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Media Framing: Transformation of Nursultan Nazarbayev's Image in the U.S. Media

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Abstract

The thesis deals with U.S. media coverage of Kazakhstan's first president Nursultan Nazarbayev between 2011 and 2022. Using Bourdieu's theory of journalistic field and Entman's concept of media framing, the content analysis of five different media outlets shows that while commercial newspapers (NYT, WP, WSJ) were more critical than non-profit online media outlets (Eurasianet, RFE/RL) regarding Nazarbayev and his regime during events that challenged his power; their overall coverage of the country, its leader and his legacy has been restrained or even credited Nazarbayev for various achievements. Differences in the degree of critical stance were also identified between the two non-profit media. Providing an overview of Kazakh government-funded lobbying information campaigns abroad, the thesis confirms the importance of research into the use of international media platforms by authoritarian regimes aiming at creating a favorable image abroad.

Keywords: Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan, media framing, lobbyism, U.S. media, RFE/RL, Eurasianet, NYT, WSJ, WP

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Abstrakt

Práce se zabývá mediálním pokrytím prvního prezidenta Kazachstánu Nursultana Nazarbajeva v USA v letech 2011 až 2022. Pomocí Bourdieuova konceptu novinářského pole a Entmanova konceptu mediálního rámování ukazuje obsahová analýza pěti různých mediálních médií, že zatímco komerční média (NYT, WP a WSJ) byla kritičtější než nezisková média (Eurasianet, RFE/RL) ohledně Nazarbajeva a jeho režimu během událostí, které zpochybnily jeho moc; jejich pokrytí Kazachstanu, Nazarbajeva a jeho režimu bylo neutrální nebo mu dokonce připisovali různé úspěchy. Rozdíly v míře kritického postoje byly také identifikovány mezi oběma neziskovými médii. Práce poskytuje přehled o kazašských vládou financovaných lobbistických informačních kampaních v zahraničí a potvrzuje důležitost výzkumu využívání mezinárodních mediálních platforem autoritářskými režimy s cílem vytvořit příznivý obraz v zahraničí.

Klíčová slova

Nursultan Nazarbajev, Kazachstán, mediální rámování, lobbing, americká média, RFE/RL, Eurasianet, NYT, WSJ, WP

List of Abbreviations

OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
NYT	The New York Times
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
WP	The Washington Post
WSJ	The Wall Street Journal
USAGM	The United States Agency for Global Media
USSR	The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Declaration of Authorship

1. The author hereby declares that he compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.

2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.

3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Prague, 28 July 2023 Assem Tokayeva

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Master thesis proposal

Expected title of the thesis: Media Framing: Transformation of Nursultan Nazarbayev's Image in the US Media

Topic of work

The first President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev, a longtime ruler from 1989 until 2019, has been portrayed by the Kazakh media as a *Leader of the Nation.* This uncritical discourse contributed to the narrative about a stable and economically prosperous nation in the post-Soviet region while omitting important context, such as that during his tenure all his opponents were killed, jailed, or fled the country. This favorable coverage was possible due to the enforced absence of political pluralism and repression of independent and oppositional media in the country.

Internationally, Kazakhstan has been eager to invest vast resources and money in campaigns to improve and boost its image abroad, including the image of its leader. The government-sponsored campaigns used the leading media in the USA, such as CNN, the New York Times, the Washington Post, etc. Such information campaigns abroad hardly mention the political situation in Kazakhstan, including the deterioration of human rights standards and restriction of freedom of speech.

Most of the existing research both in Kazakhstan and in the United States explains these efforts by the government's desire to attract tourists and investors. However, they usually don't discuss political ties between Nazarbayev and opinion makers in the United States. For example, a few times some US Congressmen supported Nazarbayev's nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize.

This study aims at examining the relationship between media framing and the way both private and state-funded media in the United States portray the first Kazakh president, Nursultan Nazarbayev. Two media are selected: New York Times (NYT) and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). The NYT is chosen because it is one of the most circulated newspapers in the United States. RFE/RL is the U.S.-Congress funded; it is read and watched in Kazakhstan as it has the Kazakh service in which news production is translated and then re-published in English at the website of the whole Radio corporation.

This study will consider the role of framing by the media. Media framing is a powerful tool for influencing the audience, its understanding of events, peoples, nations, etc. The general perception further contributes to decision-making processes. Any research on this topic has the prospect of revealing important aspects in the study of the manipulation of public opinion.

Assumed research methods

To explore the relationship between media framing and its effects on the portrayal of Nursultan Nazarbayev in the media, a comparative content analysis will be performed on articles about the key events related to Nazarbayev. This period includes the 2011 Zhanaozen events; the resignation of the Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev, which was widely seen as a formal power transition; and the 2022 Bloody January that started as a peaceful protest over fuel price rises, driven by inequality and social injustice, then turned into violence and led to the end of Nazarbayev's era.

The same number of articles from both media will be chosen to be cross-compared and examined. Comparative content analysis will be based on a quantitative method: the first stage of the study has the plan to find out what kind of frames are used in NYT and RFE/RL to report on Nazarbayev to their readers; the second stage will be focused on counting how many times these frames show up. Considering framing theories, the content analysis is chosen to find patterns, based on which news media coverage and use of framing can be evaluated.

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Contents

1. Introduction

The first president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, a longtime ruler from 1989 until 2019, has been preoccupied with his image both domestically and internationally. The book "*Spin Dictators: The Changing Face of Tyranny in the 21st Century*" (Treisman and Guriev, 2022, p.19) listed Nazarbayev among Russian president Vladimir Putin, Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orban and Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan who combined repression of alternative ideas and individuals with distortion information and simulating democratic procedures. For a long time, he has enjoyed favorable coverage in all national media. Until recently, he was portrayed as a *Leader of the nation*, with no challenges and criticism. This uncritical narrative contributed to the perception of a stable and prosperous nation with a peaceful society in the post-Soviet region. However, this portrayal omitted crucial context, such as the fact that during his tenure, many of his opponents were killed, imprisoned, or forced to leave the country. Furthermore, there were significant issues with democratic records, corruption, and the promotion of a cult of personality. This favorable coverage was possible due to the absence of political pluralism, repression of critics, and oppositional media in the country.

Internationally, Kazakhstan has been eager to invest significant resources and money in campaigns aimed at improving its image abroad, including the image of its leader. The government utilized authorized press publications, TV reports, movies, media forums, conferences, and expensive events to promote the country's potential and present a more favorable image while concealing problems and adverse developments (Druker, 2004; Marat, 2009). These international information campaigns rarely mentioned the reality of the political situation in Kazakhstan, including the deteriorating human rights situation and restriction of freedom of speech. In short promoting infomercials on foreign TV channels like CNN in 2006-2007, Kazakhstan portrayed itself as a country "committed to freedom and democracy" and as a "Central Asian leader and reliable strategic partner of the United States" (Marat, 2009). Praiseworthy articles in the Western press were then republished or quoted in local media as evidence of international recognition for the country's ruler and his achievements.

This issue arises amidst public concerns that authoritarian elites from post-Soviet regions employ various tactics to create a smokescreen for the international community, while their societies suffer from corruption and rights restrictions (Michel & Schmitt, 2022). For instance, the strategy employed by another oil-rich post-Soviet state, Azerbaijan, to influence foreign leaders and institutions, which involves expensive invitations and gifts, has been labeled as 'caviar diplomacy' (European Stability Initiative, 2021). Similar actions were observed in Kazakhstan's regime strategy, especially during presidential elections when international observers were invited (Nielsen, 2021). Discussions among media research organizations and watchdog groups also emerge regarding double standards and bias towards different countries and leaders, and these discussions extend to Nursultan Nazarbayev, the first president of Kazakhstan. While criticisms aimed at prominent newspapers such as The New York Times and The Washington Post for publishing favorable articles and positive portrayals of Nazarbayev may not be common, they must be studied. According to these claims, the excessive loyalty displayed by these U.S. newspapers can be attributed to the political and economic interests that the United States and its elites have in Kazakhstan (MacLeod, 2019). Additionally, concerns have been raised within the U.S. media about RFE/RL's alleged dissemination of Central Asian regimes' propaganda (BBG-USAGM Watch, 2013; 2016; Leonard, 2019; Khashimova, 2019; Donati, 2019). It is important to acknowledge that positions on this matter may vary. RFE/RL, where the researcher worked for over 13 years, from 2004 to 2017, as part of the Kazakh Service, takes pride in its mission to promote democratic values and its commitment to providing uncensored news. However, concerns do exist, and one of them is that positive reports and statements overshadow international criticism, soften language, substitute certain terms, and disregard problems (Marat, 2009). All of these factors contributed to the process of legitimizing autocrats and, in the case of Nazarbayev, maintained a cult of personality. The impact of these actions is not limited to the societies whose leaders manipulate their power to whitewash their image abroad (Halvorssen, 2012). Human rights organizations have already signaled concerns about the global decline in democracy and the erosion of oversight of power abuses and human rights violations (Freedom House, 2022).

This thesis aims to examine the relationship between media framing and its effects on the portrayal of Nursultan Nazarbayev through a content analysis of three leading U.S. newspapers, The New Your Times, The Washington Post, and The Wall Street Journal,

that are read globally; and two online media outlets, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Eurasianet, that, besides English-speaking readers, reach Kazakh and Russian speaking audiences. The study will look into news stories published between 2011 and 2022. This period includes the Zhanaozen Massacre, when Kazakh police opened fire on unarmed strikers in December 2011 (Orishbayev, 2021); the resignation of the Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev, which was widely seen as a formal power transition (Rittmann, 2019); and the Bloody January in 2022 that started as a peaceful protest over fuel price rises, driven by inequality and social injustice, then turned into violence and led to the end of Nazarbayev's era (Kassenova, 2022), and ultimately led to him being deprived of certain privileges and benefits in 2023.

One of the objectives of the study is to identify the transformation in the approaches to shape the image of Nursultan Nazarbayev with the development of these events; how he was represented; whether the media provide independent analysis of socio-political situations in the country, does it mention negative developments like silencing the critics of the regime, falsified elections, controls over the national resources by the ruling family members and cronies; what wordings and what sources of information prevail. Another important aspect is to review and compare two types of media - commercial and non-profit - to determine what role the form of ownership and funding play in coverage; and how these factors influence the narrative.

Chapter 2. Literature review

2.1. Persuasive Power of Authoritarian Regime

For more than 30 years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the authoritarian style of power in Kazakhstan has not changed. The country is still classified as a non-free nation in transit with a consolidated authoritarian regime (Freedom House, 2023). The ongoing transition period gets complicated by unpopular decisions of the authorities in many areas, including the media. Most international human rights organizations rank Kazakhstan as a country with unfree media (Reporters Without Borders, 2022). TV and Radio companies remain under state control (Nussipov, 2013; Gross, 2019). Members of the ruling elite have squeezed out those disloyal to the first Kazakh president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, from the local media market. Those media who dared to challenge him ceased to operate

under pressure or were shut down by courts under various pretexts. Persecutions of independent and opposition media were mainly motivated by the fear that their owners would seek power (Junisbai, 2011).

Based on the classification of post-communist nations by the World Bank in 2002, Karol Jakubowicz, who was one of Europe's leading advocates of public service media, concluded that the political systems in the regions largely affected not only their economic development but also the choice of their media system type. Kazakhstan was listed then among the 'non-competitive political regimes' (Jakubowicz, 2004). There is an adherence to the communist command system of economy in the countries of this category. They denied the citizens their fundamental rights and bar opposition from participating in elections. According to Jakubowicz, those that have been subject to the Russian Empire started nation-building and industrialization late and practically had no solid democratic background. Therefore, the major fundamental processes, including the development of civil society, have been slowed down or nonexistent except on paper. The non-competitive regimes in Central Asia have 'dominant atavistic' tendencies that echoed the communist past (Jakubowicz, 2004). The result that applies to most of the region's countries was defined by Jakubowicz as "a capture of the media by the state and by oligarchs."

Barbara Junisbai (2011), a researcher of ownership forms in the media market in Kazakhstan, also focuses on the authoritarian nature of its political system and the absence of the civil liberties of its population when she illustrates the economic control over media by the state and oligarchs. The introduction of the public broadcasting service has not even been considered. For the authoritarian regime, it is essential to hold control over the media (Gross, 2019; Tutumlu & Rustemov, 2021), without which it cannot legitimize its political dominance, cannot create an image of competence, and form a social consensus in its favor, cannot distort election results, and cannot prevent or disperse street protests. In the international arena, modern autocrats, unlike totalitarian rulers, actively attempt to get their messages across to convince global leaders that they are full-fledged partners (Schatz, 2009). These persuasion and anticipation efforts are part of the survival strategy of a soft authoritarian regime, which some observers have seen in the nature of the regime in Kazakhstan (Schatz, 2008; 2009; Schatz & Maltseva, 2012).

Under soft authoritarianism, the elites are able to frame a debate on many platforms, setting the political agenda and navigating critical discourse, and, according to some international empirical studies, the Kazakh leadership succeeded in the usage of agenda-setting technologies to sell abroad the story of its achievements (Schatz, 2008; 2009; Schatz & Maltseva, 2012). Considering persuasion as a broad concept, Schatz and Maltseva (2012) established that one of the main frames the regime in Kazakhstan deployed was the one that emphasized economic growth. The shaping of this message, among many other factors, could lead to a shift in the views of individuals and their evaluation of the regime in a positive direction. The government indeed heavily exploited the notion "the economy first, politics later" constraining any requests in the society for liberalizations (Isaacs, 2010; Tutumlu & Rustemov, 2021). During a content analysis of the daily evening news blocks of the leading TV channels in Kazakhstan and a focus group survey within research in 2007 that confirmed the existence of framing effects on Kazakhstani channels, most of the respondents defined news of the Khabar channel, one of the largest networks in the country, more like a "PR presentation of the government" (Kazhamkulova, 2007).

Nazarbayev is evaluated as a modern autocrat whose concerns about his image and reputation abroad determined his persuasive strategy. Edward Schatz, a political scientist, explained (2009) the success of Nazarbayev's agenda-setting power through his personal traits and political leadership skills; strong financial and administrative resources; sequences that conceptualize authoritarian rule in a dynamic manner; ability to manage supporters and opposition, and constant control over the media. In 2019, Nazarbayev resigned after 30 years of unchallenged power. However, he was always determined to retain the right to control decisions after retirement (Freedom House, 2022). In 2010 he was granted certain lifetime powers, such as the right to be elected an unlimited number of times, legal immunity, inviolability of his and his family's property, as well as receiving the title of *Leader of the Nation* (Issacs, 2010; Fix, 2012; Stronski, 2019; Tutumlu & Rustemov, 2021). In 2023 some of his status and benefits were taken away. Still, the most important ones, such as a guarantee of immunity, were preserved, as the current president of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev (aka Qasym-Jomart Toqaev), was a protege of Nazarbayev and also actively participated in the former system (Stronski, 2019).

Nazarbayev yearned for recognition globally and sought to remain in history as an outstanding figure who led Kazakhstan to great economic achievements. In 2007, the Kazakh Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Committee of international information was formed with the main assignment, according to its statute published on the government website, to promote the image of the state abroad as a country with a dynamically developing economy, a favorable investment and business climate, a stable political and social system, a country that promotes significant international initiatives, contributes in ensuring global and regional security (Gov.kz, n.d.). Based on its website, it is difficult to get a full picture of its activities, but sometimes the committee reports on holding image events in foreign countries and maintaining the state image in the international press. Just a few online outlets in Kazakhstan attempted to raise a question of the efficiency of such efforts, asking how the state resources and money have been used. According to some of them (Omirbek, 2022), the expenses of this committee exceeded more than $15 million in 2016. The government spared no costs to win the chairmanship of the OSCE in 2010 and the Organization of the Islamic Conference in 2011; to host expensive events like the Winter Asian Games – Aziada-2011, the EXPO-2017, the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, the Eurasian media-forum, where Nazarbayev welcomed famous guests and influential opinion makers from all over the world (Marat, 2009). These events provide a reason not only for direct advertising but also for extensive coverage in media that might divert attention away from some issues that an authoritarian leader from time to time has to face.

Most of the reviewed studies on this matter in Kazakhstan are inclined to explain these efforts by the government's desire to attract tourists and investors (Gazizov, 2017). However, they don’t usually discuss that the Kazakh government often hired lobbyists and consultants to improve its reputation among officials and the media in the USA and Europe. According to an account carried out by The Bureau of Investigative Journalism in 2011, London-based BGR Gabara, the sister company of the Washington-based lobbying firm BGR Government Affairs, orchestrated a smear campaign against the famous British musician Sting, who canceled a concert in the Kazakh capital after human rights violations against striking oil workers in the western Kazakh town of Zhanaozen. Also, there are accounts that this company helped Nazarbayev to get access to U.S.

president Barack Obama during the 2010 Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, D.C (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 2011). Moreover, information campaigns were also conducted to discredit the leadership of Kazakhstan. In particular, Rakhat Aliyev, the former son-in-law of Nazarbayev, after falling out of favor with the Kazakh president in 2007 and openly criticizing him, hired the lobbying firm RJI Government Strategies (Popov, 2016), which approached nearly three dozen of U.S. Congressmen with proposals for cooperation. As a result, several statements criticizing Kazakh authorities, including president Nazarbayev, were initiated by members of the U.S. Congress. However, as reported by the New York Times in 2011, Nazarbayev could maintain his positions and further uphold his reputation in Washington D.C. after the Kazakh government hired new lobbying firms in 2008. One of the team's members, the former U.S. ambassador to Kazakhstan, Elisabeth Johnes, publicly stated that year that Nazarbayev was not going to be a president for life (Lipton, 2011). Also, the Kazakh government-sponsored research were conducted by institutes affiliated with Johns Hopkins University and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, which produced favorable reports on the country (Renaud, 2010; Lipton, 2011).

A massive high-profile lobbying campaign was run to convince the global decision-makers that the country meets the requirements to chair the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. In 2010, Kazakhstan headed the OSCE for one year, promising to carry out democratic reforms in the country. Human rights organizations have expressed concern that a one-man-ruled country with a one-party parliament was violating the standards the OSCE should bring to its regions of influence (Human Rights Watch, 2009). These warnings were confirmed as the Kazakh leadership used the chairmanship of the OSCE to consolidate their power rather than enact reforms (Schmitz & Somfalvy, 2011). The next year a seven-month oil workers' strike in Zhanaozen ended with a bloody crackdown on the demonstration (Open Democracy, 2020). When the then president of Kazakhstan was accused of human rights abuses, including the order to shoot to kill the Zhanaozen protesters in December 2011, a consultancy firm of former UK prime minister Tony Blair (Human Rights Watch, 2012; Fix, 2012; Michel, 2016) was hired by the Kazakh government to effectively repel attacks in connection with the 2011's Zhanaozen events from Western media and human rights organizations. The British media obtained a letter written by Tony Blair to Nazarbayev, where he was advised on

how to answer questions from Western media journalists in connection with the tragic events. In particular, Nazarbayev was recommended to focus on the positive developments that followed, as well as Kazakhstan's role in helping to withdraw NATO troops from Afghanistan and the decision to abandon nuclear weapons as a relic of the Soviet era. Since then, these moments have been highlighted and prominently presented in positive reports and statements at the international level. Especially the disposal of the remnants of nuclear weapons in Kazakhstan was attributed to the merits of Nazarbayev. In different countries, various politicians voiced initiatives to nominate president Nazarbayev for the Nobel Peace Prize for contributions to nuclear security. Members of the U.S. Congress have made such statements several times (Kucera, 2008). When the former president of the United States, Bill Clinton, endorsed Nazarbayev during his visit to Kazakhstan in 2005, the New York Times called it ‘a propaganda coup’ because it undermined the U.S. foreign policy that was critical of repressions in Kazakhstan (Becker & McIntire, 2015).

2.2. Propaganda Media Effects

In the United States, there is no state censorship, and officials do not have the right to interfere with the work of the media. However, according to critical literature (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; McChesney, 1999; Bagdikian, 2004), the media is argued to represent the interests of certain political groups and business elites. The political and economic positioning of major news media creates a situation where news reports tend to align with dominant perspectives and manipulate public opinion. Specifically, the political economy discipline highlights the government's ability to influence the media and the tendency of journalists to self-censor and convey messages to the public through the lens of political and social elites. This concept is known as the propaganda model, which is part of the book “*Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*” by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, published initially in 1988. Their ‘propaganda model’ examines the inherent biases present in the American media. The book remains one of the most significant scholarly works describing the interaction between society, government, business, and the media.

The propaganda model consists of five filters that shape news content: ownership; advertising as the primary source of media income; reliance on government information,

the influence of business and experts; the disciplinary effect of ‘flak;’ and anti-communism or ‘fear ideology.’ Information passing through these filters is selectively presented to conform to their requirements (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. 2). This is not state censorship but rather elite censorship, as big business remains the driving force behind the American society described by ‘the propaganda model’ (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. 1). The media is dependent on the elite and their sources of information. According to Herman and Chomsky, propaganda effects take place when they coincide with the interests of those who control the filters. As an example, the defeat of the Solidarity trade unions movement by the Polish communist government is given, which was recognized as newsworthy and deserving of condemnation. At the same time, the defeat of the trade unions by the Turkish military government was ignored. Since then, ownership has become even more concentrated and more globalized; advertising has become an even more important component. Now there is competition not only between traditional media but also between them and the Internet. Anti-communism is gone as an ideological factor, although an ideological enemy can still be framed to warn the population about the danger of a hostile regime. In addition, the ‘war on terror’ (Entman, 2004, p. 121) has replaced the threats represented by the Soviet Union. Limited resources may also restrict journalists' ability to cover certain stories or conduct comprehensive research, leading to gaps in news coverage and a narrowed scope of information.

‘Flak’ can be expressed as the negative comments, letters, phone calls, threats, or lawsuits that a journalist or media outlet receives after disclosing sensitive topics to the public. ‘Flak’ can be carried out both by people who are dissatisfied with the topic discussed and by organized groups: state organizations and communities. With the advent of the Internet, ‘flak’ has become unusually powerful. By taking the form of cyberbullying, flak has successfully and psychologically influenced the choice of topics and objects of criticism by journalists. In different societies, different topics are toxic. But, invariably, everywhere there are topics that cause a storm of public indignation. For example, in Kazakhstan, these are topics of religion, language, national identity, LGBTQ+ rights, the destruction of dissidents and real opposition, etc. You can see how the media uses this fourth filter and bypasses it to cover these issues for fear of flak. Chomsky and Herman argue in their book that ‘flak’ is also attacking the large media in the United States. By inadvertently raising a sensitive issue and receiving a barrage of outrage from an audience

dissatisfied with the editorial board's point of view, the publication could lose advertisers. At some point, the scandal could become excessively toxic, and the ads will run away. The filter does its job.

In discussions about media bias, the propaganda model is perceived as too critical. However, its key elements find support in the theory put forth by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who argues in his book "*On Television*" (2002), that the 'journalistic field' (a semi-autonomous subsystem of social relations) is losing its autonomy due to economic coercion (Benson, 2006). This coercion places increasing pressure on the production process, forcing it to adopt 'audience rating' standards (i.e., "keep it simple and short") and cater to advertisers' interests. Furthermore, time and resource constraints can act as filters in news production. Journalists are often under pressure to meet deadlines and produce news content quickly. This can result in superficial coverage without providing a deep analysis, also reliance on press releases or official sources, and a lack of in-depth investigative reporting. Bourdieu analyzes the media and explores the dual role of journalists as both wielders of power and subjects of influence from the market and politics, sometimes even more so than in the oil industry (2002). According to Bourdieu:

> "It is clear that the authorities, the government in particular, influence the media not only through the economic pressure that they bring to bear but also through their monopoly on legitimate information – government sources are the most obvious example. First of all, the monopoly provides governmental authorities (juridical, scientific, and other authorities as much as the police) with weapons for manipulating the news or those in charge of transmitting it. For its part, the press attempts to manipulate these 'sources' in order to get news exclusively."
> (Pierre Bourdieu, 2002, p. 69.)

At the same time, Bourdieu highlights the limited autonomy of the journalistic field itself, structured around the opposition between two poles: those pure and independent from state and economic power on one end and those most dependent on these forms of power and commercial interests on the other. The journalistic field emerged from the clash between commercialized newspapers that prioritize sensationalism and those that emphasize in-depth analysis, proclaiming values of objectivity and professional

commitment. This kind of journalism, where commercial values hold increasing significance, extends its influence into other domains. Subordinated to political and economic demands, the field of journalism increasingly imposes its own requirements and terms on other fields, including cultural production, social sciences, and politics (Bourdieu, 2002; Benson, 2006). Bourdieu further argues that, despite the growing influence of television and TV personalities in journalism, the dominance of the commercial field is not absolute. Cultural capital remains with the more 'pure' print media journalists, such as those from *Liberation* or *Le Canard* newspapers, who initiate critical debates later picked up by television. The heteronomy associated with advertiser demands through audience measurement mechanisms is compounded by the current climate of instability and high unemployment among intellectual professions. The surplus of graduates in the field of cultural production leads to the formation of a cultural reserve army of labor. By exerting pressure on the cultural production space, this labor force facilitates the implementation of censorship through political or economic control. In essence, many cultural producers find themselves in precarious positions, often working on temporary contracts. This instability creates a coercive environment that enables censorship and economic coercion to be more readily imposed. Consequently, the erosion of stable employment results in a loss of freedom, making censorship and economic coercion more easily executed in such circumstances (Bourdieu, 2002, p.68; Benson, 2006).

Additionally, Chomsky and Herman argue in their book (1988, p. 3) that the primary objective of large media conglomerates is to generate profits. As a result, they are obligated to safeguard the financial interests of their owners and the investors who control them. The editors of such media outlets are constrained and dependent on the decisions of their owners, who share common interests with corporations, businessmen, and the state, and have no intention of causing harm. This directly influences the selection of news topics and how they are presented.

In the book "*Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy*" (2004), Robert M. Entman provides an analysis of the media's role as an intermediary between political elites and society in the United States. The relationship is described as a 'cascade,' with the administration (including the White House, State

Department, or Defense) at the top, disseminating ideas and influences to the elites (such as Congress members, former top officials, experts, and foreign leaders); the media occupies the next level, tasked with framing news stories and conveying them to the public (Entman, 2004, p. 9). All participants in this process operate under conditions of uncertainty and pressure, with varying levels of competence and understanding of the situation. Comprehensive understanding does not necessarily flow between the levels; instead, the main facts are packaged in framed messages, sometimes accompanied by emotionally charged and one-sided interpretations (Entman, 2003; 2004, p. 10). Entman employs the cascade model to comprehend and explain why dominant paradigms established by the elites prevail in the media. For instance, the media actively engaged in demonizing 'antidemocratic despots' before and after cheerfully covering U.S. military interventions in Panama, Libya, and the Persian Gulf. When it came to Saddam Hussein, the media largely accepted the White House's framing of the Iraq war as part of the 'war on terror,' neglecting the 'counter-narrative' (Raum, 1990). In this way, a frame is established from the outset, and journalists are left to fill it with content.

2.3. Framing in International News, and the Nuclear Diplomacy of Nursultan Nazarbayev

The use of the framing effect in the media is based on the assumption that the audience's perception of any described subject is influenced by how it is covered in the media (Entman, 1993; Druckman, 2001; Robinson, 2001; D'Angelo 2002). The media frame is one of the most important tools, compressing large amounts of information and adapting it for perception by news recipients. For the thesis, the focus is made on foreign policy framing that is used to cover international events in the media. The thesis will use Entman's definition of framing, according to which it is not only how something is presented in the press but also the process of 'selection and salience' (1993). Robert M. Entman is one of the leading experts in the field of framing, conducting research in the areas of political communication, media relations, racial stereotypes, and public opinion.

According to Entman:

> "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described."
> (Robert M. Entman, 1993, p. 52)

A later definition given by Entman (2003; 2004) describes framing as the selection and emphasis of certain features of events or agenda in order to promote a particular interpretation, assessment, and/or decision. The scholar suggests that framing is not only about how something is presented in the press, but it also involves the omission or silence about certain aspects of an event, phenomenon, or person. The coverage of international events in the media opens up wide opportunities for interpretation by political actors and decision-makers, since the public, as a rule, cannot verify the authenticity of the transmitted information without considerable effort and time commitments. By offering one interpretation of something and omitting the other, a journalist indirectly influences the opinion formed by the audience.

Robert M. Entman (2004, p. 95) clearly explains the meaning of frames using the example of the 'Cold War' frame, which prevailed in the second half of the XX century. This frame allows one to single out certain international events as problems, identify their sources, make moral judgments, and recommend specific solutions. During the Cold War tension between the USA and the USSR, it was easy for the political elites to directly impose frames that the media would follow without objection. As an example, Entman (2004, p. 29) compared the U.S. news reports of the destruction of the Korean Air Lines Flight 007 by Soviet forces in 1983 with reports of the U.S. downing of Iran Air Flight 655 in 1988 during the Reagan administration. In the coverage of the first tragedy, the 'murder in the air' frame is dominated by highlighting the guilt agent (USSR) and moral failure of communism, whereas the second tragedy was framed as a 'technical glitch' with no moral conclusion about the U.S. military policy. Reporting in given frames rendered an obvious impact on public opinion by raising the level of distrust of the USSR and increased support for American foreign policy. The threat of nuclear war was a key aspect of the security frame during the Cold War. The United States's efforts to reduce the threat of nuclear annihilation after the collapse of the Soviet Union was one of the rational qualities

and responsiveness in the post-Cold War foreign policy that the news media occasionally encouraged (Entman, 2004, p. 168). Kazakhstan was one of the four former Soviet states that inherited the nuclear arsenal of the USSR. In addition to the Semipalatinsk test site, more than a thousand nuclear warheads were left there, more than a hundred intercontinental missiles, and dozens of heavy bombers. In addition, there were tons of nuclear material left, and there were many facilities that previously worked for the Soviet military-industrial complex (Kassenova, 2017; Maitre, 2018).

The global political discourse is dominated by the narrative that thanks to the wise decision of the leadership of Kazakhstan and the support of the United States, the issue of the Soviet nuclear legacy in the former republic, which gained independence in December 1991, was resolved peacefully (Kassenova, 2017; Maitre, 2018). Kazakhstan, together with the United States, carried out several special missions to dispose and to secure vulnerable nuclear material. For example, in 1994, during the secret Kazakh-American operation Sapphire (Hoffman, Savranskaya & Blanton, 2014), a large amount of highly enriched uranium was taken from the Ulba Metallurgical plant in Ust-Kamenogorsk, Kazakhstan, to the Oak Ridge laboratory in the United States.

The dismantlement agreement between the two countries was preceded by a long process of negotiations during which the amount of the U.S. aid was increased (however, the transparent account for the distribution of the money and how they were used was never provided.) By exchanging nuclear weapons for cooperation with the Western world, the country's ability to take place as a full-fledged subject of international relations, Nazarbayev has established a personal legitimacy on this matter and certainly benefited by improving his image in the Western press. Solving the nuclear problem, behind which were the efforts of many countries, officials, specialists, as well as financial resources, became a ‘personal trademark’ of Nazarbayev (Maitre, 2018). When it comes to judging the development of nuclear programs in countries unfriendly to the United States, his figure is presented in the local and some international media as an example to follow. In 2006, the U.S. House of Representatives praised the Kazakh leadership’s nuclear threat reduction program (Maitre, 2018). Then in 2008, two members of the U.S. Congress stated that they supported Nazarbayev to be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize (Kucera, 2008). In 2011, Nazarbayev’s name again was aired in the U.S. Congress because of ‘his

role in stopping nuclear weapons testing' and thus, he 'deserved to be nominated' for the Nobel. The same proposal was also made by Japanese Parliament members later in 2012 (Maitre, 2018), let alone multiple initiatives made in neighboring countries such as Kyrgyzstan (Trilling, 2011). By earning these nominations, Nazarbayev received international recognition and positive coverage at that time (Kucera, 2013). Amid the negative images of the leaderships of North Korea and Iran, driven by their nuclear programs, the first Kazakh president was framed as a 'man of peace.' Praise articles do not mention critical factors that would indicate an inability of preserving the Soviet nuclear legacy in Kazakhstan due to the lack of specific experts and facilities to maintain this arsenal (Kucera, 2013).

2.4. *Sponsors of Frames, and CNN's Case*

Unlike Entman, Paul D'Angelo (2002) suggested considering framing research from the standpoint of three paradigm approaches (constructivist, cognitive, and critical), which give different ideas about the relationship between frames in news texts and framing effects. When studying media framing in the context of media effects arising from the coverage of international events, it is advisable to analyze primarily from the point of view of a social constructivist approach since, in the sphere of foreign policy, the main source of information for society is the media. International matters are usually outside the scope of an individual's personal experience. The constructivist paradigm suggests that journalists act as 'information processors' creating 'interpretive media packages' (D'Angelo, 2002). Another approach proposes to consider media discourse as a series of such 'interpretive media packages' (a set of 'compressing' symbols) that give meaning to a particular topic. The core of each package is a central organizing idea (or frame) that contributes to the understanding and comprehension of events (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989).

Considering the influence of the media agenda on public opinion about foreign countries, Wanta, Golan and Lee pointed out in their article that media coverage of international events should serve as an agenda-setting function (2004). They established three major foreign policy roles: the role of observer of foreign policy news, the role of a participant in foreign policy (along with politicians), and the role of a catalyst of foreign news. The

third role is directly related to the impact of the media agenda on the public agenda. The first-level agenda influences what the public thinks about an event, and the second-level agenda of attributes influences how it thinks. The authors point out that research of the second level agenda combines the ‘traditional’ agenda with framing research, suggesting that characteristics (‘attributes’), which media attributes to newsmakers, influence the perceptions of members of society. Thus, the ‘attribution agenda’ in the media sets the ‘agenda of attributes’ in society (Wanta et al., 2004). Based on obtained data from a nationwide survey and content analysis of media materials, researchers concluded that the more media coverage a state receives, the more likely it is to be thought of as significant to their state. The more negative this coverage is, the more likely it is that in a given society, the state will be thought of in a negative way; it is also noted that positive coverage does not affect public opinion (Wanta et al., 2004).

The inclusion of states in ‘attribute agendas’, i.e., the scale of coverage, in line with the conclusions of Wanta, Golan and Lee’s article, allows for increasing their significance for the public. At the same time, the perception of a particular state by the public of another state is affected by the direction of coverage if it is negative. Therefore, in framing studies, when covering international events, it is important to take into account, among other things, how a negative attitude towards a particular state is formed.

Van Gorp's (2007) culture-oriented concept of framing examines the complex relationship between ‘frame sponsors’ (their sources and advocates), key events, media content, schemes, and the overall ‘stock of frames.’ Interest groups, spin doctors, and advertisers carefully employ persuasive tactics to promote frames that shape media coverage of events or individuals. Such opportunities arise during specific situations like news conferences or government statements, where strategic decisions are made regarding the presentation of certain viewpoints (Van Gorp, 2007).

Based on the reviewed literature (Entman, 1993; 2004; Van Gorp, 2007; Gamson and Modigliani, 1989), framing occurs through the efforts of numerous professional communicators who activate existing frames at the micro level, adhering to the standard definition of selecting specific aspects of perceived reality and focusing on them. Some communicators adopt a deliberate, strategic approach to framing, designing them to be

recognized and accepted by the audience. This involves shaping interpretations of situations, problems, actions, and more. Politicians, mediators, influential media editors, and various experts engage in this type of communication (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989; Van Gorp, 2007). However, many other communicators, particularly those involved in news media, activate frames without pursuing the grand strategic goals of elites. According to Gamson and Modigliani (1989), a media frame represents the central idea of an 'interpretive media package' that assigns specific sociocultural meanings to the main issue or theme of the media text intended for public dissemination. The media frame involves contextualizing an event within an existing framework for presentation to the public. These packages often have sponsors who are interested in promoting their ideas. Sponsorship goes beyond mere advocacy and includes tangible activities such as public speaking, interviews with journalists, advertising, writing articles and pamphlets, and submitting legal briefs to support a preferred package. Typically, these sponsors are organizations employing professional specialists who regularly interact with journalists. Their work equips them with a deep understanding of the media's news requirements, as well as the norms and practices of journalists. In fact, many of these professionals have previously worked as journalists before transitioning to public relations roles.

In July 2012, when CNN aired a series of positive special reports on Kazakhstan's blooming energy sector, opportunities for foreign investors, local traditional sports, and the president's support for the younger generation (Pleitgen, 2012; CNN, 2012), a few regional experts noticed some unusual aspects. Firstly, it was observed that CNN's reports relied on commentaries and interviews with so-called independent experts without disclosing their connections to the government (Smith, 2012; Fisher, 2012). Additionally, the CNN reports were closely aligned with the narratives and agenda of the Kazakh government's high-profile lobbying campaigns (Fisher, 2012), and perfectly fit into the long-established government's frame about the economic growth of the nation (Schatz, 2012) under the leadership of Nazarbayev. As a result, this kind of reporting had no mention of negative aspects of the oil and gas industry, including strikes of workers that were frequently held due to poor payment and conditions. Later, a CNN spokesperson acknowledged (Fisher, 2012) that the reports had been sponsored by the Samruk-Kazyna Foundation, a Kazakh state assets management holding, and the Astana Economic Forum, organized by the government to attract investors. However, CNN viewers were not

provided clear and identifiable information about the initiatives and sources behind the TV program in this Central Asian country (Smith, 2012; Fisher, 2012). The disclaimer only mentioned that it was prepared “in association with” the two aforementioned organizations without explicitly describing their nature. An audience usually is not looking to verify the news they watch. Moreover, the U.S. version of the CNN website, viewed by Americans, differed from the European version seen by readers and viewers in Central Asia. As a result, Americans did not have access to logos or other identifying marks indicating that the report was sponsored by the Kazakh government (Smith, 2012; Fisher, 2012). It is important to note that the reference to this case is not made to assert the media's venality, as CNN continues to report on major social and political issues in Kazakhstan. However, the TV channel should strive for greater transparency and avoid such oversights, particularly in light of aggressive information campaigns aimed at whitewashing the regime's image. Generally, reputable media with strong editorial standards appropriately label paid publications to ensure their audience can easily recognize sponsored articles. Failure to do so may be perceived as a manipulation of public opinion.

Acknowledging that the portrayal of a country and its leader is the outcome of a deliberate undertaking, it becomes evident that it is an inherently politicized endeavor (Marat, 2009). Consequently, it cannot be an impartial reflection of reality. The process of shaping the image through media entails the utilization of source material, encompassing factual information about the nation and its leader. This information is disseminated through various channels, employing frames as a means of presentation. The ultimate outcome is determined by the audience's perception of this information (Druckman, 2001), which is influenced by preconceptions, previous experiences with the subject's representation, as well as the linguistic formulations and structure of the article.

Chapter 3. Research Goal

The thesis will operate under the definition of framing as the process of ‘selection and salience’ (Entman, 1993) in terms of choosing some aspects of perceived reality and making them more prominent in a way to promote understanding of a specific problem, causal interpretation, and moral evaluation. The same information can be presented

differently, can describe events in different variations, and contain different characteristics.

The first research goal is to examine what narratives prevail in an article about Nazarbayev, what wordings and titles are used to describe him, his policy, what topics and issues does it highlight and what not, does it provide independent, in-depth analysis and criticism, and does it mention the cult of personality, silencing the critics of the regime, abuses of human rights, falsified elections, and controls over the national resources by elites. To sum up all of these aspects, the first research question will be the following:

RQ 1: How do the U.S. media portray Nazarbayev? What frames prevail in his coverage?

To reveal dominant frames, the focus will be made on these sub-questions:

a) Whose opinions and what records balance the official position of the Kazakh government (press releases, statements, international visit-related accounts) in an article?
b) Is there a correlation between sourcing and frames in news stories covering Nazarbayev and events related to him?

The period of review may include coverage of events of a different nature, such as those in which the leadership of Kazakhstan is pictured positively or neutral during representative events or visits of international importance, in the light of one-time achievement, as well as those in which the crisis of power is reflected. This includes events caused by negative developments, including unrest in the country, a corruption case, human rights violations record, etc. A preliminary study helped to pre-define dominant titles and definitions of Nazarbayev through the keyword search on the websites of the selected media. Taking into account the coverage based on the 'selection and salience' Entman's concept, the researcher proposes the first hypothesis.

H1: When Nazarbayev is described as a *president, leader, and man of peace,* an article focuses more on achievements and merits and is most consistent with the official

narrative. When Nazarbayev is presented as an *autocrat, longtime ruler/leader/president* or *dictator*, an article has a critical narrative, includes a diversity of opinions, and mostly follows an event that challenged his power.

For the purpose of this thesis, media outlets are classified in accordance with two groups, differing in the form of ownership and funding sources; however, all of them serve as a window through which the outside world looks at the region and the country in particular. The researcher divided them by borrowing and modifying Pierre Bourdieu's theory (2002) of two models of media inside of the journalistic field: the most commercial media, forced by the market demands through advertisers and readers, and, on the contrary, 'pure', independent of the state, political and economic power. Each of them has its own principle of legitimation:

- The first model represents media offering preferably sensational news; they are mostly commercialized because they are measured by numbers of readers, listeners, or viewers, and therefore by sales and profits.

- The second model is the media featuring analysis and commentary, which differ in the values of objectivity, and they do not depend on the state, political, or economic power.

In a condensed manner, this model provides an explanation for the persistent conflict between culturally affluent yet economically deprived alternative journalism and culturally impoverished yet economically prosperous market journalism. In Bourdieu's theory, the first model is represented mostly by commercial television, whereas the second one - mostly by print media. Later Rodney Benson (2006) noted that news organizations that possess both forms of capital, such as The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal, hold significant symbolic power within the field of journalism. They play a vital role in shaping and reshaping the prevailing 'rules of journalistic practice.'

For the thesis's research, the selected media are divided into two groups and classified as follows:

Table 1. Types of selected media:

The thesis's classification	**The U.S. media**	**Ownership, Funding**	**Target audience**
The commercial media	The New York Times	Private, owned by the NYT Company, controlled by the Ochs - Sulzbelger's family. Advertising, paid subscriptions.	American, International, English-speaking extensive readership.
	The Wall Street Journal	Private, owned by Dow Jones & Co., a unit of News Corp controlled by Rupert Murdoch. Advertising, paid subscriptions.	American, International, English-speaking extensive readership.
	The Washington Post	Private, owned by Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon. Advertising, paid subscriptions.	American, International, English-speaking extensive readership.
The non-profit media	Eurasianet Headquartered in New York; has a Bureau in Almaty, Kazakhstan.	Proclaimed as an independent Non-profit, funded by grant-making institutions from the USA and UK.	American, International, English-speaking; Reaches Russian-speaking audiences.
	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Headquartered in Washington D.C. and Prague, the Czech Republic; and has the Bureau in Astana and Almaty,	Proclaimed as an independent Non-profit, funded by a grant from the U.S. Congress through the USAGM.	American, International, English-speaking; Reaches Russian and Kazakh-speaking audiences.

	Kazakhstan.		

The next research goal is to identify the differences in the coverage of Nazarbayev between two types of selected media to analyze factors that influence framing effects. Therefore, the second research question of the thesis will be the following:

RQ 2: When comparing media coverage, what are the differences and similarities between the two different media groups and the way each of them frames Nazarbayev?

To reveal differences the focus will be made on these sub-questions:

a) What are the features/attributes of an article: wording, coverage, and mentioned issues?
b) Is there direct criticism against Nursultan Nazarbayev in an article?

This research question has the next hypothesis:

H2. Non-profit media provide a full context and more critical view than commercial media because they are less pressured by political and economic demands (through sponsors, advertisers, and audience.)

Chapter 4. Methodology

Robert Entman (1993, 2004) advocates for content analysis as the primary research method for studying framing, as its results can contribute to a more objective understanding of frames. To explore the relationship between media framing and its effects on the portrayal of Nazarbayev in the news and to identify patterns for evaluating media coverage and framing usage, the researcher performed a quantitative method of content analysis on articles pertaining to events featuring or mentioning him. To be cross-examined, 70 articles were collected from three major newspapers, NYT, WP, WSJ, and two online news outlets, RFE/RL and Eurasianet. All of these media are considered

credible, providing verified news and analysis, and have not been associated with tabloids.

4.1. Sampling and Data for Analysis

The New York Times, The Washington Post and The Wall Street Journal are picked because of their international prominence and wide-reaching circulation: both are mainstream and among the most prestigious newspapers in the world (Cozma & Kosman, 2014; Wagner, 2014); they are also among the top 25 newspapers in the United States in circulation (Lulofs, 2013). Founded in 1877, The Washington Post has established itself with political reporting on the events of Congress, the White House, and other government departments in the USA. Its journalists promptly respond to international events and key aspects of foreign affairs of the USA. The newspaper has dozens of offices in other parts of the world, including Hong Kong, London, Shanghai, and Tokyo. The newspaper belongs to former Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, one of the wealthiest persons in the world (Weitz et al., 2019). Over its 170-year history, The New York Times has gained a reputation as one of the most respected and influential newspapers in the United States of America. One of the main directions of the information policy of the NYT newspaper has always been commenting on foreign news. It is run by a global media corporation, The New York Times Company, publicly traded and owned by the Ochs - Sulzbelger's family since 1896 (Novgorodova, 2020.) The Wall Street Journal is a newspaper founded in 1889 by the Dow Jones company. It got its name from the names of the most important business district in New York City and specializes in financial, economic, and business information; known for its deep analytics. The newspaper's website (which appeared in 1996) is positioned as the largest paid resource on the web. In 2007 the newspaper was bought by the News Corporation of the world's largest media mogul Rupert Murdoch (Wagner, 2014). These newspapers belong to the influential media conglomerates observed in establishing the agenda (Cozma & Kozman, 2015; Wagner, 2014). Part of their profit are advertising and paid subscriptions.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (rferl.org) and Eurasianet (eurasianet.org) posed themselves as independent news organizations, according to their website. They are not commercial, as the primary funding sources are grants. Having different funding sources,

RFE/RL and Eurasianet are partners, sometimes reposting articles from each other. These media are chosen because they cover news not only to English-speaking audiences but also to Russian-speaking readers and viewers in the post-Soviet region, including Kazakhstan, and both have accredited journalistic staff in the region. In the case of RFE/RL, it also targets Kazakh-speaking audiences. Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty were separately founded during the Cold War between the West and the Soviet Union to counter propaganda in the Communist nations and were secretly financed from 1949 until 1971 by the CIA (Cone, 1999; Johnson, 2010). Then they merged into one organization, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and now are funded by the U.S. Congress through the United States Agency for Global Media (USAGM, n.d.) With less broadcasting, the media now also produces web multimedia production and targets audiences in the post-Soviet countries, Balkans, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. According to the RFE/RL's website, "its mission is to promote democratic values by providing accurate, uncensored news and open debate in countries where a free press is threatened, and disinformation is pervasive,"; and its editorial independence is "protected by U.S. law" (Rfe/rl, n.d.) Launched in 2000, Eurasianet, as it wrote on its website and web archives of the National Endowment for Democracy organization, covers relevant information valuable to policymakers, scholars, and interested citizens, both within and beyond Eurasia; provides on-the-ground reporting from and about the South Caucasus and Central Asia, and critical and alternative viewpoints perspectives on the significant processes in the region (Eurasianet, n.d.). According to its website, Eurasianet is based at Columbia University's Harriman Institute, and it is supported by funding from Google, the Open Society Foundations, the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, the National Endowment for Democracy, Columbia University's Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies and various other grant-making institutions, and are guided by a dedicated board of trustees (Eurasianet, n.d.).

The Factiva Newsstand online database, which offers access to the newspapers and websites of leading publishers from over the world, was utilized to obtain electronic versions of news stories published by NYT, WP and WSJ. Also, the archives on rferl.org and eurasianet.org websites were used to download their articles. The keywords "Nazarbayev," "Kazakh president," "Nazarbayev Nobel," "Nazarbayev Zhanaozen," "Nazarbayev Opposition", "Nazarbayev Election," "Nazarbayev Nuclear," "Nazarbayev

EXPO," "Nazarbayev Resignation," "Nazarbayev Kazakh Capital," "Nazarbayev Bloody January," "Nazarbayev Deadly January," "Qantar 2022" were used to search for relevant stories on the certain specific events. One of the study's objectives is to identify the transformation in the strategies and approaches to shape the image of Nursultan Nazarbayev with the development of the key events between 2011 and 2022, some of which were mentioned above. However, this period includes more events and topics chosen for thesis's research:

- Crackdown in Zhanaozen town when police opened fire on unarmed street demonstrators in December 2011;
- A 2013's special operation to detain in Italy and repatriate the wife and daughter of fugitive oppositional politician Mukhtar Ablyazov;
- The presidential election in 2015;
- Confrontation with former son-in-law, Rakhat Aliyev, who became an insider in Kazakh politics, and in 2015 found dead in an Austrian jail; then his grandson, Aisultan Nazarbayev (son of deceased Aliyev), was found dead in London.
- Another attempt by the Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev to be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize with the help of international politicians, including from the USA;
- Hosting EXPO-2017 exhibition in Astana;
- President Nursultan Nazarbayev's resignation in March 2019, which was widely seen as a formal power transition;
- The Qandy Qantar (the Bloody January) events in 2022 started as a peaceful protest over fuel price rises, driven by inequality and social injustice, then turned into violence and led to the end of Nazarbayev's era.

The articles have been chosen based on specific events and topics. Unlike RFE/RL and Eurasianet, whose journalists work in the region and target its audience, the U.S. newspapers such as NYT, WP, and WSJ do not frequently cover what is happening in Kazakhstan, only specific significant events. Thus, random selection was not applied. For each considered event, only those articles that mention Nazarbayev were selected. As a result, 70 articles (Appendix 1) were included in the empirical research database.

Preference was given to extended news reports, in-depth analyses, editorial commentaries, and opinions. They are presented in the Appendices chapter (Appendix 1).

The quantity is sometimes asymmetric: not all media outlets covered the reviewed events; some media outlets published more on a specific topic, while others published less. For example, RFE/RL and Eurasianet covered EXPO 2017 more than other media. Among commercial media, only the newspaper NYT paid attention to this event. Therefore, in the review of articles on this topic, there are no publications from the WP and the WSJ. Also, the same newspapers' archives do not have any accounts of the case when Nazarbayev's former son-in-law, Rakhat Aliyev, was found hanged in the bathroom of his single cell in an Austrian jail in 2015 (Austrian authorities claimed it was suicide, but his Vienna-based lawyers and his widow publicly expressed doubt that he could have taken his own life.) Meanwhile, RFE/RL and Eurasianet, as well as most of the European media, covered it extensively. At the same time, other events, such as the resignation of president Nazarbayev in 2019, and the January 2022 events in Almaty, aroused more interest among the commercial media group: 3-4 articles from NYT, WP, WSJ were included in the analysis.

4.2. Coding

To conduct the quantitative method of content analysis, an open type of coding was utilized (Saldana, 2016). Based on the research questions, a codebook with a series of questions and parameters is designed (Appendix 2); its structure was adopted and modified from the thesis research "The Image of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the United States" (Gazizov, 2017). Each news item has been coded for basic characteristics such as newspaper name, article's type, date, length; and for essential variables of the thesis: events/topics, mentioned issues, representation wordings, sources, and article's coverage (Juyan & Glen, 2003). To identify frames of Nazarbayev the researcher followed Robert Entman's suggestion (1993) to reveal frames in the news text by "presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases," as well as sources of information. Representation of Nazarbayev, by which titles, and the mention of specific issues (such as personality cult, elimination of opponents, human rights violations, and so on) were coded and analyzed. Previously, this methodology was used to examine the media framing of the first president of Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyazov, by Eric Freedman (2007). However, unlike

Turkmenbashi's framing research, the preliminary analysis of the articles through the prism of the selected events between 2011 and 2022 showed that they do not contain personal frames or references of a personal nature regarding Nazarbayev, therefore, in this study, the focus is on frames related to his style of ruling, the use of expressions like *leader of the nation, autocrat, dictator,* and *longtime ruler.*

To count the total number of sources to which information was attributed in the articles, the code sheet with nine types of sources was designed. This method is borrowed and modified from the research of "*The Syrian crisis in the news*" by Cozma, R. and Kozman, C. (2015). The quote or paraphrase was encoded at the paragraph level (i.e., the number of paragraphs related to each source) to calculate the total number of paragraphs in each story. A quote or paraphrase is coded at the paragraph level (that is, the number of paragraphs attributed to a source) to compute a ratio with the most cited sources and identified frames in the articles. During the coding process, the balance of opinions was also analyzed, that is, how symmetrically different opinions were presented. This aspect was measured by comparing the numbers of the most cited sources with the numbers of others present in each news item. If the most cited source prevailed over the others, the record was counted as unbalanced; if not, it was counted as 'balanced.'

Based on the coverage classification adopted from the content analysis research "*China's agenda building and image polishing in the US…*" by Juyan Zhang and Glen T. Cameron, the articles' coverage was evaluated as positive, negative, mixed, or neutral. News items were defined as positive if it was reflecting 'social cohesion, co-operation, stability, and strength'; as negative if it was reflecting 'conflicts, disorganization, instability, and weakness' and one or more issues listed in the codebook (Appendix 2); as mixed - in case it was reflecting both positive and negative sides; and as neutral as it reflected 'neither positive nor negative conditions when the report did not contain explicit evaluative references' (Juyan & Glen, 2003). While mentioning or referring to certain issues and problems, some articles held Nazarbayev responsible for these negative developments, while others did not. Therefore, the researcher also coded the presence or absence of direct criticism against the first Kazakh president. For inserting data and counting codes, an Excel sheet was designed, where the charts and tables were developed to present the

results. To ensure the reliability of measurement, the researcher coded articles at least twice.

Chapter 5. Results

Descriptive analysis revealed that the majority of the analyzed articles were episodic in nature, varying in length from 11 to 60 paragraphs, with an average of 20-25 paragraphs, from 800 to 1,500 words. There were no significant differences observed in this regard between the three reviewed newspapers and two electronic media outlets. However, other notable differences were identified. Firstly, the data obtained from the non-profit media, RFE/RL and Eurasianet, exceeded that of commercial media, the NYT, the WP and the WSJ, as these outlets specialize in covering specific regions, where media is unfree, including Kazakhstan. The region itself does not receive bigger attention from major U.S. networks and newspapers, as nowadays media allocate fewer financial and human resources to foreign news coverage (Golan, 2006; Freedman, 2007).

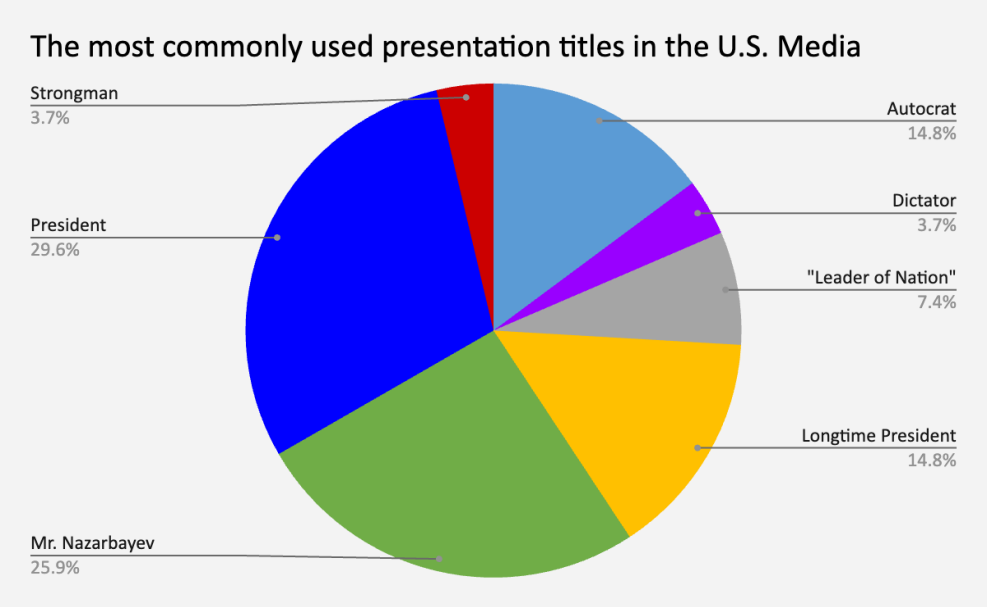
The content analysis of the 70 articles confirmed that the reviewed U.S. media, when portraying Nursultan Nazarbayev, the first president of Kazakhstan, indeed rarely employed human interest frames developed, for instance, by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). With few exceptions where Nazarbayev was referred to as an 'aging' leader, the reviewed articles generally lacked personal references, including those related to Nazarbayev himself or his family affairs. A certain emotional undertone was observed when describing his leadership style, with the media using phrases such as 'firm grip' or 'tight control' to indicate the concentration of power in his hands. In rare instances, he was directly labeled as 'brutal' and 'corrupt', particularly in relation to human rights violations and the prosecution of critics.

5.1. Analysis of Identified Frames and Dominant Sources

Research Question 1 sought to examine the dominant frames through which Nursultan Nazarbayev was portrayed in relation to the analyzed events and topics. The most prevalent portrayals were as *president* (29.6% of the analyzed news items) and *Mr. Nazarbayev* (25.9%), revealing a relatively neutral incline of coverage (Chart 1). The representation as *president* was consistently present in nearly all analyzed articles. The coverage of these articles varied, ranging from negative to neutral or positive, depending

on the specific focus and narrative. For instance, in articles addressing challenges faced by Nazarbayev's regime, such as the suppression of the 2011 Zhanaozen oil town uprising, he was predominantly portrayed as *president*. Only the NYT and the WSJ referred to him as an *autocrat* or *authoritarian president* in relation to these tragic events, where the police opened fire on unarmed protesters. Overall, the terms *autocrat* or *authoritarian* were found in 14.8% of the analyzed articles.

Chart 1. The most commonly used presentation titles in the reviewed U.S. Media between 2011 - 2022:



Source: Author, content analysis.

Nazarbayev's professional background was often mentioned, describing him as '*a former steel worker*,' 'a f*ormer Soviet apparatchik*,' and '*Communist-Era leader*.' Additionally, adjectives such as *longtime, lifelong, ruler for life, longruling, 'last soviet era president*,' and even '*last surviving president'* were used to add his portrait. These phrases, emphasizing his lengthy time in power, were categorized under the common frame *longtime president* and accounted for 14.8% of the analyzed articles. Furthermore, 7.4% of the coded articles mentioned his official title as *Leader of the Nation*. In Kazakhstan, the media began using this title without quotes and context starting in 2010, when Nazarbayev received this title officially and was granted the additional rights and benefits. While most of the reviewed U.S. media outlets, except for the WSJ, mentioned this title,

they did not directly address him using it. Only 3.7% of the coded articles depicted Nazarbayev as a *strongman*, and the term *dictator* was used in just three articles, accounting for 3.7% of the total records.

The content analysis of articles from the five reviewed media supported Hypothesis 1. In positive articles he was predominantly depicted as a president, leader, and, on one occasion, as a man of peace, without mentioning negative developments due to his authoritarian style of rule. However, the hypothesis did not assume the fact that the title *president* was also used in articles directly criticizing Nazarbayev. The terms *autocrat* or *dictator* were in line with Hypothesis 1, as they only appeared in critical articles that offered in-depth analysis and presented a wide range of opinions. The reference in WP pertained to an "unlawful expulsion" (OHCHR, 2013) from Italy to Kazakhstan of a wife and daughter of the fugitive opposition politician and a staunch critic of Nazarbayev, Mukhtar Ablyazov, who is wanted in Kazakhstan over embezzlement charges. In December 2013 they were returned to Europe following efforts by the Italian Foreign Ministry and human rights groups. In another instance, the NYT referred to the Kazakh president as a *brutal* and *corrupt dictator* in an article criticizing rapper Kanye West for his performance at Nazarbayev's grandson's wedding in Almaty.

The findings of the study confirmed that a source of information is considered to be one of the factors that influence the frame usage in a media. After counting the number of paragraphs attributed to various sources and comparing the proportions to identify the most frequently cited sources, the analysis revealed that experts and officials, including Nursultan Nazarbayev himself, as well as Kazakh and international officials (coded separately), were the most cited sources. To illustrate the relationship between the most cited sources and dominant frames, three tables are presented. Table 3 demonstrates that in articles where Nazarbayev is portrayed as 'president,' the opinions and interpretations of experts and officials prevail. Additionally, the reviewed U.S. newspapers, the NYT, the WP and the WSJ, heavily relied on experts compared to non-profit media outlets like RFE/RL and Eurasianet, which cited Nazarbayev and Kazakh officials to a greater extent than the commercial media group.

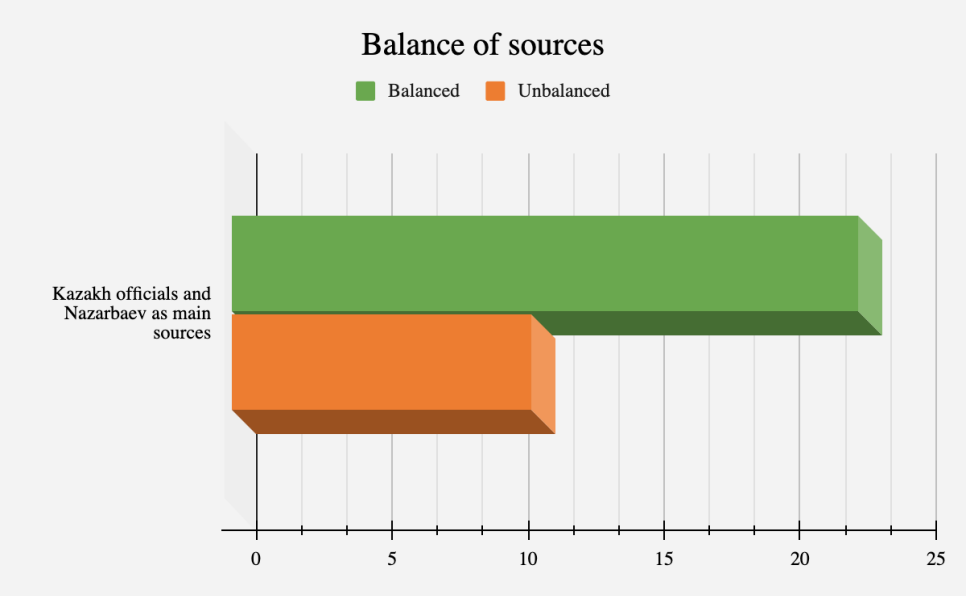
Table 3. The most cited sources in articles with the representation of *president*:

	NYT	WP	WSJ	RFE/RL	Eurasianet
Activists, citizens					1
Document*	1			1	
Experts	4	4	2	1	1
Human Rights Groups/Defender				1	1
International officials	2	2	2	3	3
Kazakh officials	2	1		7	5
Media				2	1
Nazarbayev	3	2	1	5	3
Opposition				2	2
Total number of articles	7	7	4	16	16

Sources: Author, content analysis. *Document sources included reports, books' fragments, agreements, archive files, references to law, amendments, lawsuit, etc.

In order to determine the presence or absence of a balanced range of opinions, the coding process measured whether the most cited sources outweighed other sources collectively by counting the number of paragraphs attributed to each source and comparing the proportions of presented opinions, paraphrases, and interpretations. In articles where Nazarbayev and Kazakh officials are the most cited sources, an imbalance of opinions is observed (Chart 2). This indicates that within the scope of the examined events and topics, the interpretation and viewpoints of Nazarbayev and Kazakh officials dominated over other perspectives in the reporting of the reviewed media outlets.

Chart 2: Balance of opinions in the reviewed articles where Nazarbayev and Kazakh officials are the most cited sources:



Source: Author, content analysis.

The coding process specifically paid attention to the references to Nazarbayev as an *autocrat* or *dictator.* Table 4 illustrates that in articles portraying him in such a manner, the main sources of information are experts and international officials, and once also Kazakh officials.

Table 4. The most cited sources by number of articles with the representations as *autocrat* and *dictator*:

	NYT	WP	WSJ	RFE/RL
Activists, citizens				
Document	1	1		
Experts	1	2	2	
Human Rights Groups/Defender	1	1		
International officials	2	2	1	
Kazakh officials	2	1		
Media				1
Nazarbayev		1		
Opposition			1	
Total number of articles	5	5	3	1

Source: Author, content analysis.

Furthermore, Nazarbayev, officials, and occasionally experts are the primary sources in articles emphasizing his prolonged rule (Table 5).

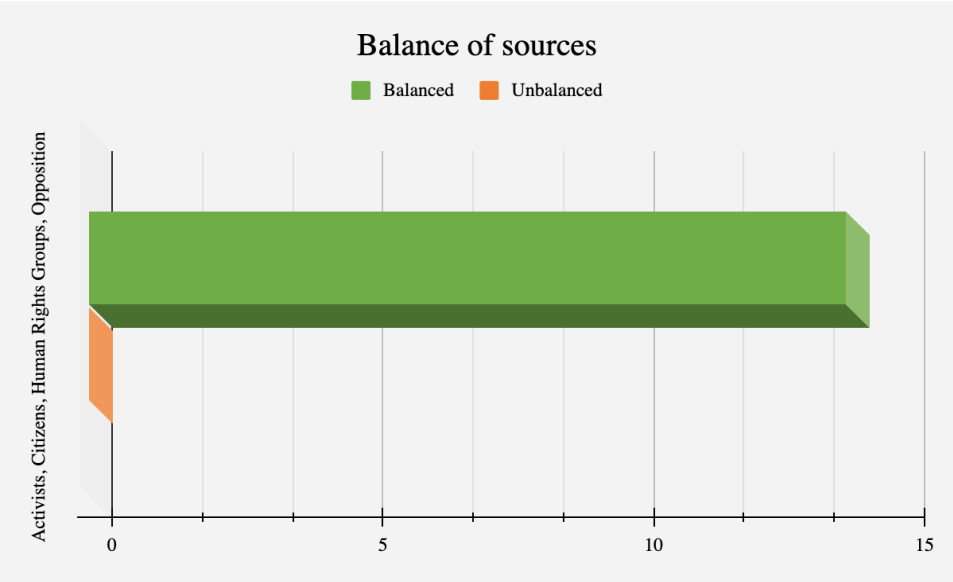
Table 5. The most cited sources in articles with emphasis on *longtime* in the title:

	NYT	WP	WSJ	RFE/RL
Activists, citizens		1		
Document				
Experts	2	1	1	
Human Rights Groups/Defender				1
International officials		3		1
Kazakh officials	1	2	2	
Media				
Nazarbayev	1	3		
Opposition				1
Total number of articles	3	6	2	2

Source: Author, content analysis.

As a general rule, articles where the terms *autocrat* and *dictator* are used contain direct criticism of Nazarbayev, highlighting issues such as corruption, lack of freedoms, human rights violations, non-competitive elections, and other negative aspects of Kazakh politics and the social situation in the country. In such cases, the most cited sources include human rights groups, defenders, opposition figures, activists, and citizens. As depicted in Chart 3, when the main sources are activists, citizens, human rights groups, defenders, and opposition figures, the balance of sources is maintained. This suggests that when publishing critical content, U.S. media ensured that perspectives justifying the policies and actions of Nazarbayev and the Kazakh government were also properly presented.

Chart 3. Balance of opinions in the reviewed articles where the most cited sources are activists, citizens, human rights groups, defenders, and opposition figures:



Source: Author, content analysis.

As was expected by H1 and confirmed by the content analysis, in the U.S. media articles with critical narratives on Nazarbayev and his ruling a wide range of opinions is provided, including those that neutralize the criticism against the first Kazakh president. For example, in April 2019, The Washington Post published an expert analysis provided by Austin S. Matthews, a research associate at the Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures at the University of Denver. Matthews commented on Nazarbayev's official resignation in 2019, which was widely seen as a formal transition of power (Rittmann, 2019) to his handpicked successor, Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev (aka Qasym-Jomart Toqayev), and one of his first decisions was to rename the Kazakh capital from Astana to Nur-Sultan in honor of Nazarbayev (Luhn, 2019). In discussing the regime's nature in Kazakhstan and dictatorships in general, Matthews remarked, “Kazakhstan had huge protests but no violent crackdown” (Matthews, 2019). These words can be perceived as contrasting the annual statements from human rights defenders about repressions in the country, in particular, the events in Zhanaozen in December 2011 were referred to as “the most egregious examples of repression” in Kazakhstan and resulted in a violent suppression (Human Rights Foundation, 2022).

Almost two years after this commentary was published in the WP, another violent crackdown occurred in Almaty in January 2022 (Human Rights Watch, 2023), where police again shot civilians, who posed no threat, and prosecuted many individuals who

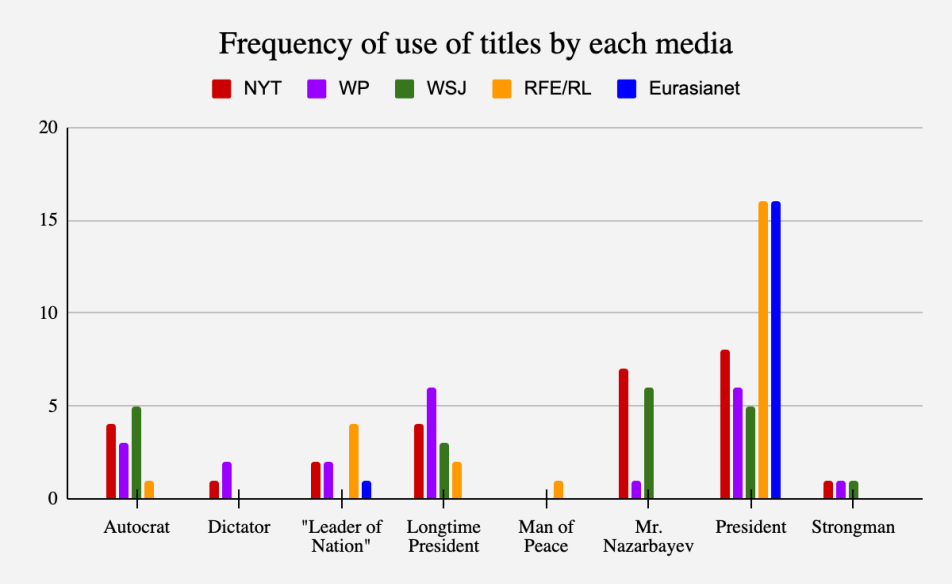
later claimed to have been tortured in detention centers. These events that became known as Qandy Qantar (Bloody January) led to the death of 241 people (Human Rights Watch, 2022). In reporting on the Qandy Qantar, both The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal quoted William Courtney, a former U.S. ambassador to Kazakhstan and adjunct senior fellow at the Rand Corporation, to evaluate Nazarbayev in the context of the January 2022 events in Almaty. According to a former U.S. official, the first Kazakh president started well by initiating reforms but gradually transformed into an authoritarian ruler. After comparing it with other countries, Courtney concluded that Nazarbayev's authoritarian regime was "relatively lighter." RFE/RL and the WSJ also cited him reporting about Nazarbayev's resignation. Mr. Courtney performed as an expert on Kazakhstan when the U.S. Congress held hearings on the Zhanaozen massacre in 2011, where police shot unarmed protesters while following orders from higher authorities. Courtney referred to it as 'an aberration' (Nechepurenko & Higgins, 2022), creating the impression among decision-makers in the USA that this kind of repression under Nazarbayev's watch was happening for the first time. Another former U.S. Ambassador to Kazakhstan, Elizabeth Johnes, as mentioned in Chapter 2, was a member of one of the lobbying groups hired by the Kazakh government (Renaud, 2010; Lipton, 2011) to build a positive reputation in the West. Former diplomats are part of what Robert Etnman (2003) called 'the community of Washington policy experts and lobbyists (former government officials, think tank denizens, university sages, interest groups, and public relations firms)." These influential figures function at the second level of Robert Entman's 'cascade,' receiving the ideas and messages from its higher level such as the White House, State Department, or Defense, or they activate their own frames, sometimes opposing frames, and then flow them down to the media, which fill these frames with content and further disseminate them among their audiences at the bottom level of the 'cascade' (Entman, 2003; 2004, p. 10).

5.2. Analysis of Differences Between Two Media Groups

Research Question 2 examines the differences between two classified groups of media. Based on the data counted and presented in Chart 4, in articles with neutral coverage the usage of representations such as 'president' and 'Mr. Nazarbayev' differed between the reviewed media. 'Mr. Nazarbayev' is observed only in the analyzed articles published by commercial media, while 'president' was used by all reviewed media, predominantly by

the non-profit ones. It appeared in almost all articles, regardless of whether the coverage and narratives were neutral, positive, or negative.

Chart 4. Frequency of title usage by each reviewed media within specific events and topics between 2011-2022:



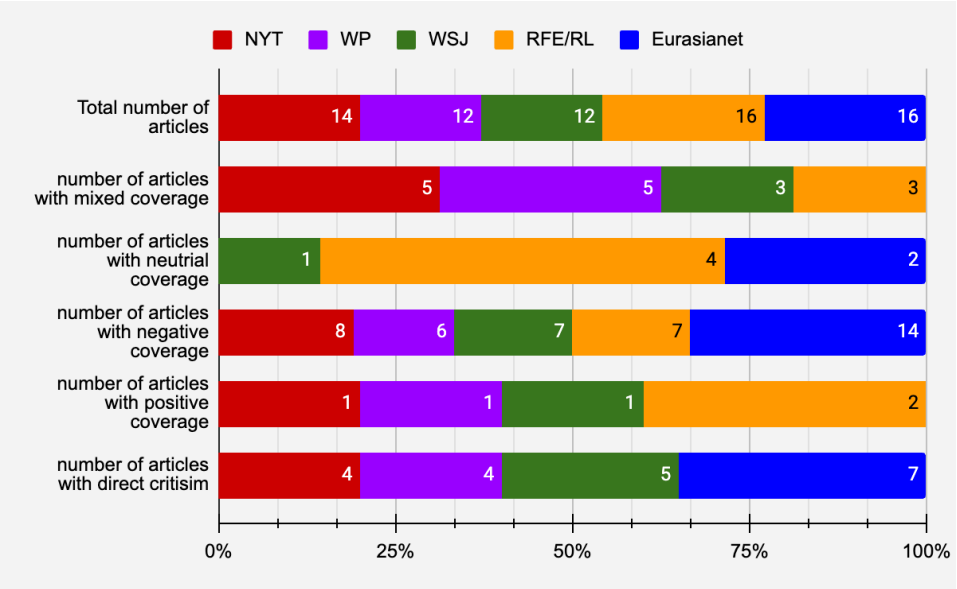
Source: Author, content analysis.

The term *strongman* used only by the newspapers seems to have different connotations, depending on the context in which it is used. The NYT, the WP, and the WSJ referred to it when they portrayed Nazarbayev as a powerful and authoritative leader who exercised significant control and influence, suggesting an authoritarian style of governance, with limited freedom and human rights. For example, reporting about resignation of Nazarbayev in 2019, the WP wrote: "Like most other leaders in the newly independent states of Central Asia and the Caucasus, he (Nazarbayev) ruled as a *strongman*, suppressed any political competition and dissent, tightly controlled the news media, and cracked down on independent trade unions and civil society leaders." The representations of an *autocrat* or *authoritarian leader/president/ruler* were identified mostly in the articles of the commercial media - NYT, WP, and WSJ. The term *dictator* was used twice by the WP, and once by the NYT. The reviewed commercial media directly call Nazarbayev a *dictator*, or an *autocrat* or an *authoritarian*, without referencing an expert or an international organizations' reports. These representations were often seen in the headlines and articles' intros published by this media group.

The single mention of Nazarbayev as a *former authoritarian president* by RFE/RL was found in its article published in August 2020, following the death of Nazarbayev's grandson, Aisultan, in London, after it was announced that he had been suffering from drug addiction. It is notable that this media outlet hardly referred to him as *authoritarian* during his presidency which ended in March 2019. The titles *autocrat* or *authoritarian* are never observed in the headlines and intros of the reviewed articles published by RFE/RL and Eurasianet. They tend to refer to Nazarbayev in a neutral manner, as either *president* or by his last name in their headlines. There is no record that Eurasianet called him as an *autocrat* or *dictator*, but often mentioned the authoritarian regime under his watch. RFE/RL also mentioned the Nazarbayev regime as authoritarian, only when a deep analysis was provided to an event that challenged the power of Nazarbayev, and, as it was mentioned above, when the sources of narrative were mostly activists, citizens, and when the human rights groups and various defender's evaluation was provided. As it is observed and above mentioned, all media made sure that critical opinions and comments were balanced and did not dominate over official sources.

The reviewed types of media differed in the coverage. As evident from Chart 5, nearly all media, except for RFE/RL, covered the event mentioning Nazarbayev in a negative light. The predominance of such coverage is likely explained by the choice of events and topics for content analysis, which are mainly related to conflicts, strikes, persecution, protests, and etc.

Chart 5. Coverage of articles by the reviewed media within the specific events and topics between 2011 - 2022:



Source: Author, content analysis.

Most of the negative coverage when referencing instability, weakness, and other issues prevailed, recorded in Eurasianet's articles. Likewise, this media much more often than others published direct criticism against Nazarbayev, meaning that it was able to suggest to its readers its own critical evaluation or interpretation without quoting an expert or organization. For example, in terms of the EXPO-2017 Eurasianet already in its headlines compared it with Vanity Fair suggesting that this exhibition was more an image event, and further the article referenced its high costs and expenses for the economy of Kazakhstan.

Meanwhile, RFE/RL, in which most of the neutral and positive coverage was seen, reported on a phone call between the president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, and then president of the USA, Donald Trump, who congratulated his Kazakh counterpart on hosting the EXPO-2017. This conversation became newsworthy for almost all Kazakh media as is confirmed by a simple search on the Internet. In their news coverage, RFE/RL and local media in Kazakhstan shared a similar narrative and used similar sources, officials. This coverage counted as positive. At the same time, the WP and the WSJ did not report about the EXPO-2017 let alone the Trump-Nazarbayev phone call. Likewise, the NYT ignored this talk. However, they sent a correspondent to Astana for reporting on the exhibition, which referred to positive aspects, as well as negative, about the event and Nazarbayev’s role in attracting investments to the country’s economy. In particular, the

NYT wrote: “Nonetheless, Mr. Nazarbayev has devoted much of his political life to expanding Kazakhstan's middle class, which has grown from just nine percent of the population in the mid-2000s to 33% in 2014, according to the World Bank. To his people and to investors, he offers both opportunity and stability - at least for now.” It is worth noting the newspaper's highlighting Nazarbayev's ‘role in the expansion of the middle class.’ In chapter 2 of the thesis, it is mentioned that the Kazakh government paid for reports that were created in various research centers in the United States. One of them was “Kazakhstan’s Emerging Middle Class” (Daly, 2008) - for the compilation of this report the lobbying company, APO Worldwide Inc, on behalf of the Kazakh authorities transferred dozens of thousands of dollars to Johns Hopkins University (Renaud, 2010).

In many cases, the coverage at the commercial media was a mixture of positive and negative sides (Juyan & Glen, 2003). References to challenges and weaknesses of Nazarbayev’s ruling, in the three U.S. newspapers often followed or accompanied by some kind of disclaimer that he ‘deserved credit’ for steady balancing between Russia and China, for building stability in the society without a “major outbreak of ethnic violence,” for denuclearisation for global security, and so on. For example, reporting on the 2015 presidential election, when Nazarbayev was expectedly declared a winner amid a lack of competitors and the use of administrative resources, the WP noted: “Nazarbayev, a Soviet apparatchik, has forged a relatively prosperous, stable state in a region where its neighbors have been far less successful. The economy is more than 12 times the size it was in 2000, better than other Central Asian nations, both those more repressive and those more politically open than Kazakhstan. Nazarbayev managed to stitch together his country's fractious ethnic groups and voluntarily surrendered its nuclear arsenal in the 1990s.” Based on the study of Schatz and Maltseva (2012), mentioned in chapter 2, Kazakhstan's economic well-being was one of the main framing exploited by the Kazakh government in their statements that they widely shared internationally to create a favorable effect. The WSJ on the resignation of Nazarbayev in 2019 added to its reporting: “He courted oil, gas and mining companies to invest in the country in the years after he took power in 1989, boosting the country's growth far beyond that of its Central Asian peers.” The NYT’s article about the 2022 Bloody January event in Almaty when more than two hundred people died following the police’s crackdown on the unrest and persecutions of civilians right afterward, has the following episode: “The country is less repressive than most in a region dominated by brutal strongmen...”

The positive coverage was identified in the articles praising Nazarbayev for making Kazakhstan non-nuclear after the collapse of the USSR. In March 2012, the NYT published the president's op-ed contribution titled "What Iran can learn from Kazakhstan" (Nazarbayev, 2012). Recalling how Kazakhstan began to prosper by ditching the nuclear weapons it inherited from the Soviet Union, Nazarbayev urged Tehran to follow his example and abandon the development of nuclear weapons. The WP's reporting from the Kazakh city of Kurchatov near the former testing site of nuclear bombs had a conclusion: "President Nursultan Nazarbayev, disturbed by the remnants of Cold War-era Soviet nuclear, biological and chemical weapons programs that had been carried out in his country, actively backed nonproliferation efforts". Its report was published on August 18, 2013, prior to International Day against the Nuclear Tests. The WSJ, in 2018, reported on the meeting between Trump and Nazarbayev in Washington D.C. and conveyed Nazarbayev's words that Kazakhstan had renounced its Soviet nuclear arsenal and had the right to engage in disarmament negotiations with countries, like North Korea, seeking to create nuclear weapons. The RFE/RL's report followed the Kazakh officials' statement, which was made in November 2012, that in 1992 Nazarbayev rejected a "multi-billion of dollar" assistance from Muammar Gaddafi, then the Libyan leader, to preserve the former Soviet nuclear arsenals; and called Nazarbayev a 'Man of Peace' in this regard. The same narratives appeared in the local media in Kazakhstan simultaneously. These publications coincided with the proposals made by politicians in different countries, including the United States, to nominate Nazarbayev for the Nobel Peace Prize for his contribution to denuclearization. The coverage of three U.S. newspapers and RFE/RL was counted as positive as they did not mention the aspects that would balance the official narrative, such as Nazarbayev using the nuclear arsenal as an instrument of political bargaining. This side of the story is described in the Eurasianet's analysis, which cites witnesses from that period, including the former Secretary of State James Baker, according to whose accounts, Nazarbayev often changed his mind about giving up the nuclear power raising stakes.

The findings of the content analysis did not support Hypothesis 2, suggesting that the non-profit media outlets reviewed in this thesis are not homogeneous in their coverage of the first Kazakh president. While these media outlets are generally considered independent and less controlled, it is worth noting that at least one of them, RFE/RL, appeared to be more constrained when it came to assessing and directly criticizing

Nazarbayev, and followed a more official position in reporting. As depicted in Chart 5, RFE/RL refrained from publishing direct criticism against Nazarbayev during the reviewed period and avoided labeling him as an *autocrat* during his presidency. In contrast, the commercial media outlets admitted direct criticism of Nazarbayev. The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Wall Street Journal referred to him as an *autocrat* and, in rare cases, as a *dictator*, providing additional context regarding his rule in a non-competitive environment, the suppression of influential opponents, and his cult of personality.

The form of ownership and funding are other aspects to be taken into account in the analysis. The NYT, the WP and the WSJ newspapers are private, belong to media conglomerates, and are often driven by commercial interests and focused on audience acquisition and profit generation. In such cases, the content may tend to be sensationalist (Bourdieu, 2002), attractive, and appealing to a wide readership, which may affect the selection of topics, presentation of facts, and coverage priorities. Meanwhile, RFE/RL and Eurasianet are non-commercial news organizations, both have the mission to provide unfree societies with unbiased information and independent analysis. Both proclaim to be guided by the public interest and democratic principles, so their content can be more independent and critical (Bourdieu, 2002).

While classified as commercial media, which, according to Bourdieu's concept, are more susceptible to economic and political pressures, three newspapers presented a critical perspective, sometimes even more critical than RFE/RL and Eurasianet. Also, as it was revealed by the content analysis, the WP and the WSJ did not cover such extensive topics as the longstanding conflict between Nazarbayev and his former son-in-law, Rakhat Aliyev, who in 2007 became the influential insider exposing wrongdoings of the Kazakh leadership and was found dead in 2015. Aliyev, former Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Austria and a former top official of the Committee of National Security, was accused in Astana of kidnapping and murdering two bankers in 2007. Aliyev claimed that the case was politically motivated, as the charges against him were brought after he began criticizing his father-in-law. The Austrian authorities, who twice refused to extradite Aliyev to Kazakhstan due to the human rights situation in Kazakhstan, launched their own investigation in 2011. The Austrian prosecutor's office officially charged Aliyev in 2014, by which time he was already in the Josefstadt prison in Vienna. As reported by

Aliyev's lawyers, his client turned himself into the Austrian police. His confrontation with Nazarbayev stretched from Astana to Europe and the USA, as Aliyev became an informant on how the then-Kazakh president enlisted political support from top U.S. officials, including Bill Clinton (Roston, 2009; Mayr, 2009). His visit to Kazakhstan in 2005 resulted in a multi-million donation to his foundation received from a mining company of the Canadian businessman Frank Giustra who during this visit secured the right to uranium excavation in Kazakhstan (according to the U.S. former president's spokesperson, Mr. Clinton said he did nothing for this deal), was extensively covered by the NYT (Becker & McIntire, 2015), which investigation became newsworthy for other international media. The NYT, as well as RFE/RL and Eurasianet followed then the most key developments of the conflict between Aliyev and Nazarbayev. However, searching for any related articles from 2011-2022 on this topic on the websites and archives of the WP and the WSJ yielded no results, although initially these media covered the conflict when it erupted in 2007. All reviewed newspapers from the commercial media group did not cover the death of Nazarbayev's grandson, Aisultan Nazarbayev, son of deceased Rakhat Aliyev, in London after he made a number of statements on corruption in the energy sector controlled then by the Nazarbayev's family. In both cases, these topics presented numerous sensational developments that were extensively covered by RFE/RL and Eurasianet, including the controversial statement of Aisultan Nazarbayev that he was in fact a son of Nursultan Nazarbayev, not a grandson. This illustrates that non-profit media also tend to publish sensational news stories to attract readers and generate more views on their websites. RFE/RL and Eurasianet have the same audiences - both reports in English and Russian languages to reach audiences in countries like Kazakhstan. Additionally, both media have local representations in Kazakhstan - Eurasianet's bureau is situated in Almaty, RFE/RL has two bureaus in Almaty and Astana; and their accredited staff includes local journalists and editors who live and work in the country. Many analyzed articles from RFE/RL had a disclaimer that they were based on reports of its Kazakh Service, which publishes in two languages - Kazakh and Russian. These articles are later translated into English and processed for the entire RFE/RL corporation, being released on the main website in English.

It is important to note that within the non-profit media group, there were also differences between them. Eurasianet, for instance, published a greater number of articles that portrayed Nazarbayev in a more critical light, highlighting developments that painted a

less favorable picture of his leadership. For example, RFE/RL and Eurasianet provided different coverage of Nursultan Nazarbayev's visit to the oil city of Zhanaozen a few days after the violent crackdown on protesters, including many ordinary workers from the national oil company, on December 16, 2011. Most of the narrative in the article in RFE/RL focused on the fact that the president of Kazakhstan dismissed several leaders and officials in the oil and gas industry, portraying him as being above the fray. Eurasianet, in commenting on these developments, offered its analysis suggesting that Nazarbayev was distancing himself from the conflict between the strikers and their employer, as well as the social inequality that had emerged in the region due to unfavorable labor conditions and the underpayment of oil workers. Nazarbayev arrived in Zhanaozen immediately after a video depicting the brutal suppression of demonstrators was posted online. The video vividly showed police shooting at unarmed people, chasing and beating them with batons. Prior to the emergence of this video evidence, president Nazarbayev had stated that the protests were provoked by 'hooligans and drunks' (Dave, 2012). In the RFE/RL report, there was a prevalence of references to official sources of information, whereas Eurasianet provided its own analysis and commentary to complement the official information. Unlike RFE/RL, Eurasianet pointed to the fact that Nazarbayev's son-in-law, Timur Kulibayev, who was among dismissed top officials, owned large interests in the oil and gas sector in Kazakhstan, and who continued to exercise control over the country's energy resources also after his dismissal (Peyrouse, 2012). The episode illustrates that Eurasianet provided more context in this regard than RFE/RL.

These non-profit media have different structures of financing sources. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty has one source of funding - a grant from the U.S. Congress that is being annually allocated through the USAGM agency which besides RFE/RL manages another such organizations like Voice of America, Radio Marti, Radio Free Asia, and etc. According to the USAGM's website, eight members of its Board are appointed by the U.S. president and confirmed by the Senate; the ninth, the Secretary of State, served ex officio (USAGM, n.d.). Meanwhile, Eurasianet receives funding from several grantmakers from two countries - the United States of America and the United Kingdom. Based at Columbia University's Harriman Institute in New York, it is funded by Google, the Open Society Foundations, the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, the National Endowment for Democracy, Columbia University's Saltzman Institute of

War and Peace Studies and other grant-making institutions, and are advised by a board of trustees (Eurasianet, n.d.).

It appears that a variety of sources of media funding is a key factor that directly influences the selection and highlighting of aspects of a news story, its representation and providing analysis (Entman, 1993). The funding diversity is likely to enable the media to be more independent in this regard, without fearing censorship and occurring such filters like 'flak' (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). Besides, the Eurasianet's base is more academic, whereas the RFE/RL's funding source is close to the top of the 'cascade' with the political decision-making centers atop from where ideas and influences are dropping to media that frame them and pass then to public (Entman, 2003; 2004, p. 10). Herman and Chomsky (1988, p. 28) directly called Radio Free Europe 'a U.S. government body,' when they described how the 'flak' filter works within the propaganda model. The propaganda model revealed by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988, p. 2) is still actual and influential, which filters - the influences of ownership, advertising, sourcing news, 'flak,' ideological biases of journalists and editors in the selection of information sources and the decision to provide their audiences with analysis - continue to shape media content to this day. The study's findings represent another illustration of how these filters do their job significantly affecting content, priorities and approaches in information coverage.

5.3. Comparison with Similar Studies

The framing used to portray Nursultan Nazarbayev in the reviewed U.S. media relates to his style of governance, with no significant personal references. In contrast to Nazarbayev, the first president of Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyazov, who ruled this Central-Asian country from 1985 until his death in 2006, in Western media was frequently ridiculed and portrayed as an 'eccentric despot' who was "well known for his idiosyncratic orders". This observation was made in Eric Freedman's study "*Framing the Turkmenbashi: Western Press Portrayals of the Late President of Turkmenistan*" (2007). Content analysis of 55 articles on events in Turkmenistan published by BBC, Eurasianet, and the Institute for War and Peace Reporting between 1 July 2004 - 30 June, 2005, revealed the presence of two frames: one appealing to Niyazov's personality and the other to his style of ruling. Belittling wordings, such as *idiosyncratic, eccentric, extravagant, fickle,* and others, were often used to create a context to describe his personality. Epithets

used to describe his style of power included terms like *autocratic*, *totalitarian*, '*grip on power*,' *dictatorship*, *tyrant, despotic, 'tough is sometimes unreliable*,' and etc. One of the concerns of the study was that the prevalence of such frames focusing on personalization could detract from the understanding of Turkmenistan, and as a result, the Western audience may miss crucial information about the serious problems in areas such as the economy, security politics, energy, the environment, and so on. According to the author of the research, Eric Freedman, creation and spreading frames represent a risk for the media and its audience as well because it leads to usage of 'simplistic formulas' to explain foreign nations.

A study conducted in 2003 and titled "*The Transformation of the Image of Nursultan Nazarbayev on the Pages of The New York Times (1989-2001)*" is the closest content analysis research to the topic of this thesis that the researcher found during a search of the similar studies. One of its findings was that, from 1989 to the mid-1990s, the NYT newspaper portrayed president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, as a progressive, independent politician capable of turning the former Soviet republic into capitalism. However, by the end of the 1990s, there was a dramatic change in his image, and he became associated with an autocrat and a corrupt official. This change was referred to as the deterioration of relations between the Kazakh government and the White House. The study concluded that while the Kazakh authorities followed the position of the United States and acted in accordance with their interests, the image of Nazarbayev remained positive for the NYT's readers. However, after supposedly "the main American goals in the Central Asian republic were achieved" by the mid-1990s, interest in Nazarbayev began to fade away, and his image transformed for the worse, changing to an autocrat by the end of the 1990s. The article's conclusions suggested that the U.S. authorities encouraged Nazarbayev's resistance to the Kremlin, as they did not want to recreate the USSR led by Russia, and they also needed the Kremlin's critics. The entire work seemed to have been written under the influence of the ideological confrontation between the Kremlin and the White House.

The content analysis in this current thesis did not analyze events related to the Kazakh leadership's balancing between interests of Moscow and Washington D.C., as the topic deserves separate extensive research. This study takes a different angle and aims to reveal

which specific aspects were emphasized or disregarded by the media when covering Nazarbayev. The concern of the thesis is more about the position of the socio-political context in journalistic reports in the leading U.S. media, whether it is present and how deeply it is addressed.

5.4. Limitations

It is important to note that the thesis does not assert itself as a comprehensive study of Nursultan Nazarbayev's media framing in the U.S. media, as the data sample's scope is limited. The coding of the articles was made by the researcher herself, without hiring coders. Furthermore, the lack of studies analyzing the coverage of the first Kazakh president in foreign media prevented the researcher from tracking and comparing the changing media analyses of Nazarbayev's image over time in response to different events, and comparing it with current framing effects.

Nevertheless, this study is based on the reliable and established methodologies of previously conducted similar content analysis on various themes, and takes a distinctive angle to compare coverage between different types of media. The findings might contribute to the broader inquiry into how Western media cover the situation in Central Asia.

Chapter 6. Discussion

The terms and labels used to describe Nursultan Nazarbayev in the examined media during the reviewed period were quite restrained. More often, he was referred to as a *president, a longtime leader/ruler/president, strongman*, and a few times - as an *autocrat* or *authoritarian leader*. The strongest vocabulary includes *brutal dictator*, *corrupt*, *firm grip*, *tight control*, and *repressive government*, and they were encountered infrequently. As expected, the reviewed media indeed applied a technique of selection and highlighting of certain aspects and features of a news story in their approach to coverage (Entman, 1993). This was most clearly visible in the analyzed articles with positive coverage, where the examined media - NYT, WP WSJ, and RFE/RL - endorsed Nursultan Nazarbayev for his decision to renounce nuclear weapons. Their articles emphasized that it was

Nazarbayev who played a crucial role in the non-proliferation of the remaining nuclear weapons in Kazakhstan from the Soviet Union, despite that it was not easy at a time when some other nations desired nuclear capabilities. The analysis published by Eurasianet highlighted what was omitted by those media. For example, it emphasized certain moments during negotiations between Nazarbayev and then-U.S. Secretary of State, James Baker, which were characterized as tough and hard, such as when Nazarbayev seemed to have changed his decision, he was given a "stern warning" that American missiles were targeted at every intercontinental ballistic missile located in Kazakhstan (Kucera, 2013). Eurasianet's article also provided its assessment of how most media cover the story of Nazarbayev's renunciation of nuclear weapons, describing it as a sentimental and 'mawkish narrative' and suggesting that journalists may have fallen for the official version of the story. The article's author, Joshua Kucera, referred to it as a brilliant PR strategy of Kazakhstan's leadership, achieving positive media coverage without having to pay for it. As was mentioned in Chapter 2, highlighting the relinquishing of nuclear power was a part of Tony Blair's recommendations for the Kazakh leadership in their engagement with Western media (Human Rights Watch, 2012; Michel, 2016).

The commercial media directly label Nazarbayev as a *dictator* or *autocrat*, presenting him in this critical light in their headlines and the articles' intros without the need for quotation marks or referencing other sources. Furthermore, they provided context about the socio-political situation that aligns with such representation, leaving readers with no questions about the choice of such wordings. Non-profit media, on the other hand, are more restrained in their formulations. Both RFE/RL and Eurasianet, in their articles, avoided directly calling Nazarbayev an *autocrat*, let alone using the term *dictator.* However, it does not mean that these media outlets did not shed light on events in a critical manner. They mentioned the cult of personality, the non-competitive political environment in Kazakhstan, corruption, human rights violations, social inequality, and other negative references. However, the findings revealed the differences not only between the two media groups but also inside the non-profit group. Eurasianet more often than RFE/RL offered its critical analysis, independently interpreting events without relying on expert commentary or other sources. RFE/RL provided critical in-depth analysis only citing other sources and when official positions and interpretations were not

dominant. The reviewed RFE/RL's news reports contained more official narratives as the most cited sources were Nazarbayev himself or other officials.

The analysis did not confirm that the commercial media group would tend to offer more sensational stories than the non-profit media within the thesis's topic. For example, not all examined newspapers reported on the sensational news around the death of Nazarbayev's former son-in-law, Rakhat Aliyev, and the death of his grandson, Aisultan Nazarbayev, whereas this topic was consistently covered by the non-profit media group. The researcher cannot argue that this conclusion directly contradicts Bourdieu's concept (2002), according to which commercial media, subject to market pressures, tend to offer more sensational news, as television and tabloids fall more into his model of commercial media. Print media, on the other hand, he classified as 'pure' and independent. The NYT, the WP, and the WSJ newspapers, according to Bourdieu's criteria, might fall into this second model, as they primarily publish analyses and news related to politics, economy, and international relations (Benson, 2006). However, for this thesis, these media were classified as commercial based mainly on their type of financing and their aims to generate profits. After all, they are 'leading newspaper empires,' profit-seeking corporations (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. 5).

During the content analysis, a trend was discovered that was not initially included in the research questions and objectives, but it is nonetheless interesting in the context of the thesis's topic. In some articles in the U.S. media, messages were encountered that were shaped by the Kazakh government to promote their image abroad. For instance, the frame of the economic prosperity of the Kazakh nation (Schatz & Maltseva, 2012), which was presented in the analyses of all newspapers and RFE/RL of the reviewed events such as the resignation of Kazakhstan's first president and the 2022 Bloody January in Almaty, was attributed to the merits of Nursultan Nazarbayev. Sometimes, the media themselves directly offered comments that "credited Nazarbayev" for certain achievements, or they quoted experts or former international officials, for example, the former U.S. ambassador to Kazakhstan William Courtney, who also listed achievements and compared Nazarbayev's regime with other tough autocrats but in more favorable lights. However, some studies and reports provide sufficient arguments against such comments, suggesting that claims of stability in Kazakhstan, both in economic and social terms, may be nothing

more than a myth (Isaacs, 2010; Fix, 2012; Stronski, 2016). The identification of government-framed messages in journalistic texts, where the achievements of former president Nazarbayev are attributed to economic prosperity and the emergence of the middle class in Kazakhstan, can be seen as supporting the concept of 'cascade' activation, as explained by Robert Entman (2003; 2004, p. 10). This concept describes how the government and elite exert political influence on public opinion by engaging and influencing journalists. Researchers in media framing (Druckman, 2001; D'Angelo, 2002; Van Gorp, 2007) have concluded that it is impossible to change an individual's position solely through broadcast messages completely, but it is possible to set the direction of thought by choosing information and the submission method. If the mechanism of repetition increases the persuasiveness of the transmitted meanings, its purpose is limited only to attracting the attention of the audience, otherwise, additional repetition reduces the power of persuasion. Therefore, the repetition mechanism only applies when the messages are barely noticed. Secondly, repetition is accompanied not only by focusing the audience's attention on certain aspects of the phenomenon but also by the silence of other aspects (Entman 1993; 2003; 2004). Thirdly, the interpreted storyline contains not only the articulation of the problem situation but also, as a rule, certain moral judgments and a description of the preferred ways of solving the problem. Therefore, framing is a process of constructing political reality by the media, which once again confirms that framing initially carries not only an element of subjective perception of reality but also some manipulative potential.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

The thesis's research supported Hypothesis 1, which suggested that if Nursultan Nazarbayev was described neutrally as *president* or *leader* and positively as the *man of peace*, then the article would focus on positive developments and achievements, would present a more official interpretation of events and would ignore some uncomfortable aspects of a story related to Nazarbayev. On the other hand, the terms *autocrat* or, in rare instances, *dictator* were used in articles reporting on newly emerging crises, human rights violations, persecution of opponents, etc. The study confirmed the first hypothesis as the media tends to select certain facts and aspects of an event, phenomenon, or personality to prominently present while ignoring or suppressing other sides of a news story. The

research revealed that both groups of media have ignored some problematic aspects of Nazarbayev's governance when evaluating his legacy regarding the 2022 January events in Almaty; as well as in reports covering events such as the 2011 Zhanaozen uprising crackdown. The media's treatment of this topic could have been much more critical, considering the evaluation of the Zhanaozen events as the most “egregious examples of repressions” (Human Right Foundations, 2022). It is worth noting that demonstrating a neutral approach towards the foreign leader, the NYT from the commercial media group, was more critical of the U.S. authorities for turning a blind eye to this kind of problem in Kazakhstan due to the interests in the country's oil and gas sector (Kramer, 2011). Notably, all media ensured that the official point of view was fully represented in the articles. When the main sources of information were human rights groups, activists, opposition, and citizens, they were presented equally alongside official sources, which means there was no imbalance of opinions. The balance of opinions was only disrupted when official sources of information predominated.

According to findings, the NYT, the WP and the WSJ newspapers seem to have more freedom in choosing definitions and portrayals of Nursultan Nazarbayev, than the examined non-profit media. In Hypothesis 2, the opposite was assumed. Most of the critical analysis was presented in the reviewed articles of commercial media and Eurasianet. The non-profit media turned out to be diverse or heterogeneous regarding the funding sources and their disposition and relation to the top of Robert Entman's cascading network that activates frames (2003; 2004, p.10). Taking into account the CIA involvement in its foundation (Cone, 1999; Johnson, 2010), RFE/RL has more political or governmental ground, and it relies on a grant from the U.S. Congress, allocated annually through the USAGM agency, whose Board consists of eight members, appointed by the U.S. president and confirmed by the U.S. Senate, and the ex officio Secretary of State (USAGM, n.d.). On the other hand, Eurasianet receives funding from various grantmakers in two countries, the United States and the United Kingdom, and it is based on academic circles. Not all commercial media covered the sensational topic, unlike the non-profit group. This can be explained by the fact that the selected commercial media are not tabloids, which best fits Pierre Bourdieu's definition of being more inclined to report sensations rather than presenting an in-depth analysis of world events (2002). Meanwhile, non-commercial media nowadays also competes for the attention of an

audience and aims to generate more views on its website. Articles and headlines with sensational content, and emotional stories, are parts of the strategies to increase traffic to websites and drive more views, which, in turn, may lead to growth in popularity or to enhance the authority of such media, even if its primary goal is not to raise advertising revenue.

This thesis may also serve as an illustration of the operation of filters, where U.S. media can still be influenced by external players, including the establishment and elites (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). Although Robert Entman (2004, p. 95) argues that in the post-Cold War period, it became challenging for the authorities in the United States to control the news, the media demonstrate independence and a critical approach. Nevertheless, in certain cases, the cascade model is still activated. The thesis demonstrated that influence and biases can manifest in various ways, such as the selection of sources, the emphasis placed on certain aspects of a story, or the framing in headlines and introductions. According to Robert Entman (2004, p. 124), media framing is inherent and inescapable: media consciously or unconsciously employs frames in news stories based on their values, editorial judgment, cultural and political norms, ownership structure, and relationship with the state. Even unconscious biases can affect editorial judgments, leading to a lack of diversity in perspectives and a skewed representation of events (Entman, 1993; Druckman, 2001; D'Angelo, 2002; Van Gorp, 2007).

In the context of an authoritarian regime, it is unsurprising that it employs tactics to create a better image and seek international acceptance. However, it becomes concerning when global media outlets assist authoritarian governments in their strategies of survival and legitimization. While it is acknowledged that media outlets are not always objective or politically neutral, they should refrain from participating in politicians' information campaigns or becoming tools in the hands of authorities. This issue becomes even more problematic when news organizations, whose mission is to promote democracy in unfree nations during their transition, provide informational support to such regimes. The thesis did not aim to corroborate the concerns expressed by media watchdog groups and other observers (BBG-USAGM Watch 2013; 2016; MacLeod, 2019; Leonard, 2019; Khashimova, 2019; Donati, 2019) that certain U.S. media outlets, including the examined by this thesis - the NYT, the WP and RFE/RL, were involved in disseminating laudatory

reports about Nazarbayev or other Central Asian autocrats. However, the research results imply that the majority of the reviewed U.S. media outlets refrained from being overtly critical towards Nursultan Nazarbayev and his regime, engaging in favorable comparisons and suggesting that he deserved credit for achievements such as economic growth, the emergence of Kazakhstan's middle class, societal stability, successful balancing between Russia and China, and others. Only when the media provided independent evaluation and direct criticism of Nursultan Nazarbayev with a wide range of opinions, these caveats were absent. Some of the examined U.S. media claim to freely report on the issues that are suppressed by the media in those countries, however, the analysis revealed that they, especially RFE/RL, tend to sometimes share the same coverage patterns with local media in Kazakhstan and can be affected by the propaganda model's filters as well. Such manipulative potential undermines the principles of journalistic integrity, freedom of the press, and the pursuit of pluralism. As the Eurasianet example shows, a variety of news sourcing for reports and diversity in media funding are obvious ways to reduce the impact of bias that can influence the editorial selection and presentation of news stories. It is crucial for media outlets to maintain their independence and uphold their commitment to objective reporting, exposing abuses of power, and holding governments accountable. The credibility and effectiveness of the media as a watchdog and advocate for democratic values rely on their unwavering dedication to these principles.

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List of appendices

Appendices

Appendix 1: Table 2. The list of reviewed articles.

Event/Topic	Media	Article's Headline	Date of publication
Zhanaozen Massacre	NYT	1. At Least 10 Die As Police Clash With Strikers In Kazakhstan 2. Kazakhstan Orders Curfew for Oil Town	Dec 17, 2011 Dec 17, 2011
	WP	3.Kazakhstan quickly slaps a lid on dissent 4. Electoral 'orchestration'	Jan 7, 2012 Jan 17, 2012
	WSJ	5.Kazakh Authorities Round Up More Activists 6.Critics of Kazakh President Protest in Four Cities	Feb 12, 2012 Feb 27, 2012
	RFE/RL	7.President Visits Troubled West Kazakhstan, Fires Officials 8.A Year After Deadly Riots, Zhanaozen Is Quiet But Angry	Dec 22, 2011 Dec 16, 2011
	Eurasianet	9.Kazakhstan: Nazarbayev Axes Officials, Distances Himself from Violence 10. Kazakhstan: Violence in Zhanaozen Threatens Nazarbayev Legacy	Dec 23, 2011 Dec 21, 2011
Nazarbayev and opposition	NYT	11.Deportation of Kazakhs Frays Italy's Government	July 19, 2013

(operation to detain in Italy and repatriate the wife and daughter of Mukhtar Ablyazov, oppositional politician and critic of Nazarbayev)	WP	12.Italy's shameful collusion with Kazakhstan	July 29, 2013
	WSJ	13.Legal Tussle Over Kazakh Former Banker	Sep 25, 2014
	RFE/RL	14.How Far Will Nazarbaev Go To Take Down Mukhtar Ablyazov?	June 7, 2013
	Eurasianet	15.Kazakhstan: The Oligarch, the Bank, and the Battle with Astana	Aug 6, 2013
Election in 2015	NYT	16.Kazakhstan's President Is Set to Win Fifth Term	April 27, 2015
	WP	17.Choosing stability, Kazakhs reelect longtime president	April 27, 2015
	WSJ	18.Kazakhstan's Longtime Leader Nazarbayev Secures Election Win; Preliminary results show President Nazarbayev with 97.7% of the vote	April 27, 2015
	RFE/RL	19.Nazarbaev Declared Winner With Over 97 Percent Of Kazakh Vote	April 27, 2015
	Eurasianet	20.Kazakhstan: Nazarbayev Apologetic for Lopsided Election Results	April 27, 2015
Nuclear Disarming as a Personal Trademark	NYT	21.What Iran Can Learn From Kazakhstan	Nov 25, 2012
	WP	22. Saving the world at Plutonium Mountain; Three countries, hundreds of pounds of unsecured nuclear material	August 18, 2013
	WSJ	23. Trump Meets Kazakh Leader in White House Visit	Jan 16, 2018

	RFE/RL	24.Qaddafi Got The Nuclear Snub From Kazakhstan	Nov 30, 2012
	Eurasianet	25.Why Did Kazakhstan Give Up Its Nukes?	May 15, 2013
EXPO 2017	NYT	26.Are You Ready to Invest in Kazakhstan?	Sep 10, 2017
	RFE/RL	27.Nazarbaev, Trump Discuss U.S.-Kazakh Relations In Phone Call	Sep 2, 2017
	Eurasianet	28.Kazakhstan: EXPO Draws Critics, and EXPOs Misfires Back 29. Kazakhstan's Expo: Vanity Fair or Imprint of the Future?	June 19, 2017 June 23, 2017
Resignation	NYT	30.Longtime Leader of Kazakhstan Resigns, Surprising Region	March 20, 2019
	WP	31. Kazakh President Nazarbayev has resigned. Here are three things to watch 32. Kazakhstan's Soviet-era ruler will step down — but won't be soon forgotten 33. A strongman's uneven legacy 34. What happens to Kazakhstan's dictatorship now that its dictator has quit?	March 20, 2019 March 29, 2019 March 30, 2019 April 25, 2019
	WSJ	35. Kazakhstan's President to Step Down After Almost Three Decades in Power; Central Asian nation faces its greatest period of uncertainty since fall of Soviet Union 36.Kazakh Leader Ends Long Reign 37. Oil-Rich Kazakhstan Calls Snap Election as Political Transition Gathers Pace; Vote will be the first since autocrat Nursultan Nazarbayev said he was stepping down 38. Police Detain 100 as Kazakhstan Votes in First Election Since Fall of Soviet Union; Critics have called undemocratic and said underscores growing authoritarianism	March 19, 2019 March 20, 2019 April 9, 2019 June 9, 2019

	RFE/RL	39. Nazarbaev's Decision To Leave Office Just Might Be His Greatest Legacy 40.Explainer: Kazakh President Nazarbaev Resigns, But Is He Really Leaving? 41.Kazakhstan Shows Managed Transition Not The Smoothest Path In Central Asia	March 19, 2019 March 19, 2019 May 14, 2019
	Eurasianet	42.Kazakhstan's leader resigns after almost 30 years in power 43.Perspectives | Other strongmen are watching Nazarbayev's experiment	March 19, 2019 March 22, 2019
Confrontation with former son in law, Rakhat Aliyev, and development.	NYT	44. Feud in Kazakh Presidents' Family Spill Into U.S. 45. Kaney's Kazakh cash-in $3 million payday from brutal dictator 46. A Former Insider From Kazakhstan Dies in a Vienna Jail.	May 30, 2011 Sep 3, 2013 Feb 25, 2015
	RFE/RL	47.Rivals In Kazakh Power Struggle Take Their Feud To Washington 48.Rakhat Aliev, Kazakh President's Former Son-In-Law, Found Dead In Austrian Jail 49. U.S. Dismisses Defamation Lawsuit Linked To Kazakh Family Feud 50.London Mansion Linked To Nazarbaev Family At Center Of British Court Battle 51. Death Of Kazakh Ex-President's Grandson Latest Dark Cloud Over Nazarbaev Family	June 23, 2011 Feb 24, 2015 Feb 18, 2016 March 10, 2020 Aug 18, 2020
	Eurasianet	52.Kazakhstan: US Rapper Under Fire for Nazarbayev Wedding Gig 53. Kazakhstan: Retrial Fails to Put Political Killing to Rest 54. Kazakhstan: Rakhatgate Saga Over as Former Son-in-Law Found Hanged 55.Kazakhstan: Troubled Nazarbayev grandson dies aged 29	Sep 3, 2013 Feb 11, 2014 Feb 24, 2015 Aug 17, 2020

Deadly January 2022	NYT	56. For Autocrats, the Perils of Finally Leaving Office 57. Power Struggle May Be Driving Kazakh Chaos 58. Ex-President Addresses Crisis Jolting Kazakhstan 59.Kazakhstan's Longtime Leader Is Gone, but Still Seemingly Everywhere	January 8, 2022 January 8, 2022 January 19, 2022 January 25, 2022
	WP	60.Another post-Soviet 'ruler for life' faces upheaval, as enormous protests sweep Kazakhstan 61.Top security official is detained as protest-roiled Kazakhstan settles into edgy calm 62.Kazakhstan's 'father of the nation' resurfaces, says he's retired after Russian intervention in bloody unrest	January 6, 2022 January 8, 2022 January 19, 2022
	WSJ	63.Mystery Surrounds Absence of Kazakhstan's Longtime Leader as Protesters Challenge State He Built 64. Kazakhstan Blames Violent Protests on Criminals; 'It Was Hell'; Rioting and looting erupted amid demonstrations over fuel prices; government and picketers alike see criminals involve 65.Kazakhstan's Former President Breaks Silence Over Unrest, Backs Successor; Nursultan Nazarbayev says he remained in country throughout recent violence, denies rift among elite	January 8, 2022 January 12, 2022 January 18, 2022
	RFE/RL	66.Nazarbaev Denies Conflict With President After Deadly Kazakh Unrest 67. Kazakhstan's Ruling Party Changes Its Name In Further Distancing From Nazarbaev	January 18, 2022 March 1, 2022

	Eurasianet	68.Kazakhstan: Nazarbayev resurfaces to deny intra-elite clash claims 69. Kazakhstan: De-Nazarbayevification picks up steam, but is it just for show? 70.Perspectives | Unpacking Nazarbayev Inc.	Jan 18, 2022 Jan 20, 2022 Jan 31, 2022

Appendix 2: Codebook.

The commercial media:

1. The New York Times
2. The Washington Post
3. The Wall Street Journal

The non-profit media:

4. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
5. Eurasianet

Article published date: month, date, year

Article's type:

1. **News** report focuses only on the facts.
2. **In-depth analysis** featured a report, profile on a person, problem, balanced with a wide range of opinions, analysis, conclusions.
3. **Commentary** – editorial column that contains the writer's opinion.

Event/Topic

Please choose the main topic, should be one.

1. Zhanaozen events
2. A special operation to detain in Italy and repatriate the wife and daughter of fugitive oppositional politician, Mukhtar Ablyazov
3. The Presidential Election in 2015
4. Nuclear Disarmament as a Personal Trademark
5. EXPO-2017
6. Resignation
7. Confrontation between Nazarbayev and his former son-in-law Rakhat Aliyev, and its development throughout 2013-2020
8. Bloody January, 2022

Issue(s) (might be more than one)

Mark the presents of further issues. Keep in mind that the theme(s) should be clearly present in the article item and could be identified by almost anyone.

1. Authoritarianism
2. Corruption
3. Cult of Personality
4. Election fraud
5. Economic issues
6. Human rights issues
7. Lack of freedom of press, speech, assemble
8. Nepotism, control of the resources by the elite, oligarchy
9. Persecution of opposition
10. Social inequality
11. Suppression of dissent, repressions

Representation. Please mark if any of these titles/definitions (or forms of them) were mentioned in the article's headline:

1. President
2. Autocrat, authoritarian leader/ruler
3. Dictator
4. Leader/Leader of the Nation
5. Longtime ruler/leader/president
6. Mr. Nazarbayev
7. Strongman
8. Man of Peace

Coverage (measurement of reflection or non-reflection to issues, conditions, evaluations):

1. Balanced/mixed (both positive and negative sides).
2. Positive (social cohesion, co-operation, stability, economic development and strength).

3. Negative (conflicts, disorganization, instability, socio-political issues listed above, and weakness).
4. Neutral (neither positive nor negative, contain no explicit evaluative references).

Sources (by number of paragraphs):

1. Activists, citizens
2. Document (laws, amendments, agreements, treaties, reports, archive files, etc)
3. Experts
4. Human Rights Groups/Defender
5. International officials
6. Kazakh officials
7. Media
8. Nazarbayev
9. Opposition

Balance of opinions (sources that prevail balanced or not with others):

1. Balanced (The most cited source does not prevail over others)
2. Unbalanced (The most cited source prevails over others)

Direct criticism against Nazarbayev (provided by media itself without quoting experts or organizations)**:**

1. Present
2. Absent

Appendix 3. Sampling data. As the size of the Excel table with the samplings is too big, it may be found **here.**