping Receipts" and Sharing Them Online: How Atajurt Uses the Internet to Mobilize Collective Action

My analysis of more than 3,000 YouTube videos is direct evidence of Atajurt's online, informal engagement with higher authorities. The four visual–discursive themes and rhetorical patterns contained in the archive of petition videos – the use of photographs to assert the truthfulness of petitions and memorialize victims; an emphasis on Kazakhstani citizenship; a multi-scale approach to claim-making; and "keeping receipts" of documents that demonstrate attempts to advance rights claims to Kazakhstani authorities and international organizations – reflect Atajurt's strategic use of its online presence to do more than just document a human rights tragedy that has been difficult to study systematically.

The videos not only document human rights violations, but also advertise Atajurt's services to others who might be interested in submitting testimony and advocating for missing loved ones. Atajurt makes announcements *(jariyalau)* on its social media platforms to invite people to the office or to submit their own testimony videos. As one representative from Atajurt told me,

this approach is "good for people who are far away, for example, those in a village five hundred kilometers from Almaty."[22] Additional, more subtle visual elements across petition videos guide viewers to Atajurt's office for further assistance. The backdrop for videos is a massive poster stretching from floor to ceiling that advertises Atajurt's logo and contact information. Interview-style testimonies filmed in front of this backdrop offer a way for viewers to get in touch with the organization if they themselves have questions or want to file a petition.

Testifiers who come into the office are coached on how to write, address, and send a letter to various state and non-state authorities. In the registered Atajurt's office, a bulletin board features neatly formatted pages that list various ways to contact Kazakhstan's president, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the United Nations Development Programme.[23] The work of coaching citizens on how to petition their government is grounded in details; the Atajurt volunteers know which documents need to be photocopied, how to word the letter properly, and whom to mail it to. On the day I visit the registered Atajurt's office, three volunteers help a man file a petition on behalf of his children; as he fidgets with a stack of light blue passport cases, one volunteer types furiously on a desktop computer while another oversees addressing the envelope. After 20 minutes, the man in charge gets a stamp from a locked cabinet, pulling it out from a like-new box and stamping each individual paper very carefully. "[The stamp] is very strong," he tells me, referring to the authority embodied in the stamp, the indelible ink of the state that reflects this faction's success in registering with the government.

Additionally, Atajurt emphasizes "keeping receipts" by showing the range of documents and stamps needed to submit formal petitions to Kazakhstani authorities; this serves to coach viewers on how to complete the petition process themselves. In one January 2019 video, Serikzhan Bilash holds up a template of a letter to a group of testifiers and explains that someone making an appeal needs five facts: "Who are you? Who is the relative that's imprisoned in China? When did they disappear? Where did they disappear? What happened when they disappeared?" He then spends fifteen minutes walking an audience through the other questions on the form Atajurt created.[24]

22 Interview, March 3, 2020.

23 Field notes, March 3, 2020.

24 "Тың жаңалық! Арыздың тың үлгісін толтырыңдар" [Breaking news! Fill out a new application form], YouTube, January 12, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q1qQkaT34K4&t=48s.

I contend that the work of coaching citizens on how to write and submit letters, and then imbuing these letters with the authority of the organization's stamp, is an example of atomized collective action. Rather than gathering several hundred citizens in a central square, which might be read as a threat to authorities, Atajurt has worked within Kazakhstan's legal framework to apply aggregate pressure to the authorities to follow through on its promise to advocate for the Kazakh diaspora. This atomized petition style has a long history as a form of political communication in the post-Soviet context (Muravyeva 2014; Fitzpatrick 1997; Alexopolous 1997). Individuals do not need to submit petitions themselves for the form to be successful: historical petition practices suggest some institutionalized organization to facilitate subjects' communication with the state. Professional letter-writer and petition-writer guilds – for example, Egyptian guilds in the late Ottoman period (Chalcraft 2005) – gave "local people not only the opportunity to speak about their concerns but to establish dialogue with colonial powers" (Korieh 2010, 102). Those with sufficient knowledge of the formal process for submitting petitions and claims to government authorities play an important role in civil society; they can coach fellow citizens to claim their rights in an atomized way.

Atajurt's advocacy is particularly striking given the repressive context where the group works. Atajurt does not mobilize via demonstrations or protests, which are heavily policed in Kazakhstan, and the organization is very explicit about working within the law. In a video uploaded on March 13, 2019, Serikzhan Bilash tells a crowded audience:

> In order not to be called terrorists and to not be characterized as rebels or provocateurs, we work within the law. We do not violate Kazakhstan's law. We don't go on strike. We do not follow organizations that have bad intentions. What we do is write petitions on white paper. That's it…. The first rule: don't break the law.

Importantly, following the law in an authoritarian regime does not mean remaining silent or couching political claims in uncontentious terms. Indeed, Atajurt's insistent testimony of mass human rights atrocities in China runs counter to Chinese authorities' narrative of what is happening in Xinjiang and challenges Kazakhstani authorities' silence on the issue. Fu identifies this mechanism, in which civil society groups make space for contention under the radar, as "disguised collective action" (2017: 500).

The difference between the disguised collective action Fu describes in her ethnography of labor organizers in China and Atajurt's efforts, however, is the hypervisibility of Atajurt's mobilization. By June 2019, Atajurt's YouTube

videos had been viewed 27,911,451 times and received 763,818 likes. When Atajurt's founder was arrested for criticizing the Kazakh government's silence on mass imprisonment of its titular diaspora, Atajurt responded by launching a hashtag campaign on his behalf. More than a thousand videos were submitted from across Kazakhstan and beyond, with speakers intervening on Bilash's behalf; he was released in mid-March 2019, reflecting how the group's strategy of hypervisibility served as a protective measure. This example challenges the strong assumption, in the study of civil society efforts in authoritarian regimes, that much of the dissent in autocratic contexts takes place off the stage of high politics (Scott 2008). Atajurt's YouTube archive is an example of civil society actors using the internet to mobilize rights claims both online and offline. They do so openly, adopting a strategy of hypervisibility to accomplish their goals; their efforts demand scholarly consideration of other forms of visible contention in autocratic contexts.

8 Conclusion

In March 2019, Kazakhstan's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Beibut Atamkulov, acknowledged the receipt of "more than 1,000 petitions (*zayavlenie,* one Russian equivalent of *aryz*) on behalf of Kazakhstani citizens who are in correctional institutions in China" (Mukanov 2019). This came just months after a January 2019 announcement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that China had agreed to allow 2,000 ethnic Kazakhs to renounce their Chinese citizenship and leave Xinjiang (Uteuova 2019). Although Atamkulov does not mention Atajurt by name, his reference to applications submitted by relatives suggests that Atajurt's relentless, multi-scaled advocacy on behalf of ethnic Kazakhs in Xinjiang has had some tangible impact for the diaspora. Indeed, a small genre of videos features recently reunited families gathering in Atajurt's office to thank the group for their support. In one clip, Serikzhan Bilash clutches a microphone in both hands while announcing to an audience that a young woman had been released from prison.[25] The woman's mother tears up as she addresses the crowd, but the look on her eyes reflects relief and joy – a look entirely different from those of testifiers who cry while imploring authorities to find their loved ones.

In this paper, I have presented a case study of Atajurt Eriktileri's advocacy efforts to raise awareness about mass detention of Muslims in Xinjiang and to

25 "Қуанышты хабар 21.01. 2019 г." [Good news 21.01.2019], YouTube, January 21, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mD4VO18oZAU.

demand that the Kazakhstani government intervene on behalf of co-ethnics. Atajurt uses photographs and claims to citizenship to advance rights claims; the group mobilizes Kazakhstani citizens to make multi-scale appeals not only to their government officials, but also to leaders of global powers and international organizations. They present evidence of having submitted formal appeals and petitions to multiple governing bodies, both as a way of holding the Kazakhstani state to its word and as a way to coach viewers whose family members have been detained in China on how to submit their own petitions. This work of coaching constitutes a form of atomized collective action. Importantly, this coaching is hypervisible, being conducted in an open manner on social media; this hypervisibility runs contrary to dominant assumptions about the hidden nature of contention in repressive contexts. I have shown the affective and strategic features of Atajurt's petitions to higher authorities across scales and borders, including the use of photographs as to challenge state narratives about detention camps in Xinjiang and an emphasis on testifiers' citizenship status to justify making claims toward the state.

These findings speak to scholarship on contentious politics not only in Kazakhstan, but also in non-democracies across the world. Indeed, given the increase in democratic backsliding and the entrenchment of autocratic regimes worldwide, further research must explore patterns in the discourse and forms used to advance rights claims and challenge the state. Scholarship that analyzes the conditions under which citizens prioritize or ignore the internet is more important than ever, as so much collective action has been pushed online during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Bibliography

Agarwal, Kritika. "Doing Right Online: Archivists Shape an Ethics for the Digital Age." Perspectives on History, November 1, 2016. https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/november-2016/doing-right-online-archivists-shape-an-ethics-for-the-digital-age (accessed December 3 2021).

Alexopoulos, Golfo. "The Ritual Lament: A Narrative of Appeal in the 1920s and 1930s." *Russian History*. 24, No. 1–2 (1997): 117–129.

Anceschi, Luca. "The Persistence of Media Control under Consolidated Authoritarianism: Containing Kazakhstan's Digital Media." *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*. 23, No. 3 (2015): 277–295.

Baudry, Jean-Louis, Philip Rosen, and Alan Williams, eds. *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1986.

BBC. "China Uighurs: Detainees 'Free' after 'Graduating', Official Says." December 9, 2019. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-50712126 (accessed December 3 2021).

Beissinger, Mark R. "'Conventional' and 'Virtual' Civil Societies in Autocratic Regimes." *Comparative Politics*. 49, No. 3 (2017): 351–371.

Bonilla, Yarimar, and Jonathan Rosa. "#Ferguson: Digital Protest, Hashtag Ethnography, and the Racial Politics of Social Media in the United States." *American Ethnologist*. 42, No. 1 (2015): 4–17.

Bunin, Gene. "Detainees Are Trickling Out of Xinjiang's Camps." *Foreign Policy*, January 18, 2019. https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/01/18/detainees-are-trickling-out-of-xinjiangs-camps/ (accessed December 3 2021).

Carr, Caleb T., and Rebecca A. Hayes. "Social Media: Defining, Developing, and Divining." *Atlantic Journal of Communication*. 23, No. 1 (2015): 46–65.

Casas, Andreu, and Nora Webb Williams. "Images that Matter: Online Protests and the Mobilizing Role of Pictures." *Political Research Quarterly*. 72, No. 2 (2019): 360–375.

Chalcraft, John. "Engaging the State: Peasants and Petitions in Egypt on the Eve of Colonial Rule." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. 37, No. 3 (2005): 303–325.

Chapman, Hannah S. *Shoring Up Autocracy: Participatory Technologies and Regime Support in Putin's Russia*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. 2018.

Cronin-Furman, Kate, and Roxani Krystalli. "The Things They Carry: Victims' Documentation of Forced Disappearance in Colombia and Sri Lanka." *European Journal of International Relations*. 27, No. 1 (2020): 79–101.

CurrentTime. "V Nur-Sultane zaderzhali dvukh chelovek za piket pered posol'stvom Kitaya. Oni trebovali otpustit' ikh rodnykh" [Two people detained in Nur-Sultan for picketing in front of the Chinese embassy. They demanded the release of their relatives]. June 26, 2020. https://www.currenttime.tv/a/kazakhsnat-nur-sultan-arrest-china/30691940.html (accessed December 3 2021).

Dave, Bhavna. "Entitlement through Numbers: Nationality and Language Categories in the First Post-Soviet Census of Kazakhstan." *Nations and Nationalism*. 10, No. 4 (2004): 439–459.

Dukeyev, Berikbol. "Ethnic Return Migration in Kazakhstan: Shifting State Dynamics, Changing Media Discourses." *Migration* 52 (2014): 178–197.

Earl, Jennifer, and Katrina Kimport. *Digitally Enabled Social Change: Activism in the Internet Age*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011.

Erens, Patricia. "Women's Documentary Filmmaking: The Personal is Political" in *New Challenges for Documentary*, ed. Alan Rosenthal. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988.

"Families of Kazakhs in Xinjiang's Camps Say Pompeo Promised to Help." *Radio Free Asia*, February 4, 2020. https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/pompeo-020420 20100611.html (accessed December 3 2021).

Feng, Emily. "An Advocate for Kazakhs Persecuted in China is Banned from Activism in Kazakhstan." *NPR*, October 26, 2019. https://www.npr.org/2019/10/26/771989624/ an-advocate-for-kazakhs-persecuted-in-china-is-banned-from-activism-in -kazakhsta?t=1576656348114 (accessed December 3 2021).

Fitzpatrick, Sheila. "Editor's Introduction: Petitions and Denunciations in Russian and Soviet History." *Russian History*. 24, No. 1–2 (1997): 1–9.

Fu, Diana. "Fragmented Control: Governing Contentious Labor Organizations in China." *Governance*. 30, No. 3 (2017): 445–462.

Gunitsky, Seva. "Corrupting the Cyber-Commons: Social Media as a Tool of Autocratic Stability." *Perspectives on Politics*. 13, No. 1 (2015): 42–54.

Hahn, Allison Hailey. "Live from the Pastures: Maasai YouTube Protest Videos." *Media, Culture & Society*. 38, No. 8 (2016): 1236–1246.

Joo, Hyung-min. "Hidden Transcripts in Marketplaces: Politicized Discourses in the North Korean Shadow Economy." *The Pacific Review*. 27, No. 1 (2014): 49–71.

Kaşıkçı, Mehmet Volkan. "Documenting the Tragedy in Xinjiang: An Insider's View of Atajurt." *The Diplomat*, January 16, 2020. https://thediplomat.com/2020/01/docu menting-the-tragedy-in-xinjiang-an-insiders-view-of-atajurt/ (accessed December 3 2021).

Keck, Margaret E., and Kathryn Sikkink. *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014.

Korieh, Chima J. "'May it Please Your Honor': Letters of Petition as Historical Evidence in an African Colonial Context." *History in Africa*. 37 (2010): 83–106.

Kosnazarov, Daniyar. "#Hashtag Activism: Youth, Social Media, and Politics." In *The Nazarbayev Generation: Youth in Kazakhstan*, edited by Aziz Burkhanov, Ulan Bigozhin, Douglas Blum, Reuel R. Hanks, Sabina Insebayeva, Rico Isaacs, and Azamat K. Junisbai. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019.

Lerner, Alexis M. "The Co-optation of Dissent in Hybrid States: Post-Soviet Graffiti in Moscow." *Comparative Political Studies*. 54, No. 10 (2021): 1757–1785.

Levitsky, Steven and Way, Lucan. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Lewis, David. "Civil Society and the Authoritarian State: Cooperation, Contestation and Discourse." *Journal of Civil Society*. 9, No. 3 (2013): 325–340.

Lewis, David. "Blogging Zhanaozen: Hegemonic Discourse and Authoritarian Resilience in Kazakhstan." *Central Asian Survey*. 35, No. 3 (2016): 421–438.

Maerz, Seraphine F. "The Electronic Face of Authoritarianism: E-Government as a Tool for Gaining Legitimacy in Competitive and Non-Competitive Regimes." *Government Information Quarterly*. 33, No. 4 (2016): 727–735.

Martinez, Monica Muñoz. *The Injustice Never Leaves You: Anti-Mexican Violence in Texas*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018.

Moreno-Almeida, Cristina. "Memes as Snapshots of Participation: The Role of Digital Amateur Activists in Authoritarian Regimes." *New Media & Society*. 23, No. 6 (2021): 1545–1566.

Morozov, Evgeny. *The Net Delusion: How Not to Liberate the World*. Columbia University Press, 2011.

Moustafa, Tamir. *The Struggle for Constitutional Power: Law, Politics, and Economic Development in Egypt*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Mukanov, Baurzhan. "Beibut Atamkulov: Chislo kazakhov v kitaiskix lageryakh sokratilos' na 80%" [Beibut Atamkulov: The Number of Kazakhs in Chinese Camps has decreased by 80%]. *InformBuro*, March 4, 2019. https://informburo.kz/novosti/beybut-atamkulov-chislo-kazahov-v-kitayskih-lageryah-sokratilos-na-80.htm (accessed December 3 2021).

Muravyeva, Marianna. "The Culture of Complaint: Approaches to Complaining in Russia – An Overview." *Laboratorium: Журнал социальных исследований*. 6, No. 3 (2014): 93–104.

Nichols, Bill. "Documentary Modes of Representation." *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. (1991): 32–75.

O'Keeffe, Moira. "Evidence and Absence: Documenting the Desaparecidos of Argentina." *Communication, Culture & Critique*. 2, No. 4 (2009): 520–537.

Pachirat, Timothy. *Every Twelve Seconds: Industrialized Slaughter and the Politics of Sight*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

Pannier, Bruce. "Analysis: Official Trickery? Pro-Government Atajurt Gets Registered in Kazakhstan." Radio Free Europe, October 12, 2019. https://www.rferl.org/a/qishloq-ovozi-kazakhstan-atajurtregistered-pro-government/30213406.html (accessed December 3 2021).

Pietrobruno, Sheenagh. "YouTube and the Social Archiving of Intangible Heritage." *New Media & Society*. 15, No. 8 (2013): 1259–1276.

Radio Free Europe. "Nearly 1 Million Kazakhs Have Resettled In Kazakhstan Since 1991." January 16, 2015. https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-ethnic-kazakhs-oralman-return-uzbekistan-turkmenistan-china/26796879.html (accessed December 3 2021).

Radio Free Europe. "Xinjiang Activist Detained in Kazakhstan, Accused of Sowing Discord." March 10, 2019. https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-xinjiang-activist-detained-accused-of-sowing-discord-/29813145.html (accessed December 3 2021).

Roberts, Sean R. "The Biopolitics of China's 'War on Terror' and the Exclusion of the Uyghurs." *Critical Asian Studies*. 50, No. 2 (2018): 232–258.

Sanovich, Sergey, Denis Stukal, and Joshua A. Tucker. "Turning the Virtual Tables: Government Strategies for Addressing Online Opposition with an Application to Russia." *Comparative Politics*. 50, No. 3 (2018): 435–482.

Schatz, Edward. "The Soft Authoritarian Tool Kit: Agenda-Setting Power in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan." *Comparative Politics*. 41, No. 2 (2009): 203–222.

Scott, James C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008.

Scott, James C. *Weapons of the Weak*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985.

Subotić, Jelena. "Ethics of Archival Research on Political Violence." *Journal of Peace Research*. 58, No. 3 (2021): 342–354.

Synovitz, Ron, Mamashuly Asylkhan, and Lakhanuly Nurtai. "Official's Testimony Sheds New Light on Chinese 'Reeducation Camps' for Muslims." Radio Free Europe, July 29, 2018. https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-officials-testimony-chinese-reeducation-camps-muslims/29396709.html (accessed December 3 2021).

Tilly, Charles. *Contentious Performances*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2008.

UNDP. "Kazakhstan." United Nations Human Development Reports, 2018. http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/KAZ (accessed December 3 2021).

Uteuova, Aliya. "Kazakhstan Offers More Clues on the Plight of Kazakhs in China." *Eurasianet*, March 5, 2019. https://eurasianet.org/kazakhstan-offers-more-clues-on-plight-of-kazakhs-in-china (accessed December 3 2021).

Wedeen, Lisa. *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015.

Wilson, Andrew. *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

Wood, Colleen. "In Central Asia, Politics by Way of Social Media." *The Diplomat*, February 22, 2019. https://thediplomat.com/2019/02/in-central-asia-politics-by-way-of-social-media/ (accessed December 3 2021).

Xinhua. "Xinjiang Achieves 'Worthwhile' Results in Fight Against Terrorism, Extremism." August 16, 2019. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-08/16/c_138314363.htm (accessed December 3 2021).

Zenz, Adrian. "'Thoroughly Reforming Them Towards a Healthy Heart Attitude': China's Political Re-Education Campaign in Xinjiang." *Central Asian Survey*. 38, No. 1 (2019): 102–128.