



## Central Asia Protest Tracker Codebook

This document describes the Central Asia Protest Tracker (CAPT), an original dataset of protest events compiled by the Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs. It was launched in September 2020 with Edward Lemon and Bradley Jardine as principal investigators. The original research team consisted of Aizhan Abilgazina, Aruuke Uran Kyzy, and Ardasher Khashimov. The dataset offers a unique analytical tool to study the dynamics of political activism in the region and the various issues and challenges encountered by each of the societies in Central Asia. In addition to issue sets, the data also offers insight into common targets of dissent, as well as the responses by those targeted. These are then transposed onto an interactive protest map, which can be used to map the geographic and spatial patterns within which protests have unfolded in the region in recent years. We recognize that our dataset does not represent a complete picture of public sentiments or resistance in Central Asia. Not everyone feels it is necessary or safe to protest publicly, instead expressing themselves in more subtle ways which anthropologist James Scott called “hidden transcripts.”

The Central Asia Protest Tracker (CAPT) dataset describes and categorizes political activity in each of the five Central Asian republics, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan from January 1, 2018 to August 31, 2020. The database serves as an important resource on patterns of regional dissent and the respective issues most pressing to its inhabitants. The database is reviewed and updated on a regular basis according to the methodology outlined herein. While the current data is limited to just two and a half years, the Oxus Society aims to expand the data historically, while continuing to log ongoing protests as and when they occur in real-time, with regular reports and analyses published throughout the year.

The collection of the material in the database is extracted from events being reported in local-language news media, with supplementary evidence from social media. In other words, the database relies on publicly-available data sources that can be cross-checked and verified by independent analysts.

### METHODOLOGY

Our database consists of online published material. It is important to note that we only gather information that is public and identifiable, but not private. The use of online source material allows us to cross-check data and conduct follow-up studies, for example, by reaching out to activists involved in specific protests to inquire about whether their activities led to substantial policy change. Due to the nature of the collected data, the dataset is likely to have a substantial effect on the results of empirical research. Our reliance on reporting means that many cases of activism not considered “newsworthy” or that took place in geographically remote communities may be missing from the final results, skewing the dataset. While we do attempt to address this by mining social media platforms for additional sources of data, these sources also come with their own issues of verification. Academics and analysts using the database should be aware that this dataset is by no means comprehensive but is intended to demonstrate patterns of contentious politics throughout the region.

## **DEFINITIONS OF PROTEST**

While we recognize that both resistance and protests can take a number of forms, many of which are subtle and go unreported in the media, we have limited ourselves to the following definition:

*A protest action is a public expression of objection towards an idea or action of an individual or institution, including state organs, businesses, organizations and foreign governments which happens in physical space.*

We therefore excluded online protests, such as posts on the social media about a particular issue, petitions, letters of complaint, or boycotts.

We coded all reported protest data, with no event being too small. In other words, some of our entries involve a single protester. Ongoing events, such as strikes, sit-ins, rallies, and hunger strikes are coded each day as a separate event. Similarly, protests occurring in multiple locations on the same day are logged in each locality as a separate incident.

We ignored reports of future plans for protests or strikes, which we could not verify actually took place. Nor did we code communal violence, mass brawls or conflicts between groups across borders. We also do not code data on examples of armed resistance to the state, such as terrorism or other forms of political violence. Finally, we coded only reported events for which we could identify a date and location.

We took the decision to develop a web-based data entry system that will allow a very large number of partners to help develop the project over time, with a careful system of checks and balances to ensure consistency. The large scale of the data also means we can rely on activists and analysts in the region to flag

protests as and when they occur and allow us to fill gaps and create as complete a record as possible. The submission system allows us to verify individual coding records for accuracy.

Our data was collected using a small, dedicated team of researchers to help avoid discrepancies and limit human error in the coding process. To limit discrepancies, we have created strict definitions on specific variables to be collected and have established rigorous coding guidelines and standards to help members accurately identify relevant data. This approach enables research assistants and open source contributors to perform targeted searches and filter relevant information to bring to the attention of the Central Asia Protest Tracker (CAPT). Oxus research team leaders Edward Lemon and Bradley Jardine ensured the quality of coded data was accurate by conducting systematic, cross-checked reviews of data inputs, reading them against multiple sources of local reporting to ensure the accuracy of coded information. Each entry was separately coded by at least two individuals to ensure inter-coder reliability. The core working languages of the project were in English and Russian, but supplementary materials in Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Tajik were also used.

## SOURCES

Raw data was produced using the sources of local news listed below and deemed by the authors to be “authoritative” and “credible,” while relying on supplementary materials, including photographic and video images in order to corroborate information such as protest size and issues raised (for example, by reading the placards of activists present at particular demonstrations).

The majority of sources are in Russian, but English and local language (Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Tajik) were also consulted to produce records close to publicly available government tallies of protests. Coders searched for protests on authoritative local news sites (listed below), and through Google and Yandex. Each search period initially ranges from January 1 - December 31 of each year, for each country analyzed. Searches were conducted using the keywords: in Russian (акция протеста, митинг, пикет), Tajik (эътироз, митинг, пикет), Uzbek (norozilik, miting, piket), Kazakh (наразылық, митинг, пикет), Kyrgyz (нааразычылык, митинг, пикет) and Turkmen (nägilelik bildirmek; ýöriş, piket). Each entry was then checked to see if it fit within the parameters of our dataset. Despite our best efforts, wide discrepancies remain, with the Kyrgyz Ministry of the Interior listing 552 protests in 2018 - our data gathering only confirmed a total of 107 cases.

For the first round of data collection, we utilized the following sources:

Country	Sources
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Kazakhstan	Akhbor, Almaty TV, Aq Zhaiyq, Aqparat.info, BASE (YouTube), Bureau.kz, Caravan.kz, Currenttime.tv, Diapazon.kz, EurAsia Daily, Feminita.kz, Fergana Agency, FiLTER (YouTube), Holanews.kz, Inbusiness.kz, Informburo, Kaktus Media, Ktk.kz, Lada.kz, Life KZ (Facebook), Mail.kz, Mediazona Central Asia, mgorod.kz, New York Times, news.myseldon.com, newtimes.kz, ng.kz, nur.kz, otyrar.kz, Oyan, Qazaqstan (Facebook), RFE/RL, rossaprimavera.ru, Semeyainasy, Tengrinews, time.kz, timeskz.kz, Uralsk Week, Vecherniy Almaty, vlast.kz, voanews.com, zakon.kz, zona.kz
Kyrgyzstan	24.kg, Akipress, Akyrky Kabarlay (YouTube), april.kg, aqparat.info, Barakelde, Akipress, Channel 7 Kyrgyzstan (YouTube), Elgezit, EurasiaNet, Fergana Agency, for.kg, Gezitter, kabar.kg, Kaktus Media, Kloop.kg, knews.kg, nts.kg, RFE/RL, Russia Ok (YouTube), sputnik.kg, Tazabek, Trend News Agency, Turmush
Turkmenistan	Fergana Agency, Hronika Turkmenistana, RFE/RL, vesti.kg, Zhalbyrak TV (YouTube)
Tajikistan	Akhbor, Asia Plus, EurasiaNet, Fergana Agency, Habarho (YouTube), RFE/RL
Uzbekistan	AsiaTerra, Daryo, Fergana Agency, kun-uz.com, kun.uz, podrobno.uz, repost.uz, RFE/RL, sof.uz, Tashkent-SNOS (Facebook)

We used these sources in a two-stage process. First, we mined the content of the news sites using keyword searches to identify relevant cases of protest. Second, once a protest had been identified, we checked the information using additional Russian and local-language reporting to ensure the validity of the data. If the reporting contained scarce details on specifics such as the number of protesters present, the authors then conducted additional searches on social media for videos and photography to ensure an accurate estimate of the number of attendees and the presence or absence of law enforcement.

To supplement the keyword search collection, we also utilized data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) <https://www.acleddata.com>. The ACLED dataset's focus is broader than CAPT's, including battles, explosions, terrorist attacks and inter-communal violence, all of which are excluded from our dataset. We therefore identified protests from ACLED that fit with our definition of protest outlined above and then coded them according to our methodology.

To add a new protest entry in the database we started by examining the events according to our definition of protest as outlined above. The inclusion of a new protest was identified and flagged by contributors online,

and scrutinized and logged by Oxus Society staff and experts. For each new individual entry, we would write a brief description of events (with a word limit of 80 words), check the individual categories, and use the source and additional materials to list the facts and categorize the new data according to our typologies (see pages 7-11).

The verification process involved first correcting any data entry errors, or even updating the data according to newly created categories and typologies as the project evolved. The reviewers would then go through each dataset twice to verify each category individually. If systematic mistakes were found, the first reviewer would flag the case for the second reviewer to assess before a final decision was made.

The updating of the database will proceed in two stages:

During the first stage, we will update current entries based on searching all protests by name, date, and location (in Russian and English, with common alternate spellings). The information will then be updated with a brief background description of the protests and on publicly available facts in more than one source from among our list of authoritative reporting. In the second phase, the updates are reviewed by the project supervisors. The project supervisors edit the descriptive text to ensure the descriptions are paraphrased and the main sources are clearly referenced. Research assistants should raise concerns over data reliability or category assignment with the project director as appropriate.

The datasets and analysis on the Oxus Society website is regularly updated, with blog posts and special monthly briefings published as appropriate.

The database contains 10 types of political protest (Confrontation, Rally, Strike, March, Hunger Strike, Roadblock, Sit-in, Self-immolation, Riot, Government-backed); 28 categories of issue taken up by activists (Relief, Political Prisoners, Labor, Cultural, Repression, Covid-19, Welfare, Income, Property, Anti-opposition, Development, Utilities, Land, Justice, Food, Freedom of Assembly, Freedom of Expression, Gender Issues, Human Rights, China, Corruption, Environment, Elections, International Politics, Extractive Industries, Identity, Financial Sector, Animal Rights); 10 forms of response by state actors (Arrests, Intimidation, Dispersal, Force, Monitoring, Penalty, Meeting, Nothing, Promise, Unknown); and 9 types of target singled out by demonstrators (Local Government, National Government, Business, Foreign Government/International Organization, Foreign Business, Law Enforcement, Judicial System, Individual, Organization).

These categories were developed and refined in three stages. First, at the outset of data collection we set out initial expected categories. Second, based on the results of the data collection, we introduced new categories, removed redundant ones and merged similar ones. Finally, having compiled a finalized list, we went back

through the entire dataset to ensure consistency. These revisions and additions to the codebook and web-portal were all made in the interest of increasing data-entry reliability, enhancing the utility of the database, and decreasing margins of error.

Coding variables: The following variables are the columns in the coding spreadsheets.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Description</b>
Date	The date of the protest, based on local time
Location	The city, town or village where the protest took place
Latitude/Longitude	The location of the protest to the maximum degree of accuracy based on the information provided.
Number of Protesters	An estimate of the number of protesters based on reporting (see note below)
Number of Arrests	Number of protesters detained by police or security forces.
Type	A classification of the type of protest based on ten categories listed and explained below
Issue	A classification of the issue or issues that the protesters demand is addressed
Groups Linked	The individual or group which organized the protest, or for whom the protest is organized in the case of political prisoners
Target	The name of the target(s) of the protest
Target Type	A classification of the type of protest target based on the categories listed and explained below
Response	A classification of the target's immediate response based on the categories listed and explained below
Link	A link to a media report, video or social media post about the protest
Description	A brief description of the protest and, if relevant, response of the target

For both participants and the number of arrests, the authors had to draw certain inferences from available information. For example, local reporting often used terms such as “several” and dozens to describe the number of attendees present at demonstrations. In such cases, we have chosen to use a multiple of three to provide a conservative assessment. In other words, “hundreds” would be coded as “300,” while “dozens” is listed as “36.” For presented ranges, e.g. “20-30 protesters,” we chose to always code according to the lower-end estimate.

For the latitude and longitude, we have attempted to record the spatial data as specifically as possible, though this varies with reporting. Some reports provide neighborhoods and specific landmarks, while others only reference the city, village, or province where protests took place. Crucially, if protests took place in multiple locations involving different people, we decided to log each incident as a separate event.

For the target, we identify the primary, and in some cases secondary, individual or institution that protesters are opposing the behavior of or calling on to help them. In cases where there were two targets, for example where traders in a bazaar were calling on the local government to assist them in resolving a conflict with the bazaar’s management, we identified the government as the primary target as it was being called upon to help. In many cases, the specific target of the protesters was not made clear, for example in protests about corruption in the national government or calling on the local government to resolve land disputes. In these cases, we coded the target with broad labels, such as “National Government” or “Local Government.”

## Type

Code	Description
Confrontation	Protesters surround or confront an individual or group, or attempt to forcibly access a building, in order to make specific demands.
Rally	When a group of people gather together in support of a cause.
Strike	When a group of workers halt production or refuse to work until specific demands are met.
March	When a group of people gather in a location with the purpose of walking to another to generate momentum for a cause.

Hunger Strike	When a group of people refuse to eat in order to draw attention to an issue.
Roadblock	Protesters block roads, key infrastructure, or transport arteries to draw attention to their cause.
Sit-in	Protesters occupy offices, government buildings, or other public spaces as a form of resistance.
Self-immolation	A protester commits an act of suicide or self-harm to draw attention to their cause.
Riot	Protesters use violence, destroy property, or clash with police or counter-protesters.
Government-backed	Protests have a direct connection to either local or national government.

**Issue**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Description</b>
Relief	Protests established with the aim of calling for or calling for attention to government relief in the wake of freak incidents such as floods or natural disasters.
Political Prisoners	Calls for the release of prisoners, defined as “political” by the protesters themselves
Labor	Protests which draw attention to work or employment conditions.
Cultural	Protests related to protecting cultural heritage, such as monuments, language and events, such as sporting events.
Repression	Protests related to the use of force by the state to restrict and control an individual or society, including police brutality, torture and detention without trial.



Covid-19	Protests related to restrictions enforced by the state due to Covid-19 or the economic, social or political effects of pandemic.
Welfare	Protests related to state welfare programs, such as benefits, state subsidies, public transport, education and healthcare.
Income	Protests related to practices that affect individual income, including non-payment of wages, state regulations affecting income, such as taxes or trade policies, businesses closing, debts, or laying off workers.
Property	Protests related to corporate practices or state policies that affect personal property, including housing.
Anti-opposition	Protests targeting political opposition individuals or parties.
Development	Protests related to the effects of development, including the destruction of urban spaces like parks and buildings
Utilities	Protests related to the price or supply of gas, electricity or water, or roads.
Land	Specific or general concerns about land being sold or requisitioned by the state, businesses or individuals, including disputes over borders.
Justice	Protests related to the operations of the judicial system, including complaints about access to justice and trials.
Food	Protest actions related to food shortages or food prices.
Freedom of Assembly	Protests defending the right of people to come together and collectively express, promote, pursue, and defend their collective or shared ideas.
Freedom of Expression	Protests related to restrictions that seek to curtail freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds.
Gender Issues	Protests related to the rights of women, such as curtailing domestic violence or calling for measures to support gender equality.

Human Rights	Protests that seek to protect people from severe political, legal, and social abuses, including minority rights, freedom of expression, LGBTI rights, women’s rights, religious freedom, freedom of assembly and torture.
China	Protests against China’s policies towards the region, the behavior of Chinese businesses or individuals.
Corruption	Protests related to official corruption or the corruption of a particular individual.
Environment	Protests related to destruction of the local environment by individuals, private enterprises or state agencies.
Elections	Protests resulting from the conduct of elections
International Politics	Protests against the behavior of foreign states or responding to international events.
Extractive Industries	Protests against the activities of mining, gas, oil or other businesses within the extractive industries.
Identity	Protests stemming from perceived threats to or the need to protect national, ethnic, religious or sexual identity.
Financial Sector	protests responding to practices within the financial sector, including lending practices and state regulations, such as interest rates.
Animal Rights	Protests responding to the abuse of animals and calling for their protection.

**Target Type**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Description</b>
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Local Government	Protests targeted at local government entities at the local (e.g mahalla, jamoat), district-level or region-level.
National Government	Protests directed at national government entities such as the Ministry of Justice, Presidential Administration, and other organs of government.
Business	Protests directed at either a private or government-owned business registered or owned by nationals of the country where the protest took place.
Foreign Government/International Organization	Protests directed at the embassy, consulate, or government of a foreign state or office of an international organization.
Foreign Business	Protests directed at businesses majority-owned or registered in a foreign country.
Law Enforcement	Protests targeted at police, detention centers, and state security organizations.
Judicial System	Protests targeted at either local or national courts, or the Prosecutor General, seeking to overturn a decision or draw attention to cases of injustice.
Individual	Protests targeted at a particular individual, usually with calls for them to stand down from office or position.
Organization	Protests targeted at a particular organization or group, including religious organizations, political parties or non-governmental organizations.

**Response**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Description</b>
Arrests	Protesters are arrested or detained by security services.

Intimidation	Security services or police deploy military equipment, or show up in overwhelming numbers to project force.
Dispersal	Protests are physically dispersed by security services or police.
Force	Protests are countered with tear-gas, riot police, rubber bullets and other policing methods.
Monitoring	Police are present in the crowds, monitoring the protesters.
Penalty	Protesters are fined or face charges, such as administrative arrest, for their actions.
Meeting	The target concedes to a meeting or discussion with protesters.
Nothing	Protests continue with no form of response from state or security actors.
Promise	The target promises to resolve or address the situation.
Unknown	Insufficient reporting to discern the final outcome of the demonstration.