

*Mergen Dyussenov*¹

Abstract

Notwithstanding the evolution in agenda-setting theories, their major assumption has been a passive stance of the government. More recent scholars (e.g. Boin et al., 2009), while taking an actor-centric approach to analysing agenda-setting processes in the EU, explicitly assume an ability of other actors, both inside and outside the government, to effectively exploit crisis events that emerge on policy arenas by aggressively pushing their own narratives and frames and thus setting the government agenda. While similarly taking an actor-centric approach to studying agenda-setting interactions, this paper seeks to fill a gap in existing policy research by explicitly assuming the government's capacity and motivation to withstand the external pressure that is often exerted by other key actors, and thus by introducing a concept of government resilience as applied to agenda-setting. It furthermore attempts to quantify the notion of government resilience, thus addressing the issue of operationalising a change in public policy. Reflective of growing calls among scholars to look into policy change in the developing world, this paper develops a framework that could be useful not only in assessing the degree of resilience of a certain actor, e.g. the government, as applied to agenda-setting but used as a diagnostic tool to assess the government's capacity to pursue its agenda and implement policy measures. Seeking to explore the potential applicability of the new framework in the context of economic diversification across two post-Soviet nations – Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan – this study looks into the time span of 2008-2017.

Keywords: *agenda setting theories, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, government resilience, economic diversification.*

Introduction

The agenda-setting stage remains the most critical stage in the policy process, which pre-determines the remaining stages of the policy cycle (Howlett et al., 2009; Peters, 2015). Since the original agenda-setting theory was developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), which posits the strong role of mass media vis-à-vis other key actors in setting policy agenda, e.g. the government and the public, this area of public policy research has evolved to incorporate not only a wider range of actors in agenda-setting interactions, e.g. academia, think tanks, advocacy groups etc (see, for example, Dyussenov 2017 for a summary of major actors), but to analyse multiple directions and reciprocal causality patterns (e.g. Neuman et al., 2014).

All these evolutions notwithstanding, the agenda-setting theory has so far largely assumed the government's rather passive stance (Boin et al., 2009; Kingdon, 1984; McCombs and Shaw, 1972). Especially relevant with regard to the government's interactions in the context of actor-centric agenda-setting processes is the work of Boin et al. (2009), who explicitly assume an ability of other actors, both inside and outside the government, to exploit emerging crisis events by aggressively pushing their own narratives and solutions and thus setting their agenda on the government. Their theory of *crisis exploitation* in agenda-setting posits the government's limited ability to withstand the pressure from external actors (ibid).

This paper seeks to fill this gap as it applies to the evolving agenda-setting theory. First, it attempts to describe a new government resilience framework grounded on the explicit assumption of the actors' sufficient capacity and motivation to effectively withstand external pressures in the context of highly contested agenda-setting interactions among advocacy

¹ Head of the Research Centre for Studies on Anti-Corruption Issues; Chief Instructor / Lecturer on Public Policy Analysis, Academy of Public Administration, Republic of Kazakhstan. Email: mergend7@gmail.com

groups (Schattschneider, 1960), or 'policy entrepreneurs' (Kingdon, 1984), and among other actors either inside or outside the government (Boin et al., 2009). Second, reflective of the growing calls to analyse policy change in the developing world (Richardson, 2009; Steinberg, 2003), the new framework is applied to assessing the relative degree of government resilience across two Central Asian nations – Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan – with regard to economic diversification policies.

Literature review

The notion of resilience has increasingly become useful across a wide range of fields, predominantly within physical and ecological systems (Bodin and Wiman, 2004; Holling, 1973; Walker et al., 2004; Gunderson, 2000; Tilman and Downing, 1994; Bhamra et al., 2011); in climate change and disaster management (Surminski and Leck, 2017; Leal Filho et al., 2016; Aoki, 2016; Aoki, 2015; McEvoy et al., 2013); in psychology (Zautra et al., 2010; Capano and Woo, 2017; Luthans et al., 2006; Vickers and Kouzmin, 2001) and especially in children psychology (Benard, 1993; Forman and Kalafat, 1998; Stoiber and Good, 1998; Vickers and Kouzmin, 2001); in criminology and mental health (Bourbeau, 2015); in NPM-driven organisational actors' resilience² (McNulty and Ferlie, 2004; Vickers and Kouzmin, 2001; Hamel and Valikangas, 2004); and in engineering (Hollnagel et al., 2006; Vickers and Kouzmin, 2001; Baker et al., 2004; Capano and Woo, 2017).

Review of resilience research in public policy

Resilience has also recently sparked scholarly interest in the fields of public policy (Capano and Woo, 2017; Boin et al., 2009), political science and international politics (Bourbeau, 2015), and local governments (Lowndes and McCaughie, 2013). The relative novelty of the resilience notion in public policy research suggests that scholars are yet to articulate with sufficient precision the evolving definition of resilience as applied to policy processes.

One useful way to analyse an array of definitions of resilience as applied to public policy processes is in terms of *definitional rigidity*. On one, somewhat rigid, side of the spectrum lies the definition of the resilience notion as suggested by Capano and Woo (2017), who assess the applicability of two related notions – resilience and robustness – across policy processes and policy design. In defining resilience, it is suggested that its key distinctive characteristic is “*a heightened desire to maintain a stable equilibrium*” (p. 407), as contrasted with the notion of robustness: “*Unlike resilience, the stability that a robust system regains after recovering from shock... may not resemble its pre-shock state*” (Capano and Woo 2017: 405). Next, in the middle of the spectrum is the definition of resilience developed by Nair and Howlett (2016), who analyse resilience as a crucial means of avoiding policy traps applied to climate change adaptation. Contrasting the two notions, the authors note that while robustness implies an ability of a policy to adapt to linear changes, resilience enables the policy not only to withstand linear but also non-linear context changes, and embraces “*the elements of flexibility and adaptability, that is, the ability of the system to adapt and retain its key structure and functions under stress by being flexible*” (Davoudi et al.; 2012; Nair and Howlett, 2016: 911). Last, but not least, on the other side is the definition offered by Bourbeau (2015). Inspired originally by criminologists and social workers, the author analyses the notion of resilience through the lens of international politics and he defines resilience as “*the process of patterned adjustments adopted by a society or an individual in the face of endogenous or exogenous shocks*” and further referring to it as “*an inherently dynamic and complex process*” (Bourbeau, 2015: 375). According to this specific definition, while change may

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originate from both external and internal sources, the outcome does not need to return to the pre-shock state of affairs.

To the contrary of the above-listed sources, McEvoy et al. (2013), while applying resilience to climate change adaptation in Australia through the lens of policy processes, fall short of providing a specific definition of resilience. First, the authors refer to the following three characteristics of the resilience concept as suggested by recent scholarly research: (1) resilience is viewed as a response to disturbance; (2) as a capacity of a system to self-organise; and (3) as the learning and adaptation capacity (Adger et al., 2011; Turner II, 2010; Folke, 2006; McEvoy et al., 2013). Second, the Australian federal government develops generic attributes of what should constitute resilience in the Australian context, with community and organisational resilience being key elements in the new frame of resilience discourse as applied to climate change adaptation (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011, in McEvoy et al., 2013). This lack of a concise definition is not by any means negative but is conducive to a plethora of solutions to address the wicked issue of climate change adaptation allowing policy makers to “*address new challenges using system-based approaches*” (McEvoy et al., 2013: 289). Thus, this generic definition of resilience may travel across the degrees of definitional rigidity depending on a specific reference framework employed by different communities in resilience discourse (McManus et al., 2012; McEvoy et al., 2013).

The summary of the above definitions of resilience is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: The spectrum of resilience definitional rigidity in the context of public policy

	The degree of definitional rigidity		
	<i>(Somewhat) rigid</i>	<i>Flexible</i>	<i>Dynamic</i>
Author(s)	Capano and Woo (2017)	Nair and Howlett (2016)	Bourbeau (2015)
Brief context	A critical assessment of resilience and robustness in the context of policy processes and design.	A descriptive analysis of applicability of resilience versus robustness to climate change adaptation.	An application of the resilience notion to the context of international politics and international relations.

Source: The author’s own analysis of literature

Review of resilience research in agenda-setting

While resilience discourse appears to be emerging in the context of public policy, there is a scarcity of resilience research specifically applied to agenda-setting processes. First, as mentioned earlier, McEvoy et al. (2013) look into resilience from the viewpoint of strengthening local communities in the face of climate change. Though the role of the federal government is recognised in terms of setting a partnership with local businesses and communities and developing a generic definition of resilience, the authors view the notion of resilience as adaptation of communities to climate change, but not as government resilience against the external pressure of other actors in the context of agenda-setting. Similarly, while Capano and Woo (2017) attempt to answer the question: resilient against *what?* i.e. unexpected events, ‘black swans’ that tend to disturb the functions of society (Ho, 2008, 2012a; Taleb, 2010, 2012, as in Capano and Woo, 2017), or crisis and ‘focusing events’ especially prominent in agenda-setting (Birkland, 1998), the question: resilient against *whom?* i.e. other key actors that push their own agendas and solutions onto the government with regard to specific policy issues, remains largely unanswered.

One particularly interesting source that attempts to answer the ‘resilient against *whom?*’ question - as raised by Capano and Woo (2017) - in the context of *actor-centric agenda-setting*

processes comes from Boin et al. (2009), who analyse a series of cases related to framing contests as driven by 'focusing events' (Birkland, 1998) that take place across EU nations. These crisis events are immediately exploited by other actors both inside and outside the government that seek to destabilise established policies and newly elected government figures by aggressively pushing their own frames and narratives and thus effectively setting their agendas on the government. This (agenda-setting) theory of *crisis exploitation*, defined as "*the purposeful utilisation of crisis-type rhetoric to significantly alter levels of political support for public office-holders and public policies*" (Boin et al., 2009: 83), thus seeks to analyse both political and policy dimensions of impact. However, while the authors largely take an actor-centric approach to analysing agenda-setting processes among the government and other actors, e.g. media and opposition forces, they appear to largely imply the government's vulnerability with a limited capacity to effectively withstand pressure in the presence of aggressive players that only wait for a new crisis to exploit. Furthermore, similarly to the other research analysed above, this study offers descriptive analysis of cases without any visible attempt to quantify or assess a degree of policy change. Finally, Boin et al. (2009) focus on EU democratic context, e.g. Spain, Belgium, Sweden, etc, whereas scholars increasingly call for analysing policy change in the developing world (e.g. Richardson, 2009; Steinberg, 2003). Thus, there is a need for an alternative framework centred on government resilience in the context of agenda-setting in developing nations.

The evolutionary theory of agenda-setting

The original agenda-setting theory was developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972) that posits the strong role of mass media in setting political agendas. The essence of media's ability to shape the political agenda can be expressed by borrowing Bernard Cohen's (1963) quote: "*the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about*" (as cited in Dearing and Rogers 1996: 2). However, while early theories primarily looked into a simplified one-way direction of agenda-setting influence dominated by media, modern scholarship recognises the importance of other actors e.g. the public, think tanks, academia, etc (see Dyussenov (2017) for an overview of actor-centred theories and frameworks in agenda-setting) and context and issue specificity, as well as the need to analyse multiple directions and reciprocal causality patterns (e.g. Neuman et al., 2014).

Agenda-setting is generally defined as the process in which policy issues capture the attention of government leaders. It is the first and most critical stage in the policy process that deals with the way policy issues emerge competing for government's attention. This stage largely pre-determines all the subsequent stages of the policy cycle and their outcomes (Howlett et al., 2009; Peters, 2015). An agenda can be defined as the set of issues that government bodies will take action on (Cobb and Elder, 1972). Agenda-setting can be viewed as the "list of subjects" that government officials pay attention to, while their attention is greater to some issues than to the others (Kingdon, 1984: 3-4). Further, as Kingdon's multiple streams framework suggests, three independent streams – problem, policy and political – jointly interact to produce 'windows of opportunity' which are then seized by policy entrepreneurs to push their agendas on to the government. This implicitly points to the potential presence of conflict among key stakeholders. Schattschneider (1960), on the other hand, more explicitly states that the involvement of political contestations and conflict is an integral part of agenda-setting processes. He articulates the notion of conflicts, or the scope of conflict, among various stakeholders and groups, in shaping and defining policy issues that should be included into the government agenda (ibid). Thus, the government should intensify its resilience against the

pressure from other actors, e.g. political opposition, media, academia, think tanks, etc, if incumbent figures intend to pursue their own (government) agenda and lead key policy and political developments over a reasonable term of time. Surprisingly, agenda-setting discourse so far has neglected to analyse and assess a degree of government resilience as applied to the context of actor-centric agenda-setting interactions. Combined with earlier observations from the literature review section, this raises the need to develop a government resilience framework in the context of agenda-setting in developing nations.

The government resilience framework in agenda-setting

As noted above, the new framework is purported to fill a gap in existing research, i.e. by analysing and assessing a degree of actor resilience in the context of agenda-setting interactions with other key actors, with an explicit assumption of the actor's capacity and motivation to withstand the pressure exerted by other actors in a setting characterised with contestation both among advocacy groups (Schattschneider, 1960), or 'policy entrepreneurs' (Kingdon, 1984), and among other actors either inside or outside the government (Boin et al., 2009).

The framework is both conceptual and theoretical. The new concept as applied to actor-centric agenda-setting is *government resilience*. Its definitional rigidity depends on the issue and context specificity and thus may take one of the three forms as in Table 1. It should be noted, however, that there is no clear dividing line between the three forms, and these can change over time depending on the political context. It can be hypothesised that socially sensitive issues, e.g. violent crime and disaster response, may be characterised with dynamic resilience, while more technical issues, e.g. economic diversification, should exhibit rigid resilience traits. Furthermore, since the framework can assess a relative degree of government resilience, it should be applied to comparative cases of two or more nations and/or settings. It is also a theoretical framework as it stems from a number of agenda-setting theories, as described in detail above.

The Methodology

The proposed methodology for the government resilience framework comprises two parts. The first part is to employ online government databases, e.g. *Adilet.zan.kz* legal database in Kazakhstan (The Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2018). For the case of Kyrgyzstan, two search systems are used – the Centralised Database (The Ministry of Justice of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2018), which generates results through 2014 and a Google search filtered for site: *www.gov.kg* and then selecting documented mentions in the 2008-2017 span³. The numbers of documents collected will be plotted on a graph over a time span to produce quantitative analysis observations for the two governments, with a specific focus on the most visible spike in attention. This is necessary in order to clearly observe which type of definitional rigidity applies most, and to test the applicability of the government resilience framework. The numbers of documents generated by the databases serve as a *proxy for government attention* to the issue. The government resilience framework is employed to analyse economic diversification policy across the two nations over the time span of 2008-2017. The rationale for focusing on this issue is driven by its recently growing importance both on political (Strategy2050.kz, 2014; as in Dyussenov, 2017) and policy agendas (Toxanova, 2008; as in Dyussenov 2017) in Kazakhstan. The rationale for choosing the 2008-2017 time frame is driven by two opposing factors. First, prominent scholars suggest that attempts to observe

³ Understanding that the use of two (similar) databases may not produce consistent results, the author believes this is the best approach feasible in this situation.

policy change would require at least a decade or more (e.g. Sabatier; 1988; Hecló, 1974). Specifically, when describing his advocacy coalition framework of policy change, Sabatier (1988) states that “...*understanding the process of policy change – and the role of policy-oriented learning therein – requires a time perspective of a decade or more*” (p. 131). The second factor is driven by lower internet penetration rates, e.g. in Kazakhstan, in the earlier part of the time span (which is the reason Dyussenov(2017) includes the 2011-2016 time frame for his analyses). Thus, the 10-year span is selected for this study.

The other part of the methodology is content analysis. Following the quantitative analysis by using the government databases described above, the content analysis method should be used to specifically analyse the documents collected during the year(s) of the most visible spike in attention to see (1) what (crises, or ‘focusing’ events; as in Birkland, 1998) might be the cause of the intense government attention to the issue, i.e. answering the ‘resilient against *what?*’ question; and (2) identifying the actor(s) most prominently referred to in those documents that would indicate an answer to the ‘resilient against *whom?*’ question (provided that the government attention trends indeed return to some form of stability as suggested by the spectrum in Table 1).

To summarise, this study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- RQ 1: Do the attention trends across both Central Asian nations point to the overall applicability of the government resilience framework in agenda-setting?
- RQ 2: Providing that the framework applies, *what* are the critical, or focusing, events to which the governments exhibit resilience over the time span?
- RQ 3: Providing that the framework applies, *who* are the key actors to which the governments most (or more) frequently refer to, based on the content of documents?

Finally, as mentioned earlier, the major hypothesis as applied to the issue of economic diversification is that (somewhat) *rigid* or *flexible resilience* traits are expected to be observed across the two country cases, due to the technical nature of the issue.

Analysis

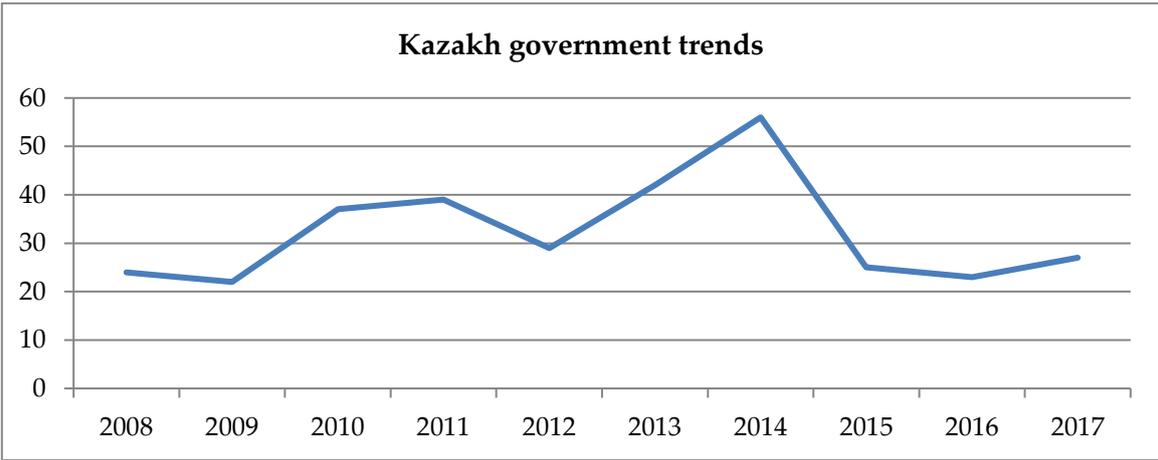
The analysis consists of two parts, quantitative and qualitative (content) analyses. First, quantitative analysis is conducted to (1) identify which degree of definitional rigidity applies to each of the two country cases over the time span; and (2) observe government attention trends in order to identify visible spikes, which should then become the focus of content analyses.

Quantitative analysis

Kazakhstan

The search for documents related to economic diversification in Kazakhstan over the 2008-2017 period returned a total of 324 documents, by using the following filters: decrees and strategies as forms of acts, current (as opposed to expired) status, and the government of Kazakhstan (Prime-Minister) and the President as bodies that adopted the bills (as opposed to other agencies, e.g. the National Bank, Parliament, etc, since this study focuses specifically on government activities). The number of documents per year are as follows: 24 in 2008, 22 in 2009, 37 in 2010, 39 in 2011, 29 in 2012, followed by a 2-year spike of 42 in 2013 and 56 in 2014, followed by a new period of stable trends – 25 in 2015, 23 in 2016, and 27 in 2017 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Kazakh government attention trends to diversification, 2010-2017



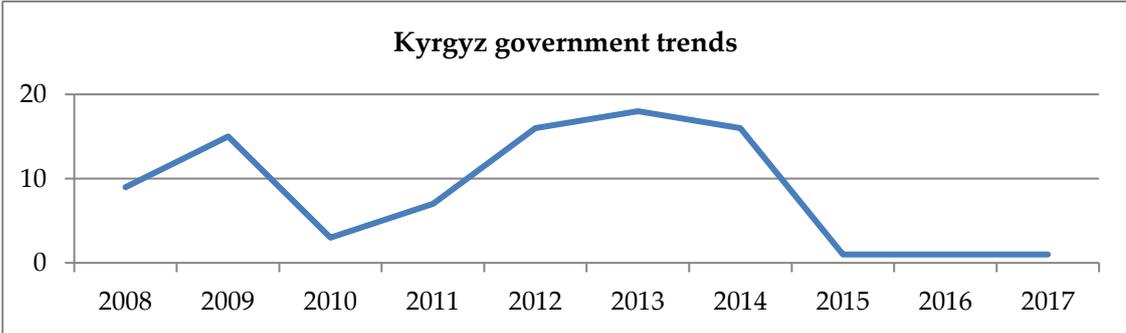
Source: The author’s own analysis based on data from adilet.zan.kz database

Figure 1 demonstrates a number of interesting observations. First, it suggests that the Kazakh government’s attention trends generally conform to the combination of “somewhat rigid” and “flexible” degrees of definitional rigidity of resilience (as in Table 1), namely that while attention trends largely fall in the range of 20-30 mentions per year in 2008-2009 and 30-40 mentions per year in 2010-2012, then following the spike of 2013-2014, the post-spike period of 2015-2017 enters a new period of stable equilibrium again in the range of 20-30 mentions per year as in 2008-2009. Thus, the Kazakhstanian government case supports the overall tentative validity of the new framework as applied to agenda-setting processes. Second, the trends reveal a clear spike in attention, i.e. 2013-2014. This 2-year span of heightened intensity should be the focus of content analysis (below).

Kyrgyz Republic

Next, the combined document search (based on two search systems) related to the Kyrgyz government case over the period produced a total of 96 documents, including 72 by the Centralised Database (filtered for current status documents) and 14 (screened for relevance) documents generated by Google search. The numbers of documents per year are as follow: 9 in 2008, 15 in 2009, 3 in 2010, 7 in 2011, followed by a three-year spike of 16 in 2012, 18 in 2013, and 15 in 2014, then followed by a sudden period of low stability, with 1 mention in 2015-2017 each (Figure 2). It should be noted that the overall number of documents in the Kyrgyz case is significantly lower than in the case of Kazakhstan. This is because Kazakhstan is a petroleum resource rich nation, which spurs intense debates among the local expert communities with regard to specific political and policy measures that should be adopted to push the agenda on economic diversification away from oil and gas dependency.

Figure 2: Kyrgyz government attention trends to diversification, 2010-2017



Source: The author’s own analysis based on data from Centralised Database and Google

Figure 2 points to the following observations. First, the Kyrgyz government's attention trends are less clear vis-à-vis the Kazakh case and only vaguely seem to fall into the "flexible" degree of definitional rigidity. Specifically, the trends start off with what appears to be an earlier spike, not a period of stable trends, followed by a quick downward trend in 2010 (3 documents) and then the period of somewhat a prolonged spike in government activity from 2011 to 2015, especially in 2012-2014 which then should become the focus of content analysis that follows. The post-spike plain stable period appears somewhat counter-intuitive especially following a 'drama' of prolonged heightened attention intensity. This could be explained by two possible factors. First, as in the Kazakh case, only current status legal bills and documents are selected, as opposed to expired ones (i.e. no longer in force) and draft bills (i.e. yet to be enacted). Thus, the Kazakh government might possess stronger capacity vis-à-vis its Kyrgyz counterpart to push legal bills quicker. The second possible explanation is the (still) ongoing process of digitisation of government documents which make take longer in the Kyrgyz Republic due to limited budget and/or other resources. Overall, it should be noted that the prolonged instability in trends may indicate that the Kyrgyz government is less resilient vis-à-vis its Kazakh counterpart. Again, the content analysis section below should either support or disprove these tentative observations and ensure better triangulation of research methods. Thus, although this case fails to clearly demonstrate a specific degree of definitional rigidity of the resilience concept, the framework remains useful as a diagnostic tool. The comparative case method embedded into the (government resilience) framework is also quite useful as it allows better observing relative variations among the cases.

Qualitative analysis

Kazakhstan

As suggested in Figure 1, the Kazakh case exhibits a spike in government attention to the economic diversification policy issue concentrated around 2013-2014. Thus, content analysis should be carried out with regard to these documents specifically to identify (1) the key actors that the government more frequently refers to in its discourse on diversification policy (it should be noted that the more the documents emphasise the role of other actors at the expense of government's own expertise, the less resilient the government is viewed); and (2) what critical or 'focusing' events (as in Birkland, 1998) spur intense debates within the government's discourse.

The total number of generated documents in 2013-2014 is 98 (42 and 56, accordingly). These documents are then screened to filter out those files not directly *relevant* to the essence of economic diversification policy, e.g. related to diversification of risks for pension funds, etc, and to further include only those with *meaningful substance*, i.e. containing at least two references to economic diversification in a single document. Thus, in total 34 documents (15 for 2013 and 19 for 2014) are selected for content analysis.

First, with regards to the key actors identified, i.e. answering the 'resilient against *whom*?' question (Capano and Woo, 2017) in the context of Kazakhstan, these are outlined in Table 2.

Thus, the Kazakh government appears to predominantly refer to its own agencies (38 references, 35.5% of the total number of references) in its discourse on economic diversification policy, this is followed by the role of industries (19 references, or 17.8%), the private sector, e.g. small and medium-sized business enterprises (17 references, or 15.8%), investors (10 references, or 9.3%), academia (8 references, or 7.4%), quasi-state enterprises (7 references, or 6.5%), international organisations (6 references, or 5.6%), while the role of the public is less pronounced (2 references, 2%). The observation that the government mainly refers to its own

institutions as part of its discourse on economic diversification points to the possibility of government resilience as measured in terms of references to other key actors, including industries and the private sector. This is further triangulated by earlier observations from quantitative trends (Section 5.1.1) that found the Kazakh case to fall into the “somewhat rigid” category of resilience (as in Table 1).

Table 2: Key actors as suggested by content analysis, the case of Kazakhstan

#	Key actors	The number of content references
1	The government	38
2	Industries	19
3	The private sector, e.g. SME	17
4	Investors	10
5	Academia and research	8
6	Quasi-state enterprises	7
7	International organisations	6
8	The public	2

Source: The author’s own analysis

Second, regarding the critical events, i.e. answering the ‘resilient against *what?*’ question (Capano and Woo, 2017), these can be categorised into the following groups as suggested by content analysis (Table 3 below): group 1 can be broadly titled as infrastructure-related critical events, mainly including new logistics terminals built at the Aktau sea port in West Kazakhstan and Khorgos terminals at the Chinese border and the intercontinental road from Western Europe to Western China; group 2 incorporates global factors, e.g. the financial crisis; and group 3 includes a number of regional factors, e.g. the Customs Union and Single Economic Space.

Table 3: Critical events as suggested by content analysis, the case of Kazakhstan

Groups	Critical events	The number of content references
Infrastructure projects (total – 6 references)	New logistical terminals, e.g. Aktau sea port, Khorgos, etc.	2
	Oil pipeline expansion	1
	The Western Europe – Western China corridor	2
	Refinery upgrade	1
Global factors (total – 5 references)	Global competition	1
	The financial crisis	2
	Commodity prices	1
	Sanctions against Iran	1
Regional factors (total – 4 references)	Integration processes in the macro-region	1
	The Customs Union	2
	Common Economic Space	1

Source: The author’s own analysis

Kyrgyz Republic

As Figure 2 suggests with regard to the case of the Kyrgyz Republic, the major spike in government attention is spread over the 3-year time span from 2012 to 2014. The other sporadic spike around the year 2009 (with 15 references) turns out to be due to noise: as the two criteria of *relevance* and *substance*, are applied, this leads to the selection of only two documents for content analysis.

The total number of generated documents over the three-year time span is 41, including 14 in 2012, 18 in 2013, and 9 in 2014. Further filtered based on *relevance* and *substance* criteria, the final number of documents selected for content analysis is 12, including 6 in 2012 and 2013 each, followed by 4 documents in 2014.

First, in the attempt to answer the ‘resilient against *whom?*’ question, the following key actors are identified in the process of content analysis of government discourse on economic diversification (as in Table 4 below): the government (11 references), then the private sector (7), closely followed by industries (6) and international organisations (6), and the public (5), while the role of investors appears less emphatic (2).

It is striking to observe a number of differences in the relative degree of government resilience across the two nations. First, the degree of Kazakh government resilience in relation to the next key actor, i.e. industries (38 to 19) is considerably higher than the degree of its Kyrgyz counterpart’s resilience in relation to the next key actor, i.e. the private sector (11 to 7). Second, the Kazakh case presents a larger number of actors, i.e. 8 versus 6 in the Kyrgyz case, divided into three distinct groups in terms of the number of references: the top group – the government (the predominant actor), industries and the private sector; the intermediary group, i.e. with a moderate number of references – investors, academia, quasi-state agencies and international organisations; and a single actor with a negligible number of references, i.e. the public (with 2 references only). Third, similar to the case of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz case presents the government in the top (but not quite predominant as in the Kazakh case), followed by the private sector and industries, with the difference among the latter two being negligible, i.e. 7 versus 6 references. However, while the public appears rather dormant in the Kazakh case, it seems more pronounced in the case of Kyrgyzstan, though not at the top (of actors). This may point to the Kyrgyz government’s greater responsiveness to public needs as compared to the case of Kazakhstan.

Conversely, the Kazakh government’s resilience seems greater vis-à-vis the Kyrgyz case. This is an important observation, as it suggests that the notion of resilience can be linked to both positive and negative connotations depending on the context. Last, it is interesting to compare the role of investors perceived in government discourse. While investors immediately follow the top actors in the Kazakh context, the Kyrgyz case attributes them a negligible role. Instead, the Kyrgyz government relies more on assistance from international organisations (e.g. Office of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2014; The National Council for Sustainable Development of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2013). On the contrary, the Kazakh case attributes a relatively lower role to international organisations vis-à-vis other key actors. Interestingly, this observation is further supported by public perceptions which view international organisations with negative sentiments (Dyussenov, 2017).

Table 4: Key actors as suggested by content analysis, the case of Kyrgyz Republic

#	Key actors	The number of content references
1	The government	11
2	The private sector, e.g. SME	7
3	Industries	6
4	International organisations	6
5	The public	5
6	Investors	2

Source: The author’s own analysis

Next, to answer the ‘resilient against *what?*’ question, the Kyrgyz government discourse points to the following major groups of critical events: gold mining (8 references), primarily with

regard to the Kumtor field; followed by economic factors (5 references), e.g. negative trade balance and a decline in GDP; and regional factors (2 references), e.g. cooperation with other Central Asian nations and in the context of the Customs Union.

Table 5: Critical events as suggested by content analysis, the case of Kyrgyz Republic

Groups	Critical events	The number of content references
Gold mining	Economic dependency on gold mining fields	8
Economic factors	Negative trade balance	2
	Declining GDP	2
	Migrant remissions	1
Regional factors	Cooperation in the Central Asian region	1
	The Customs Union	1

Source: The author’s own analysis

As the analysis of critical events suggests, it is gold mining issues that the Kyrgyz government discourse emphasises most, while economic and regional factors appear less pronounced. Among gold mining issues, the most prominent is the Kumtor gold mining field. Located in the Issyk-Kul region, the Kumtor field operations underwent a dramatic fall in production in 2012, which led to a decline in the share of the industrial sector in GDP creation from 20% in 2009-2011 to 16.8% in 2012 (Government of Kyrgyz Republic, 2013a). Furthermore, the Kumtor factor, along with a drop in agricultural production due to unfavourable climate conditions, caused 0.9% real decline in 2012 GDP compared to 6% increase in 2011 (Government of Kyrgyz Republic, 2013b).

On the contrary, the case of the Kazakh government discourse suggests that critical events appear to be more evenly distributed, i.e. infrastructure projects (6 references), closely followed by global (5 references) and regional factors (4 references). Overreaction of the Kyrgyz government discourse to a single issue, i.e. the Kumtor gold mining field, may be indicative of not only economic overdependence on the mining industry but the government’s vulnerability against external shocks as driven by critical events and when as contrasted with the case of the Kazakh government that appears more resilient.

Discussion and Findings

First, as suggested by the quantitative analysis, the Kazakh government trends over the period from 2008 to 2017 generally conform to the “somewhat rigid” resilience degree of definitional rigidity, since both pre-shock and after-shock periods are characterised by a stable equilibrium. On the contrary, the Kyrgyz case shows only a vague resemblance of patterns characteristic of (otherwise) strong government resilience. Thus, the Kyrgyz government appears less resilient vis-à-vis its Kazakh counterpart.

Second, content analysis focuses on key actors and critical events across the two nations. With regard to actors (RQ 3), the Kazakh government mainly refers to its own government agencies (38 references versus 19 references to the next key actor, the industrial sector) as part of its discourse on economic diversification, in contrast to the Kyrgyz government, which exhibits lower resilience as measured by the number of references to key actors (11 references versus 7 references to the next key actor, i.e. the private sector). This suggests the presence of (relatively) more robust resilience as related to the Kazakh government, which is supported by the quantitative analysis observations. Next, regarding critical events (RQ 2), these are categorised into groups to facilitate better comparison across the two nations as opposed to comparing individual events. While the Kazakh case demonstrates somewhat an even distribution of

attention across the event groups (i.e. infrastructure projects, global factors and regional factors), the Kyrgyz government discourse appears to overreact to a single issue, i.e. the Kumtor gold mining field that experienced a dramatic fall in production volumes in 2012 and, along with the slowdown in agricultural production, led to a 0.9% real decline of 2012 national GDP vis-à-vis 6% GDP growth in 2011 (Government of Kyrgyz Republic, 2013b).

Greater vulnerability of the Kyrgyz government vis-à-vis its Kazakh counterpart suggests an application of the *crisis exploitation* theory (Boin et al., 2009), leaving less room for the direct use of the *government resilience* framework. However, the framework remains useful in the Kyrgyz context since it serves as a diagnostic tool to assess the government's capacity to pursue its agenda and to implement its policies. Furthermore, the government resilience framework is found to directly apply to the context of government discourse in Kazakhstan and not only as a diagnostic tool (RQ 1).

As a final note, this research finds that the notion of an actor's resilience may include both negative and positive connotations. On the one hand, the government should exhibit resilience to effectively lead political developments and to implement policy change. On the other hand, the government should constantly engage the wider public in its discourse to avoid a democratic deficit. Defining resilience as the capacity to learn (as in McEvoy et al., 2013), policy experts across Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan should pursue resilience discourse through the lens of public interest (relatively higher in Kyrgyzstan) and engaging a wider range of actors (e.g. academia and quasi-state institutions as in the case of Kazakhstan).

Conclusions and suggestions for further research

This study appears to demonstrate the overall validity and value of the government resilience framework as applied to actor-centric agenda-setting processes and interactions, at least with regard to the economic diversification policy discourse across two Central Asian states – Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The framework's currency extends beyond its ability to assess a relative degree of government resilience in a comparative case setting. It also serves as a diagnostic tool that helps identify the government's overall capacity to effectively withstand external pressure coming from other key actors in an agenda-setting environment often characterised as politically contestable (Schattschneider, 1960), while actors both from inside and outside the government wait to exploit a crisis in attempts to set their own agenda on the government (Boin et al., 2009).

Moreover, studies should try to replicate other applications of the government resilience framework across various jurisdictions and policy areas. One possible approach is to observe its usefulness in other Eurasian nations using a comparative case method. Another possibility is to test the applicability of the framework with regard to other policy issues, e.g. corruption not only in the Eurasian context but across a wider range of developing nations. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the Kyrgyz government discourse appears to better respond to public needs (as measured by the number of references) while demonstrating somewhat weaker government resilience as contrasted with the Kazakh government. Yet, the Kazakh government appears to suffer from a greater degree of democratic deficit (as the public receives negligible attention in terms of content references). Thus, further research might test a possible correlation between a degree of democratic deficit and government resilience in a specific country context.

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