



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Kazakh Citizens protests against land bills, 2016

Time period notes: 25th of April to mid-May

April
2016
to: May
2016

Country: Kazakhstan

Location City/State/Province: Atyrau, Aktobe, and Alma-ata

Goals:

To reverse the land laws that were recently passed by the Kazakh government

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws › Defiance of law against gathering to protest

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws › Defiance of law against gathering to protest

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws › Defiance of law against gathering to protest

Methods in 4th segment:

- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings

- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws › Defiance of law against gathering to protest

Methods in 5th segment:

- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws › Defiance of law against gathering to protest

Methods in 6th segment:

- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws › Defiance of law against gathering to protest

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Democracy

Group characterization:

- citizens

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Max Bokayev and Talgat Ayan

Partners:

not known

External allies:

not known

Involvement of social elites:

not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Max Bokayev
- and Talgat Ayan

- citizens

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: 5 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

The Kazakh Government, Chinese Government (and corporations)

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

not known

Campaigner violence:

not known

Repressive Violence:

Arresting protesters when they were practicing their freedom of speech and assembly.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

0 points out of 6 points

Survival:

0.5 points out of 1 point

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Kazakhstan had a long history of social activism and violent oppressive actions taken by the Kazakh government, but the Kazakh movement that took place during April and May of 2016 was different in the way that the government responded to previous protest. The Kazakh government had become known for the use of extreme violence against protesters, including arrests, use of live ammunition, torture, and jailing. The Kazakh government had recently passed a new land law that allowed foreign governments and entities to lease and buy more land in Kazakhstan than was previously legal. Under this new land law, the Kazakh government declared the sale of national parks legal, drawing significant criticism.

On 24 April 2016, Max Bokayev and Talgat Ayan, posted a message on Facebook that they would picket in the Isatay-Makhambet square of Atyrau, a city in western Kazakhstan. They were two of the very few activists still remaining in Kazakhstan after years of intense crackdown against activists by the Kazakh government. They did not expect anyone to show up given the danger of protesting against the Kazakh government, but, much to their surprise, several thousand people gathered. The picket lasted approximately four hours at which point people quickly dispersed. Even more surprising than the number of protesters who showed up was the response by the Kazakh government. The Kazakh government did not respond in the violent manner to which activists were accustomed; instead they arrested the leaders. Arresting the leaders for peaceful protests was still a violation of human rights, but in contrast to the oil protests during which the Kazakh police killed 15 people and injured many more, this was a drastically less violent response.

A day later, on 25 April 2016, then-President Nazarbayev spoke out against the protesters. He began by thanking his citizens for being active in their country's politics, but he warned that there was no justification for these protests and that protesters would be charged for their crimes. Despite the president's ominous warning, the next day, 26 April, two small pickets appeared in the cities of Aktobe and Alma-ata. Surprisingly, the government did not use violent repression. Emboldened by their government's lack of response, even more protesters took to the streets on 27 April. One picket of protesters in Aktobe attracted approximately 1,500 people and was even visited by the mayor of the city, who spoke about the people's demands. The protest remained nonviolent with people coming and going frequently in order to avoid the threat of conflict with police. The next morning, despite the lack of response the day of, the Kazakh police went around and rounded up the protester present the day before, issuing them fines of 120-130 dollars each.

The Kazakh government slowly increased their repression by arresting those involved and threatening to use live ammunition against protesters and torture those who could be caught after the protests. The Kazakh government never followed through, but the threat of such violence was an adequate deterrent for many protesters. Protests ebbed before ending by 5 May 2016.

After the Kazakh government threatened violence upon the protesters, all protesting about the issue stopped. The Kazakh government used a strategy different from previous violent crackdowns. They used the threat of violence and jailings instead of large amounts of physical violence against protesters. A government press release stated that authorities used these new tactics in order to avoid provoking moral outrage in the population and producing more support to the protesters' cause.

Research Notes

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