

national chauvinism). More generally, it is committed, as are the ex-communist apparat and the clans it represents, to retaining power.

Although there is considerable freedom of expression and association in Kazakhstan, there is little evidence of any willingness on the part of the government to contemplate a transfer of power. This is perhaps not a bad thing. Nazarbaev, although authoritarian and favouring his own ethnic subgroup, nonetheless runs a reasonably efficient government (by former Soviet standards) and is perhaps the single guarantee of civil peace in the republic.

The transition to independence was not accompanied by the rampant popular activism common elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. Most of the parties in Kazakhstan have roots in the antinuclear movement, Nevada-Semipalatinsk, which was formed in the perestroika era to protest continuing nuclear testing and the environmental consequences of past tests at Semipalatinsk, the principal Soviet testing ground. The movement was officially sanctioned by the Kazakh leadership and had representation in Parliament. In other words, it was at least in part a co-opted extension of the communist party structure.

As a result, political groups entered the period of independence with little experience of political organization or building coalitions in pursuit of common interests. They tended to be small, personalistic, politically ineffectual, and frequently organized along ethnically exclusive lines.²⁶ They also tended to be highly unstable, forming, splitting, and reforming continually. Significantly, Nazarbaev and his government have consciously avoided party affiliation.

Parliamentary elections were held in March 1994. Presidential elections are scheduled for 1996. The parliamentary elections were the result of a gradual delegitimation of the previous parliament. In late 1993, in the face of increasing pressure from the state, many local and regional legislative bodies began to dissolve themselves to prepare the way for new elections (and apparently with the encouragement of the president). In November, this spread to the national Supreme Soviet, when 40 members resigned, calling for the replacement of this holdover from the Soviet era with a modern, democratic and professional legislature. This move apparently also had the support of the president. The Supreme Soviet ultimately responded by dissolving itself and setting a date of March 7, 1994, for new legislative elections.

²⁶ Our researchers in Almaty maintain, however, that with the passage of time, ethnically based parties such as Lad and Alash have been eclipsed by larger interethnic movements such as the National Congress of Kazakhstan and Popular Unity.