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“In this Republic, I am the Caliph”:  
Traditional Cultural Norms, Ritual  
Humiliation and Regional Authoritarian  
Dynamics in Chechnya and Ingushetia

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Submitted in the Fulfilment of the  
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Postgraduate Research in Central and  
Eastern European Studies

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## Abstract:

The North Caucasian republics of Chechnya and Ingushetia have long received attention for their extremely complex series of traditional cultural norms and customary codes as well as the far-sweeping violence that has engulfed them since the collapse of the Soviet Union. While there is some research into the effects of these cultural norms on the counterinsurgency and the conflicts, this thesis examines the way that traditional cultural norms affect local authoritarian regime dynamics and practices. Through discourse and content analysis paired with process tracing, the author researched the roles of three broad categories of traditional cultural norms – clans, customary law and Islam – over a period of ten years for each republic. It found that over the period of 2012-2021, Chechnya under Ramzan Kadyrov began leaning into the policing of morals and these cultural norms to conform to a more “acceptable” form. The most prominent form of this are the forced apologies, a coercive method from the Kadyrov regime wherein ordinary Chechens are brought onto state media channels and forced to apologise for their supposed infractions. These infractions range from criticising the government to complaining about regime brutality, being a “witch” and drinking alcohol. Worryingly the research shows that this practice is spreading along authoritarian regimes through informal communication channels. By contrast, traditional cultural norms are out of the control of the Ingush government, acting as a rallying cry for opposition, forming the basis of both opposition movements and alternate centres of power, and contributing to instability and further violence within the republic. It also examines the role of said norms in the relationship between the republics and the Kremlin itself, finding that there are some links between these practices and how these republics fit into the Russian authoritarian system.

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## Author's Declaration

"I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution."

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Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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“In case you, Ramzan Akhmatovich, are hurt at least a little, then, Ramzan, I apologise to you” – Gadjimurad Isabekov, apologising for challenging Ramzan Kadyrov to a duel, 30/08/2019.

This thesis is dedicated to all victims of the Kadyrov Regime’s oppression, and to the Chechens fighting for the freedom of Ukraine.

To the memory of Neil Tutte, Helen Yeo and Jocelyn Yeo.

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Ágnes Kéner has put up with my talking about the contents of this thesis and all the struggles therein with a patience I am not sure she appreciates. Likewise, the same could be said for her friendship, which has been life affirming. She deserves a special recognition for the work I don't think she even knows she's done.

In 2023, I joined the West of Scotland Cricket Club at Hamilton Crescent in Partick, having not played any team sport beforehand. I could not have asked for a better place to go and a better team to find – I have never once felt out of place. Cricket has filled a strange place in my life, becoming something of an obsession of mine. I would in particular like to acknowledge the Sunday XI; Akshat Fondekar, Andrew Strong, Rizwan Hussain, Athsham Hussain, Nakul Jain, Swami Ananthanarayanan, Oliver Leadbitter, Anubhav Joshi, Faris Aslam and the others who've helped fill our team over the summers.

During the course of writing the corrections for this thesis, my Grandmother, Helen Yeo, passed. One of the last things she said to me was how proud she was of what I've been able to achieve. I can only hope that this thesis has done her proud.

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## 1.Introduction

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of September 2019, Yesimat Uspakhadzhieva, an elderly resident of the Chechen village of Kargalinovskaya, appeared on the Chechen state television channel TVGrozny as the subject of a special report. Named and shamed, she was accused of conducting “witchcraft” and “providing occult services” for a period of around 37 years. At the end of the report, she apologised for her actions and told her clientele not to contact her again<sup>1</sup>. Two months later, Islam Kadyrov, the former Mayor of Grozny, was also brought onto TVGrozny to apologise, this time for an incident wherein he was filmed assaulting a woman for seemingly minor reasons<sup>2</sup>. This time, he apologised not to his “clientele”, but to Ramzan Kadyrov, his colleagues – and to the entire Chechen nation. The next year, four schoolchildren were subjected to the same treatment; in a video posted to the social media page of TVGrozny, they too were shamed for their crime, in front of their parents, local clergy and law enforcement. Their crime? Breaking a fence and recording the act.<sup>3</sup>

The phenomenon of forced apologies – of which the three above are an extremely small sample – is perhaps the most explicit example of a turn towards policing the morals of their citizens which the government of Chechnya, under Ramzan Kadyrov, has taken. Likewise, they are but one example of the strange fascination not with punishment but with abject humiliation. Meanwhile, less than an hour’s drive from the Chechen capital of Grozny in the neighbouring republic of Ingushetia, there is a rather different situation. In 2018-2019, protests brought down their government, a Sufi order runs a state-within-a-state, and women are kidnapped off the street in a still surviving tradition of bridal abduction.

The drive from Khasavyurt in the North Caucasian republic of Dagestan to Vladikavkaz in the republic of North Ossetia takes about three hours. In this drive, one never leaves the Russian

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<sup>1</sup> Caucasian Knot, 16/09/2019. *Жительница Чечни публично раскаялась в колдовстве*. link: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/340265> (last accessed 19/03/2024).

<sup>2</sup> Caucasian Knot, 05/11/2019. *Islam Kadyrov's apologies outrage residents of Chechnya*. Link: <https://eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/48996/> (last accessed 19/03/2024).

<sup>3</sup> [Caucasian Knot | Grozny schoolchildren publicly repent for broken fence](#)

Federation. Yet, within this drive, one passes from a government built around the delicate balance of representing many different ethnic groups into a highly effective nigh-on totalitarian state under a personality cult led by a charismatic leader – before passing into a politically unstable government which no local leadership has really been able to get a solid grip over, before finally passing into what may well be the model Russian republic. Is there anywhere else on the planet where this could happen but the North Caucasus? What causes the two republics of Chechnya and Ingushetia, such culturally similar neighbours to be so incredibly different?

To provide an answer to the above puzzle, this thesis examines the role which the shared traditional cultural norms of Ingushetia and Chechnya play within the authoritarian regime dynamics of these two republics. In doing so, it will demonstrate that in Chechnya these norms are effectively distorted by the ruling regime and changed into tools of authoritarian governance, while in Ingushetia, these very same norms add to a cycle of instability that is nigh-on insurmountable. As well as this, the effects of both of these situations are felt across the Russian Federation and in other authoritarian regimes.

The Governance of Russia's North Caucasus has, since the end of the Chechen Wars in the early 2000s, been primarily researched in the context of counterinsurgency. In the 2000s-2010s, this was not an approach without merit. However, in recent years, the violence in the region has begun to subside. This coincides with claims that the governance of the North Caucasus is beginning to change, especially in the wake of the Ingush protests of 2018-2019 (Kazenin, 2019), with a postulation that the main component of this strategy is using political outsiders to preside over these regimes. Previously, I completed a master's dissertation on the regimes and societies of the Vainakh republics of Ingushetia and Chechnya and found that traditional beliefs, customs and religion also play a large part in protest and governance in the respective republics (Yeo, 2020). For example, it was found that the Vainakh system of clans, or teips, (Jaimoukha, 2005; Vatchagaev, 2019) had impacts on systems of

neopatrimonialism (Hale, 2015) and protest movements, while religion was used in methods of legitimation/virtuality (Wilson, 2005).

Yet this is only a fragment of a complicated issue, a ripple in a much larger lake. This project was an early piece of research, was completed in the height of the Coronavirus Pandemic in 2020 and suffered from the setback I am sure every researcher can relate to – poor research planning in the very, *very* early stages of an academic career. That is not the main issue, however, and I am confident in the research findings from that piece, but there is more to consider - for starters, the world has changed since this original work was completed; not only has the COVID-19 Pandemic swept across the world, but, most crucially for this thesis, the War in Ukraine has changed the region, if not the world, forever. Ramzan Kadyrov, the Head of Chechnya has appeared front and centre in the Russian discourse of the War since its beginning in February 2022, with headline-catching statements such as calling for a Russian Jihad in Ukraine<sup>4</sup>. Many of these statements reinforce findings from this previous research; yet there are still attitudes to be investigated, new pathways to explore. For instance, a religious cultural norm appears in that very headline, with the call to jihad.

The aim of this thesis is, at its most basic, to expand on my earlier research. In particular, it is taking the research period and expanding it to a period of ten years, 2012 to 2021. Expanding this research period gives us the ability to see how these norms develop in Vainakh political life, tracing these processes in areas from their prevalence to their content. Additionally, given everything that happened over this period, we can see how these processes change in response to them – everything from the 2012 Russian protests to the start of the Ukrainian War in 2014, from the rise of the Islamic State in 2015 to the coronavirus pandemic, ending with the slow build up to the invasion of Ukraine.

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<sup>4</sup> The Moscow Times, October 2022; <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/10/26/kadyrov-calls-for-russian-jihadacross-all-of-ukraine-a79192>

## 1.2. Research Question(s)

This study is the first scholarly effort to explain, explore and elucidate the complex and multidimensional interplay between local culture (defined by norms), traditions and religion in the realm of governance in Vainakh republics of the North Caucasus. With a goal of providing a theoretically-grounded and empirically-novel analysis of cultural norms' impact on local governance, this study formulates its primary research question as follows:

*What is the interplay between traditional cultural norms, religion and politics among the Vainakh peoples?*

This question, combined with the inherently diverse nature of the North Caucasus, naturally lends itself to further questions. While this question will guide much of analytical and theoretical discussion of the thesis, as the primary point of research, there arise other questions from this:

1. How do these cultural norms change in importance between Chechnya and Ingushetia?
2. Are any of them more prevalent than the others? If so, why?

## 1.3. The North Caucasus; Geography and Orientalism

Where, exactly, are we talking about? This is a simple question, yet it must be answered. This region is, after all, slightly understudied in the English-speaking world, relegated to discussions of counter insurgency and terrorism.

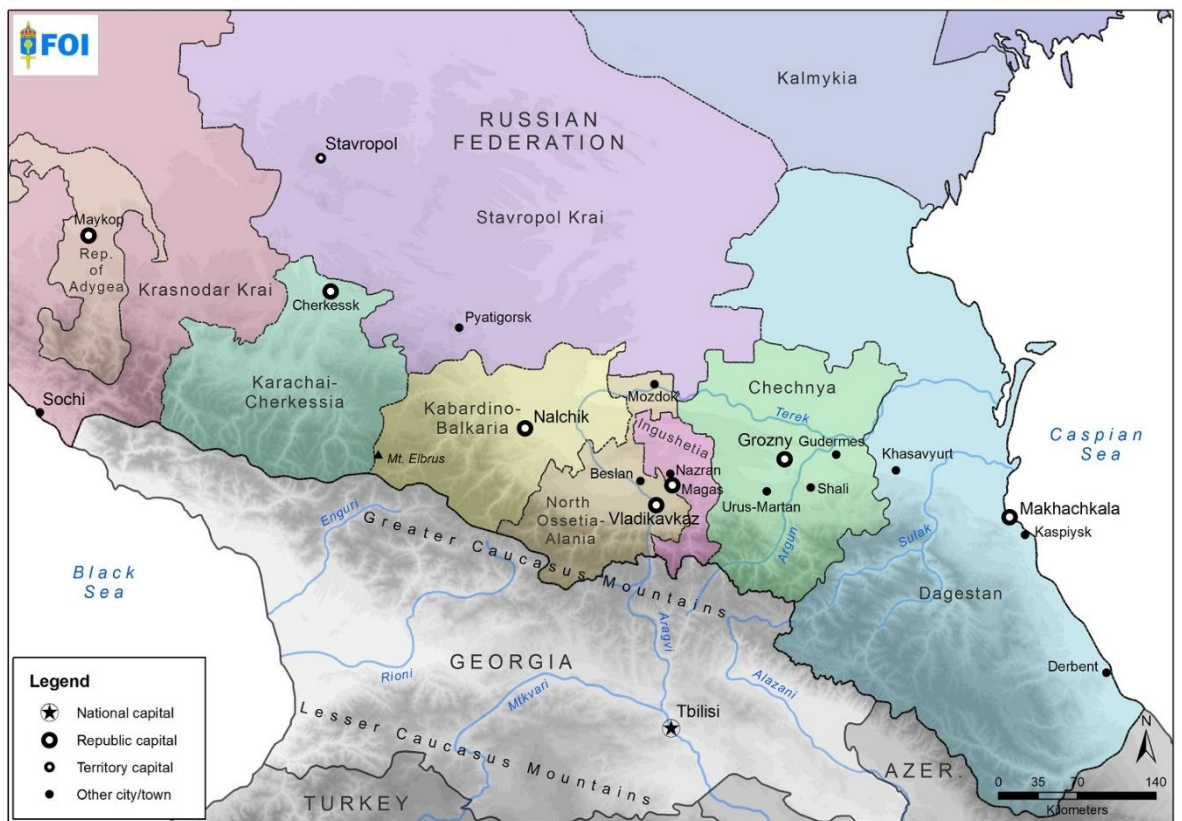


Figure 1.3.1: Hendeskog, Jakob (2020): Map of the North Caucasus. Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency. <https://www.foi.se/en/foi/research/security-policy/russia-and-eurasia/maps-russia-and-eurasia.html>

The North Caucasus has two definitions: the first, the simplest, is that it is the area immediately north of the Greater Caucasus Mountains, on the land bridge between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea. The region is a mixture of mountains, their slopes and hills (the latter particularly so in the Northwest) and the western edge of the Great Steppe. The extent of the region is somewhat up for debate. You could make an argument that the northern edges of Azerbaijan are part of this – Quba is, after all, on the northern slopes of the Caucasus – and you would be correct, but we are referring to the Russian territory of this region. Going even further, we are referring to a specific group of Russian Federal Subjects, specifically (listed east to west): Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria & Karachai-Cherkessia. All these are Republics, a type of Russian Federal Subject with, theoretically, more autonomy, and represent the most widely agreed upon definition of the region. However, some, including me, expand the definition to include the following: the

Republic of Adygea, the Republic of Kalmykia, Krasnodar Krai and Stavropol Krai. These are included as part of the North Caucasus due to their cultural closeness – especially in the case of Adygea – and for geographic reasons.

This thesis focuses on two republics – Chechnya and Ingushetia, Nokchiycho and Ghalghajchiy to their respective inhabitants, the Chechens and the Ingush. Together with two peoples in Georgia – the Kists of the Pankisi valley and the Tsova-Tush/Batsbi of the western Alazani valley in the region of Kakheti – they form the Vainakh peoples. Vainakh comes from the common term in these languages meaning “Our People” – Chechens call themselves Nokchii, Ingush call themselves Ghalghaj, the Kist Vaeppi and the Tsova-Tush/Batsbi have a complicated relationship with their names and heritage outside of this thesis. These four peoples share a common culture and descent, have languages all part of the Nakh branch of the Northeastern Caucasian language family – one of the indigenous language families with no relatives that give the Caucasus a level of fame – and to an extent a shared history. Three of these groups, the Chechens, Ingush and Kists, are followers of the Islamic faith, mostly the Sunni branch, while the Batsbi are primarily Christian.

The North Caucasus is famously diverse – Dagestan has the most native ethnolinguistic groups of any region in Europe, at around 40 – and whose indigenous groups form pluralities/majorities of their population, something that not all the Russian republics can claim. There is, to a degree, a common culture to the region, at the very least a common pattern. Multiple groups, for example the Avars and the Karachai-Balkars, self designate themselves as simply “Mountaineers” (Maharulal for Avars, Tawlula for Karachai-Balkars). Adat, the numerous codes of customary law, is common throughout the North Caucasus and has many different names and varieties. There are systems of clans, tribes, village communities and remnants of old political systems, ranging from monarchy to tribal democracy, scattered throughout these in a web that to an outsider can be nigh-on incomprehensible at first. Islam is the prominent religion of the region, with Derbent in Dagestan being Islamicised in the time of the Rashidun and Ummayad Caliphates, yet this

too is a diverse experience – Sufi orders, followers of Islamic mysticism, jostle with newly introduced Salafism and Wahhabism (much more puritan and “radical” than mainstream Islam) and those in the middle of the boat, “simply Muslims”. There are also Christians and neo-pagans, especially prominent in North Ossetia, where all three faiths are present.

The region was conquered by the Russian Empire in the 1800s, underwent the turmoil of ethnic cleansing under Stalin’s deportations in 1944, with three groups (the Chechens, the Ingush and the Karachai-Balkars, the “Mountain Turks”) deported in their entirety and only returning in the 50s. In the 1990s, as the USSR collapsed, all the regions underwent great social change, with Chechnya fighting a war for independence that ended in failure, with Chechnya coming under the rule of the pro-Russian Kadyrovs. The fighting did not cease and spread to the rest of the North Caucasus.

I believe that, due to my status as an outsider to the region, Orientalism is a risk that needs to be averted. Orientalism is defined as the creation of an other – the “orient” - Kuzio, writing on the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, makes a convincing connection between Western Orientalism and how Eastern Europe is viewed by writers in the West. He states that ‘Academic orientalism describes European colonies and Ukraine [and the Former Soviet Union, save for Russia] as artificial entities, regionally divided and weak states with immature rulers’ (Kuzio, 2020, p.69). Furthermore, the Caucasus has, historically, been subjected to orientalism from Russian writers: King states that “the writings of Güldenstädt, Klaproth and Bronevskii worked out how these “natives” were. Pushkin, Lermontov and others created the image of the romantic highlander” (King, 2008, p.140). Given this tradition, this thesis will attempt to steer clear of this, and to the best of its ability, put the Chechens and Ingush at the centre of their own story.

#### 1.4. Research Problems and Background

The extant research on the North Caucasus has several shortcomings: the issue of studying the Vainakh Republics, and the North Caucasus as a whole, purely through the lens of securitisation and counterinsurgency, how, if at all, we can move past this, and what the

resulting framework looks like. This is a tough task; security risks in the North Caucasus have been extremely pronounced since 1991, after all. This also relates to practical concerns; even without the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and the closing of Russia as a whole, researching this in the field is extraordinarily difficult if not outright impossible. Through addressing both problems, and conducting research into both, the overarching issue of whether Vainakh cultural norms and social structures play a part in their politics/participation in politics can be properly answered.

#### 1.4.1 Counterinsurgency in the North Caucasus

Much of the literature regarding the North Caucasus focuses on the Chechen Wars and the following North Caucasus Insurgency, looking at governance as an arm of a broader counterinsurgency (Le Huérou 2014; Lieven, A, 1998; Smith, 2009; Bacon, 2017, pp.124-134). This is not without merit; for examining the region at that time it can prove incredibly useful. However, in recent years, violence has declined, few deaths recorded. The Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (UCDP), a database and tool of great value for analysing deaths in conflict, tracks the violence in the North Caucasus (and all of Russia) from the period of 1989 to the present. Since 2007, the year of the foundation of the Caucasus Emirate and dissolution of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria's Government-in-Exile, there have been at least 3,112 deaths in the North Caucasus insurgency<sup>5</sup>. This is the lower figure – the data stops for the Caucasus Emirate due to its dissolution. The figure for the Russian Federation is at 3,546 – though this data includes fatalities from other conflicts in which Russia has participated<sup>6</sup>. Even when this is considered, the stark number of fatalities from the North Caucasus alone – at least accounting for all but 434 fatalities in conflict involving the Russian Federation – does show the importance for the study of counterinsurgency in the region.

Much of the literature about the conflict and the counterinsurgency relates to its applicability to other counterinsurgencies. Byman (2016), for example, reflects this approach well: the

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<sup>5</sup> Uppsala Conflict Data Programme, 2022: retrieved from <https://ucdp.uu.se/actor/367>, 30/09/2025).

<sup>6</sup> Uppsala Conflict Data Programme, 2022: retrieved from <https://ucdp.uu.se/actor/367>, 30/09/2025).

first few lines of his article asserts that authoritarian states do counterinsurgency “wrong”, yet they succeed. There is also a plethora of literature on the effects of the insurgency on securitisation in Russia, due to perceived successes in the crushing of independent Chechnya. Gel’man, for example, posits that due to the “successful” war in Chechnya waged under Putin’s leadership, the Russian President was “able to successfully restore the coercive capacity of the Russian state” (Gel’man, 2015, p.40). Even Russian opposition politicians have weighed into this literature – Grigory Yavlinsky comments that the Chechen War “consolidated the militaristic element in the ruling *nomenklatura*” (Yavlinsky, 2019, p.37). However, for the study of the region specifically, there has been much research into the counterinsurgency and the state of governance in the North Caucasus. An obvious vector for analysing the insurgency was through Islam given the Islamist nature of the insurgency. Hahn notes that “Radical Islamists influenced by the global jihadi movement seized control of the [Chechen Republic of Ichkeria] and spread a network of combat “jamaats”” (Hahn, 2008, p.3), which is representative of how the insurgency was researched at the time. It is worth further noting that the year before Hahn’s work was published, the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria ceased to be and was replaced by the Caucasus Emirate.

One inspiration for the author’s research was in a 2014 article by Emil Souleimanov, titled *An ethnography of counterinsurgency: Kadyrovtsy and Russia’s policy of Chechenization*. Written during the insurgency, the article focuses on the period of 2000-2004, during the rule of Ramzan Kadyrov’s father, Akhmat, and the policy of Chechenization and the ‘Kadyrovtsy’ militias. The approach of this research was an influence on the author’s approach to his research for this thesis – most notably, looking at cultural values and ethnography to understand why the counterinsurgency in Chechnya was working/did work. However, due to the focus of Souleimanov’s work being on the insurgency, and being nearly a decade old, the author feels the work may not reflect current trends in governance in the Northeast Caucasus.

Investigating the governments of Eurasia through unified theories of authoritarian governance is nothing new. However, through an examination of sub-national authoritarian governance and politics, especially when done in conjunction with local cultural norms, a lot can be learned and added to the corpus of knowledge in the region. Others have attempted this – most notably Klyachkina (2021), who found across the Northeastern Caucasus (the Vainakh republics plus Dagestan) that there is a great deal of expectation on day-to-day governance on local to republic level authorities. This thesis aims to, in this regard, expand on this knowledge for the Vainakh republics, to trace the course of the processes of these sub-national cogs of the authoritarian machine and, where possible, the reactions of the people who live under these regimes to these processes. This is especially important as the region is undergoing change from a counter-insurgency focused form of governance into a more longevity-minded approach.

#### 1.4.2 Cultural Norms and Vainakh Politics – existing research

There is extensive literature on counterinsurgency in the North Caucasus; what of the role of traditional cultural norms? Here, I argue, there is a research gap. There are some works that do address this subject and do so quite well. For instance, Sokirianskaia (2024) provides a well-researched overview of the status of teips in Chechnya and Ingushetia, concluding that the teip in Chechnya is, effectively, dead and that it is weakened in Ingushetia. I address this research and these conclusions in chapters 5 and 7, but for now it suffices to say that while I agree with much of this, I do not agree with all of it. Further, Sokirianskaia's work, while extremely informative and important (as one of the last pieces of fieldwork-based research on this), it is a narrow-focused piece of work, though this does make sense for her research. Additionally, you have Souleimanov (2014) but also Colombo and Souleimanov (2022) who tackle the issue of blood vengeance and provide fascinating research onto this topic. However, the focus of this research is once again on counterinsurgency.

What of the instrumentalization of blood vengeance as a tool of authoritarian rule? What of other cultural norms among the Vainakh, such as codes of honour, customary law, religion?

This research addresses all these points as well as some that are often overlooked or not researched at all, for instance bridal abductions and, crucially, forced apologies. This thesis represents the first piece of work to properly catalogue, analyse and theoretically ground the phenomenon of forced apologies, something that, given the spread of the practice analysed in chapter 6, is of great importance. Finally, this thesis looks at these norms and sees how they interact with each other, with the local regime dynamics and, occasionally, with the Kremlin – something that is not always done when examining these norms.

### 1.4.3 Authoritarianism in the Russian Federation and its regions

Russia is classed as an authoritarian state, alongside seven other states, including the entirety of Central Asia. The only democracies, all Flawed Democracies, are Moldova, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia; the rest are classed as “hybrid regime” (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025). The states are given a score out of 10, 10 being the most democratic and 1 being the most authoritarian; Russia is scored 2.03, and when ranked globally, it is 150<sup>th</sup> out of 167 ranked states, tied with Guinea Bissau (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025). Wegren describes it as “a centralised and authoritarian state” and a “personalistic autocracy” (Wegren, 2019). Levitsky & Way describe Russia as a competitive authoritarian state, i.e. an authoritarian state disguised with the trappings of democracy for the purposes of legitimation (Levitsky & Way, 2014; Gel’man calls it the same whilst adding the label of nondemocracy (Gel’man, 2015). As well as this, however, Russia is a federal state, at least in theory; in practice, the different subdivisions of Russia vary greatly in autonomy, both constitutionally (e.g. Oblasts vs. Republics) and practically (e.g. Chechen Republic vs. North Ossetia). Both politics at the national level and politics at this subnational level are of critical importance when discussing politics and political engagement in Chechnya and Ingushetia.

Gessen neatly describes the course of Russian politics from 1991 to 2008 as “the death of a democracy that never really came to be” (Gessen, 2017). It is not correct to imply that Russia under Yeltsin or Putin during his first term was a democracy, nor a country on the way to

becoming one, despite the thoughts of analysts at the time. The systems of government, however, were different. While Yeltsin ruled over a decentralised Hybrid Regime, Putin has created an authoritarian system based around his own rule and what has come to be known as the power vertical. While he did not inherit this system (Wegren, 2019), Putin has centralised power in a much more aggressive, effective manner. It cannot be overstated how important this change to a more personalised autocracy is; Putin has no clear successor, no one who has been indicated as a successor nor who is qualified for the role. As Svoboda (2015) argues, de-personalised dictatorships have a much longer “life expectancy” and avoid the messy politics of succession by setting in stone term limits that allow anticipation and preparation for a new generation of leadership, as seen in Mexico during the reign of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* from 1929-2000. Putin, through personalising the regime heavily, especially from 2012 onwards, has created for himself a strong position but an uncertain future for Russia.

Chechnya and Ingushetia are of interest to this approach – this is one of the reasons for their overall importance – through their being of opposite ends of the spectrum of Federal control. Ingushetia is, especially after the departure of the Head Yunus-Bek Yevkurov in 2018 after protests, similar to the other republics of Russia. There is space for some autonomy of approach for local leaders (it is something of a necessity) but these leaders are part of the pre-existing political apparatus. Yevkurov was a military official before his appointment in 2008 and has since become a deputy minister of defence following his departure in 2019. Makhmud-Ali Kalimatov is from a well-respected family in Ingushetia but was an outsider to the region and previously part of the legal apparatus in Russia. Similarly, Dagestan’s Head, Sergei Melikov, was in the military before his appointment, and his predecessor, Vladimir Vasilyev, was not even from Dagestan and now serves as the Parliamentary Leader for United Russia. This all forms part of a new strategy for the North Caucasus (Kazenin, 2019) aimed at increasing centralisation. By contrast, Chechnya is, at this point, the personal fiefdom of Ramzan Kadyrov. Kadyrov, the son of previous Chechen President Akhmat Kadyrov and

favourite of Vladimir Putin, has created a system almost separate from the greater Russian system. Chechen nationalism permeates through all institutions (Silaev, 2022), though it is a strange new version of this well-established nationalism that seeks to suppress other interpretations of their national history (Avedissian, 2016). This nationalism is based around strength, pro-Russian sentiment and manifests as much through architecture and civil festivities as it does through Kadyrov's social media (Avedissian, 2016). Kadyrov's interpretation of Islam reigns supreme, as does his personality cult and his feelings on a wide range of subjects, and his rule goes almost unquestioned. Those who do question it are usually those who were forced into exile, found in the European continent and are subject to harassment and even assassination. At home, Kadyrov's personal militia, the *Kadyrovtsy*, keep his order, suppressing dissent and even being known to assassinate opposition figures in Chechnya, the North Caucasus and the wider Russian Federation (Moore, Youngman and Kiss, 2024, p.870).

### 1.5. Summary

In the fewest possible words, this thesis aims to research the question(s) set out above, whilst conducting it with the limitations and restrictions of previous research in mind. The thesis deals with naturally very dense and complicated topics – authoritarianism and the culture of two indigenous peoples of the North Caucasus have many different branches between them that one could explore. Indeed, some of the findings of the research do not deal with some of the traditional cultural norms identified for research. With all this in mind, this thesis shall start with two separate literature review/terminology definition chapters. Chapter 2 shall deal with those in the authoritarian framework, primarily focusing on theories and literature surrounding coercion, patrimonialism, legitimation and forced public apologies. Chapter 3 will do the same for traditional cultural norms of the Chechen and Ingush, namely teips (clans), adat (customary law) and Islam. After these terms have been examined and defined, chapter 4 sets out the methodology – specifically, content/discourse analysis and process tracing – and giving a brief overview of the broad strokes of the results.

We then will move on to the main body of the thesis – the case study analyses. Chapters 5 and 7 examine the two case studies of Chechnya and Ingushetia respectively, analysing the numerous ways traditional cultural norms appeared over the research and how these practices developed over the ten-year period of research. Chapter 6, meanwhile, provides an analysis of the most important way any of the norms appeared in the research; the forced public apologies. This chapter, and parts of chapter 5, outline the growth of the obsession of Ramzan Kadyrov’s Chechnya with policing “morally unacceptable behaviour”. The final case study chapter, chapter 8, looks at the role of the Kremlin in the research, and how the cultural norms of Ingushetia and Chechnya affect their relationship with the federal centre. Finally, chapter 9 summarises all the findings, argues for their importance and what, in the big picture, it all means.

## 2. Authoritarian Political Practice: Literature and Theoretical

### Concepts

#### 2.1. Introduction

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the research question being presented, there exists a plethora of literature and theoretical concepts to be discussed and defined. In general, there are two categories that must be discussed: authoritarian theories, and theories pertaining to cultural practices in the region. Several theories of authoritarian politics warrant the attention of the thesis. While the majority of these theories pertain to the post-Soviet states, others are also applicable to the world at large. The main part of the broad field of authoritarian studies to be examined is how authoritarian regimes sustain themselves and the classification of these regimes. To embed those theoretical frames into the North Caucasian context, the chapter will begin with a discussion of counterinsurgency and the “broad strokes” of authoritarianism in the North Caucasus. This will be followed by analyses of the theories of neopatrimonialism and patronalism, theories of legitimation, theories of coercion and finally theories relating to opposition and civil society.

#### 2.1.2 Authoritarian regimes and the North Caucasus

Studying the North Caucasus through an authoritarian lens requires the acknowledgement that these republics exist under the Russian Federation during the rule of Presidents Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin (and before the timeframe, in the first two terms of Vladimir Putin and the two terms of Boris Yeltsin). In this same timeframe, there has only been one Head of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, yet in Ingushetia, one Head, Yunus-Bek Yevkurov, was effectively deposed/replaced due to a popular movement against him.

Despite the popular conception of the polarity between democratic and authoritarian regimes, literature on authoritarian regimes has diversified greatly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Writing in 2010, Levitsky and Way (2010) emphasise the need to point out that the hybrid regimes that they study in their book are not in transition to democracy and that the assumption they

“are (or should be) moving in a democratic direction lacks empirical foundation” . Instead, the more relevant literature focuses on classifying the diverse types of authoritarian regimes that have emerged in the wake of the “third wave of democratisation.” In his book *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*, Svoboda (2012) makes the distinction between what he calls a contested autocracy and established autocrats. He defines them as such: “contested autocrats can be credibly threatened with a removal; established autocrats have effectively monopolised power”. Levitsky and Way (2010) add to this the labels of competitive authoritarianism and the hybrid regime. These definitions highlight the complexity of applying such theories to the North Caucasus only some aspects of these theoretical frameworks effectively apply to the region under study.

Firstly, Chechnya under Ramzan Kadyrov fits the definition of an established autocracy. As Wilhelmson (2019, p.44) states, “it is unlikely that any Chechen outside the Kadyrov clan has any influence over how his republic should be governed” . Kadyrov has solidified his regime to become “Chechnya’s version of a feudal lord, nominally subordinate to the imperial centre but with wide leeway to rule over his own kingdom as he [pleases]” (Yaffa, 2020, p.92). In contrast, the frequent resignations and replacement of the Heads of the other four republics highlight the strength of Kadyrov’s position.

The Heads of the Northeastern Caucasus are appointed. Their position is not only under threat from popular movements, such as in Ingushetia (Kazenin, 2019), and from potential conflict within their ruling coalition, but also from the influence of the Russian Government, which can also include the issue of ethnic power-sharing. For example, the appointed Head of Dagestan was, before Vasilyev and Melikov, rotated between an Avar and a Dargin, the last in this system being Ramazan Abdulatipov, an Avar. In other words, not only are the appointed Heads (theoretically) the leaders of their own local ruling coalition, but they are also members of the Russian President’s ruling coalition. They are, thus, only ever contested autocrats (Svoboda, 2012, p.55) with little prospects of becoming as entrenched as the

established autocrat (Svolik, 2012, p.55) Kadyrov, though it is not impossible for them to become entrenched, as in the case of pre-2018 Yevkurov (Kazenin, 2019).

## 2.2 Neopatrimonialism/Patronalism

Neopatrimonialism is perhaps the most important political trend in post-Soviet Eurasia. At its simplest, Neopatrimonialism “is a social equilibrium in which individuals organise their political and economic pursuits primarily around the personalised exchange of concrete rewards and punishments, and not primarily around abstract, impersonal principles” (Hale, 2015, p.20). The main object, politically speaking, of this equilibrium is the relationship between the client and patron. This relationship is repeated until the top of this “patrimonial pyramid” is reached. At the top sits the highest figure of this network, whose power extends all the way down to lowest member of the network.

Lynch (2005, p.130) describes 6 characteristics of the Neopatrimonial political system in Russia, at an earlier stage of its development (but still of great importance):

1. Regular but unfree, constrained elections, resulting in a leader who feels they do not need to be accountable.
2. Domination of the government by the Presidency and affiliated bodies.
3. Governing of peripheral territories via informal deals with local elites (at the time of Lynch’s writing, best exemplified by Tatarstan and Chechnya).
4. Economic coordination between prominent businesspeople and the central government.
5. A level of Soviet continuation: “there is hardly a senior official in the Russian federal government who could not have been a trustworthy administrator of the Soviet Union, had it survived”
6. Contradictory support for the ideas of democracy and capitalism, while elites and the public distrust and dislike for the liberal model of democratic capitalist development.

Of these, two are of particular importance to the discussion of the Northeastern Caucasus and their respective regimes, so should be listed in full. The first characteristic is:

“The domination of government at the national level by the presidential administration, which has become increasingly a paramilitary body in terms of the military and intelligence origins of key officials – for example, fully two-thirds of the staff of President Putin’s administrative offices have a background in the security services” (Lynch, 2005, p.130).

The officials with security service backgrounds are the *Siloviki*, a term which would come into scholarly use after Lynch was writing. The second characteristic of much more obvious relevance, is:

“Government at the regional level is mediated by extraconstitutional deals between the president’s office and regional governors, most of whom are even less accountable by legal methods than is [sic] the Russian president himself” (Lynch, 2005, p.130).

In the Northeastern Caucasian perspective, this is of extreme relevance due to the regime dynamics of the Northeastern Caucasian Republics. This is most obvious in Chechnya, which is an extremely authoritarian regime *within* the Russian Federation. In Ingushetia and Dagestan, these deals are almost always extraconstitutional. For example, the de-facto recognition of ethnic power-sharing in Dagestan, where the position of Head revolved between an Avar and a Dargin until 2017. However, some of these “extraconstitutional deals” are in fact *constitutional* when it comes to Chechnya. While the Heads of Ingushetia and Dagestan are de-facto appointed (both are appointed by the Russian President with approval by their respective regional parliaments), the Chechen Head is an elected position. This becomes important when viewed in the context of Eurasian neopatrimonialism. The most blatant examples of reward as a manner of ensuring loyalty can be found in South Russia as a whole, with Chechnya and Crimea being some of the most heavily subsidised regions in Russia (Petrov & Slider, 2019). More recently, the aspect of punishment of regional

leaders has become evident, including arrests and trial of incumbent and recently departed regional leaders in, among others, the Mari-El and Udmurt Republics (Petrov & Slider, 2019).

Neopatrimonialism is a global political phenomenon. In Eurasia, patronalism is perhaps a better label due to the unusual centrality of the patron-client relationships – while Hale’s quote at the start of this section is used to describe the basics of neopatrimonialism, it is in fact describing patronalism (both systems do share the same “social equilibrium”). In a patronalistic society, “everyday politics and power struggles revolve around extended networks connecting people through actual personal acquaintance” (Hale, 2015, p.21). The patron is the most powerful person in these relationships of acquaintance, while the subordinate is the client. In a patronalistic society, then, politics is organised around actual, personal relationships, which, in turn, link the many networks present, with the competition between these networks forming the main kind of political contestations (Hale, 2015, p.21). The societies and states this form of politics creates and necessitates is a vertical power structure as opposed to a horizontal one, where instead of a “*primus inter pares*” being selected by the people, power is concentrated in powerful, wealthy patrons and distributed among their clientele (Hale, 2015, p.29).

In the immediate aftermath of the dissolution of the USSR, many regional governments in the successor states were more or less collections of the regional patrimonial networks, organised around both the aforementioned hierarchies and the different figures at the top of said hierarchies (Hale, 2015, p.110). Naturally, the situation in all the regions has changed with the accumulation of broader power by the Russian Presidency and the associated network – one of Putin’s first objectives when he first came to power (Petrov & Slider, 2019). Broadly, the Northern Caucasus is full of leaders who fall under the label of clientele – who, despite being able to build up a powerful support base, can be removed from their position in the network at any time. However, one leader who provides an exception to this rule is Ramzan Kadyrov of Chechnya. In part, Chechnya is both a “parallel vertical structure,” run by one of the regional leaders that Putin depends on to produce the results he needs for

legitimation (Petrov & Slider, 2019). If analysing the North Caucasus from a purely patronal aspect, another aspect of patronalism reveals itself – the importance of contested elections to the patronal society. As previously stated, in Ingushetia, and most of the North Caucasian republics, the regional head is appointed by the Federal centre – in Chechnya, the position is elected. In an authoritarian patronal society, an election is a contest not between the ruled and the ruler (i.e., an expression of actual opposition) but a competition between *networks* (Hale, 2015, pp.71-72). Even on the regional level, pulling off an election win is a grand accomplishment which displays to other networks that the patron has the power to engineer a successfully rigged election (Hale, 2015, p.72). The fact that Chechnya has elections at all indicates both a different patronal context between it and the Russian Presidency and a strong enough patronal network within the Chechen Republic itself. This was highlighted by Presidential Envoy to Southern Russia and the North Caucasus Dmitry Kozak (as quoted by Brian Taylor) as an issue in bringing stability to the region due to the corruption inherent in the system, specifically that “the dominant clan-corporative associations, due to their closed nature, are not interested in feedback mechanisms that enable open dialogue with citizens” (Taylor, 2011, p.275). Aleksandr Khinshteyn, as noted by Taylor, likened the North Caucasian republics to “family enterprises”, whose members had secured and privatised the “tastiest pieces of the pie” – i.e., government positions, business opportunities and, in the case of Chechnya, paramilitary organisations (Taylor, 2011, p.275).

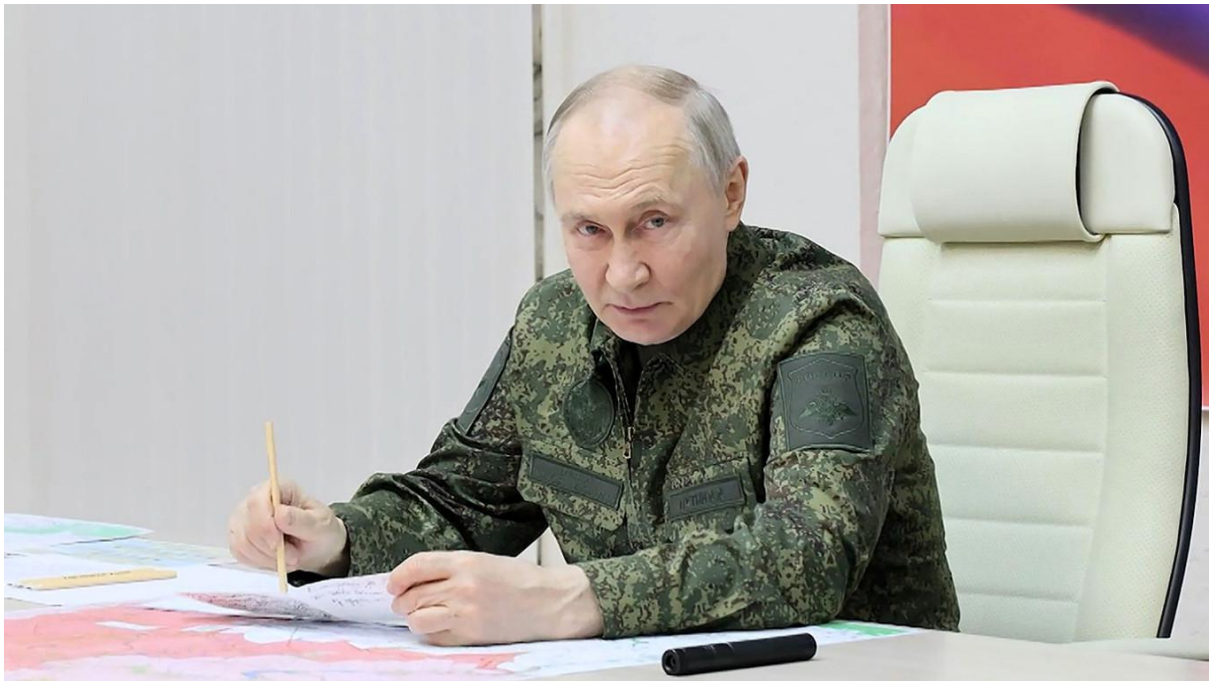
### 2.3 Legitimation

Authoritarian regimes cannot survive through managing internal politics of the ruling coalition alone. Legitimacy in the eyes of the public is necessary; even just the appearance of legitimacy or popularity. Gilley offers a definition of legitimacy: “a state, meaning the institutions and ideologies of a political system, is more legitimate the more that it holds and exercises political power with legality, justification and consent from the standpoint of all of its citizens” (Gilley, 2009, p.11). He later adds that legitimacy is born from the process of action by the state and the response of the citizens, wherein the citizens judge the actions of

the state (Gilley, 2009, p.48). In short, legitimacy is not just derived from legality, justification and consent but also from the effective governance of the ruling regime.

However, Gilley's later remarks on democracy and democratisation as the biggest source of legitimacy (Gilley, 2009, pp.48-49) present a problem which can be answered twofold; namely, that the North Caucasian regimes, and Russia as a whole, are not democratic yet are still, in some ways, legitimate. This situation especially true in Chechnya.

Firstly, the leader must be able to offer different presentations of themselves at different times to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. This is not just a practice within Russia or the post-Soviet space – in some cases, it is done more literally than others, with Hill and Gaddy referring to clothing choices such as Muammar Gaddafi's robes and Yasser Arafat's keffiyeh (Hill & Gaddy, 2015, pp.14-15). However, Vladimir Putin has become a master of crafting his image for different events. While the above leaders have one image, Putin has several. Hill and Gaddy list six such identities – “the Statist, the History Man, the Survivalist, the Outsider, the Free Marketeer, the Case Officer” (Hill & Gaddy, 2015, p.18) – and noting that “over the last several years, Vladimir Putin's public relations team has pushed his image in a multiplicity of directions, pitching him as everything from big game hunter and conservationist to scuba diver and biker” (Hill & Gaddy, 2015, p.14). These identities may not always come with their own clothing, but it is important to note that, since the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, when dealing with military matters Putin has taken to dressing in military fatigues:



*Figure 2.3.1- Putin in military fatigues (Moscow Times, 28/05/2025).*

The main reason for these performances, which are often met with confusion in Western countries, is simple – the Kremlin is responding to opinion polls from different sections of the Russian population, creating an image personally tailored to different groups. “they are all based on feedback from opinion polls suggesting the Kremlin needs to reach out and create a direct personal connection to a particular group among the Russian population” (Hill and Gaddy, 2015, p.15-16.). The most obvious application of this in the Northeastern Caucasus is in Ramzan Kadyrov. Kadyrov has, like Putin, been able to project different versions of himself as and when the need arises.



Figure 2.3.2. Kadyrov in Islamic dress. (Fuller, 2015) <https://www.rferl.org/a/profile-ramzan-kadyrov-chechnya-russia-putin/26802368.html>



Figure 2.3.3. Kadyrov being embraced by Muhammad bin Zalman of the United Arab Emirates (Galeeva, 2020) <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2020/01/02/balancing-adversaries-russian-policy-in-the-gulf-and-the-role-of-russian-muslims/>



Figure 2.3.4 Kadyrov performing a Lezginka in Chechen traditional dress (Gladstone, 2016). <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/07/world/europe/chechnya-kadyrov-child-fights.html>



Figure 2.3.5. Kadyrov holding an assault rifle (Ioffe, 2015).

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/10/30/chechen-strongman-ramzan-kadyrov-likes-fall-on-instagram/>

There are several aspects to this which are worth a brief overview here. Firstly, figures 2.3.2 and 2.3.3 show the Kadyrov the devout Muslim – figure 2.3.2 shows this at a rally, where he is surrounded/partly adorned by Islamic iconography. Figure 2.3.3 shows Kadyrov with Mohammed bin Zayed of the United Arab Emirates, on one of his many diplomatic visits to the Islamic powers of the Gulf. Meanwhile, figure 2.3.4 shows Kadyrov as the guardian/figurehead of Chechen tradition. He is outfitted in Chechen clothing, dancing a folk dance with his mother. Finally, figure 4 shows Kadyrov the military man posing with an automatic rifle. Much like one of Putin's different personas, this is meant to show Kadyrov as the strongman, the defender of Chechnya against the insurgency. In this case, it is possible to argue that this is less to win more popular support, and more to intimidate – a discussion on this will occur in later chapters.

While the above figures are meant to conjure up popular support for the leader, in authoritarian regimes actual popular support is not necessarily needed – only the image of popular support. This, and the general 'staging' of politics forms the backbone of virtuality as described by Wilson (2005). Explaining the term Virtual Politics, Wilson states that in post-

Soviet politics, parties and politicians are mere “projects”, with very little reality and a select few being “totally fake” (Wilson, 2005, p.33). Those leaders who engage in this form of politics are averse to “any independent political activity”; if a force in politics, no matter how insignificant, can be manipulated, it will be, from election results to the candidates, parties and “themes” of the election. (Wilson, 2005, p.38). This must be viewed in a much more regional context than that of the entirety of the Russian Federation. Virtual Politics applies to most authoritarian/semi-authoritarian states in post-Soviet Eurasia – its implementation in authoritarian post-Soviet *systems/sub-national* regimes is on a smaller context, but is much the same.

Chechnya, being the only North Caucasian Republic to still hold elections for the office of Head, illustrates the implementation of the theory best. In 2003, a constitutional referendum and presidential election were held in Chechnya. Using the previously discussed patronal networks at their disposal, Moscow and Grozny were able to craft an air of legitimacy for themselves by rigging the results of the votes. The official turnouts for both votes were over 85%, the referendum passed with 96% of people voting yes, Akhmad Kadyrov won the vote with 80.8%, his “official” rivals – constructed through political technologists – won a cumulative 9.8% and his actual rivals were forced out of the race (Wilson, 2005, p.87).

Virtuality extends not just to the ruler and the regime surrounding them, but to their opponents as well. This is primarily achieved with “Black PR” and “Kompromat,” slander and “compromising material, real or imagined (financial details, lurid videos and simple slander)” (Wilson, 2005, p.70). It can extend further to the creation of a false/officially sanctioned opposition – in the Russian system, this takes the form of the parties outside of United Russia (Wilson, 2005).

#### 2.4 Coercion, Civil Society and Opposition

The 2018-2019 Ingush protest movement was a watershed moment for the politics of the North Caucasus, due to the simple facts of the movement’s size and success. As such, an

examination of civil society and opposition in both the North Caucasian and Russian contexts is necessary for any meaningful examination of the region.

It must be noted that this section of the thesis was written during what is possibly the lowest point in Russian civil society since the fall of the Soviet Union. This is due to anti-War laws in the Russian Federation closing many independent media outlets, such as Meduza, TVRain and Echo Moscow, as well as the imprisonment of thousands of Russians who oppose the invasion of Ukraine. Due to this being a current event, it may affect the reliability of some of the theoretical literature discussed in this section – this is an unprecedented moment in recent Russian political history, but this thesis will try to incorporate these developments into this present discussion.

Greene (2014) states that an issue with studying/discussing theories around civil society in Russia “is a lack of useful theory” (Greene, 2014, p,4). He elaborates on this by explaining that “the broadest studies of democracy, in order to achieve generalised relevance, take their definitions and categorizations to a level of abstraction that is scarcely useful to someone trying to understand why a particular country falters (Greene, 2014, p.4). While there is truth in this statement, there does exist literature offering an analysis on the role of civil society in the Russian Federation. In broader Russian society, the main issue facing civil society is that after he first became President, Putin consolidated the power of the presidency, thus placing great amounts of this power in his own hands, at the expense of virtually all other centres of power in the Russian political system (Evans, 2015, p.19). This relates to the President’s idea of civil society; instead of civil society being a power outside of the state, sometimes in complete opposition to the state, it is something to be *co-opted* by the state in order to assist the leadership in realising its goals for broader society (Evans, 2015, p.19). A prominent example of this co-option is to be found in the youth group Nashi, “Ours,” founded by Vladislav Surkov which “artfully copied the external trappings of rebellious youth organisations to turn the movement into a powerful state structure” (Zygar, 2016, p.98). This has been taken to its logical extreme over the course of the 2022 invasion of

Ukraine. Reporters without Borders noted that a “draconian” law outlawing “false” information about the law had delivered the final blow to Russian independent media, as well reporting that 30 media outlets had been banned in Russia due to their reporting on the conflict (RSF, 04/03/2022). The purpose of this law is to control the narrative around the “special military operation” in Ukraine – rather than have protest and civil narratives against the war, the Kremlin can try and control the flow of discourse in a favourable manner. This links back to the theories surrounding political technologists and virtual politics; co-option of civil society allows for the creation of the illusion of popularity to legitimise the regime. This can be seen in the North Caucasus, particularly in Chechnya, where the TV station *Grozny* is used to broadcast news favourable to Kadyrov, most noticeably in the broadcasting of forced apologies for everything from actual opposition to the regime to accusations of witchcraft.

Why, then, do actual movements of opposition both materialise and fail to materialise? Answering this is different for both the Russian and North Caucasian contexts; though, as stated previously, both are important due to the North Caucasus being part of the Russian Federation. The Ingush protests have rightly been at the centre of discussions on protest in the North Caucasus due to their success (Kazenin, 2019). However, small-scale demonstrations in Dagestan over local issues are also frequent, though they can grow quite large. For example, in 2022, 300 villagers from the highland village of Kakashura travelled to Makhachkala to protest over the allocation of land<sup>7</sup>. These protest movements in the Northeastern Caucasus materialised over local political issues, from the deposition of the local Head to the allocation of land. The failure of materialisation can be traced to the start of Putin’s third term in 2012, with protest movements on a large scale declining, due to fears of state persecution, and the co-option of civil society as previously discussed.

There is also the issue of coercion, where co-option of civil society and opposition movements fail, coercion is available to quash such independent movements. Coercion is both one of the main ways a state can crush opposition as well as one of the main ways a

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<sup>7</sup> (Caucasian Knot, 11/02/22: <https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/58197/>).

state exercises power (Taylor, 2011). Two types of coercion are identified for the use of this thesis, both of which are to be found in Levitsky and Way (2010). Firstly, there is high-intensity coercion, “high-visibility acts that target large numbers of people, well-known individuals, or major institutions” which may come in the form of assassinations, imprisonment and crackdowns (Levitsky and Way, 2010). The opposite side of this is low-intensity coercion – smaller-scale acts meant to target individuals, such as surveillance, harassment, denial of opportunity etc. (Levitsky and Way, 2010). In Russia as a whole, the coercive instruments of the state are concentrated in what Taylor defines as the Power Ministries – the Ministry of Defense (MO), the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and the Federal Security Service (FSB), as well as other adjacent ministries such as the Ministry of Civil Defense and Emergency Situations (MChS) (Taylor, 2011). Coercion is closely linked with counter-insurgency in the North Caucasus, in particular with high-intensity coercion strategies (Taylor, 2011).

#### 2.4 Authoritarian Learning and the Forced Apology

Beginning in 2015, a particular form of coercion starts to take root in Chechnya, ultimately becoming, as we will see in chapters 6 and 7, the dominant form of coercion and the most numerous category in the research for Chechnya. These are the forced apologies, one of the most important findings of this dissertation. The forced apology is exactly what it sounds like – people are, for various reasons, forced to apologise for supposed crimes, ranging from opposition to Kadyrov and the government to, overwhelmingly, “moral” issues such as drinking alcohol, behaving poorly at a wedding and driving over the speed limit. This is also a practice that has spread from Chechnya to other authoritarian systems in the region. It is an issue which necessitates examining different perspectives to construct a framework looking at where the practice comes from and how the authoritarian systems “learn”.

Before explaining the theoretical background to the practice, it is worth discussing the existing literature around apologies in politics briefly. What makes the phenomenon of forced public apologies worthy of greater exploration is that research into apologies within politics

usually focuses on apologies from states for actions in their past. One of the best sources on this is Lind's 2008 book *Sorry States*, which focuses on apologies (and the lack of them) from Germany and Japan and questions their effectiveness, with a theoretical contribution focusing on apologies by states to states. Other articles elaborate on "political apologies", but still with a focus on states as the apologiser. A good example of this is Saito (2016), who examines the cultural and social aspects of these apologies. Saito focuses, again, on the international apologies that most articles do, though it is not entirely unhelpful for what we are looking at, as he identifies several common factors in the apologies:

- Collective representations
- Actors
- Audience
- Means of symbolic production
- Mise-en-scène
- Power (Saito, 2016, p.2).

These are not unimportant to the issue of forced apologies. Collective representation applies the least, though it does appear; the actors are the victim and the Chechen state, the Chechen people and Ramzan Kadyrov himself; the audience is the people of Chechnya. This latter point presents one of the peculiarities of the practice, namely that one of the actors is, in effect, the audience, with the victim of the apologising to them. While it is true that they are the intended audience, the intended effect is not for them to accept an apology, but to "learn" what the Kadyrov regime expects from them. This is best seen in the two trends examined in that chapter on morally unacceptable behaviour, particularly on weddings, and on the "witch hunts". The mise-en-scène for the apologies varies over time – the first apology takes place with Kadyrov personally accepting an apology; later apologies take place in police stations, with apologies directed to the police officers present; later, they are instrumentalised, with many apologies taking place and posted on social media. Power

scarcely needs an explanation; the apologies exist to further Kadyrov's hold over Chechen society, a display of his control over the very fabric of Chechen culture.

From an anthropological-culturalist perspective, the main avenues of importance are dignity, shame, and the role of "ritual" within politics. Dignity and shame within an authoritarian context have been previously noted in anthropological and ethnographical research. Hervouet, for example, notes the role of dignity in the 2020 protests in Belarus (Hervouet, 2021, p.297) before going on to note the examples of how dignity is attained within such a society, specifically contending that "forms of "defensive dignity" are based on the functioning of the regime and are expressed by showing loyalty to Lukashenka, while forms of "offensive dignity" see the system not as a provider of support for personal autonomy, but as an intolerable guardian that prevents individual emancipation" (Hervouet, 2021, p.298).

Logically, the role of ritual is the next, and one of the most important, steps. The forced apology is not just a method of coercion, it is, due to its prominence, a ritual form of coercion. Kertzer (1988: 178) states that "Political rites are important in all societies, because political power relations are everywhere expressed and modified through symbolic means of communication. Certain kinds of political rites are more important in some political contexts than others". Aronof and Kubik (2012; pp.102-103) define two rituals. The ritual of rebellion, done within the confines of the political order, and the ritual of confirmation, confirming the strength and the legitimacy of the political order. Forced apologies are a ritual, to be sure, but they do not comfortably fall into either of these categories (the closest is the latter). They are, in a sense, a ritual of coercion, wherein the state/system re-affirms its power over certain political and moral issues. There is also an element of political theatre, as investigated by Pisano (2022: 3-6), within this – it is a performance, a public mockery of cultural codes and understanding that, through the nature of the abused cultural codes, manages to simultaneously adhere to them. Pisano notes that some of these performances are purely "for the King" (2022: 3-4) and in a sense there is an

element of this within the apologies due to Kadyrov's repeated demands for apologies (and their addressing towards Kadyrov and his entourage in some cases).

Perhaps the most crucial piece of theory is that of the honour culture and a study conducted into the effects apologies have on those living within one. The honour culture is a simple definition: it is a culture where the concept of "honour" is a central cultural value. One of the best books on this is Nesbitt's 1996 *Culture of Honor*, examining the culture of the Southern United States. Nesbitt (1996, p.4-5) defines the honour culture as having the following features:

- Members of the culture are prepared to respond to personal "insults" with physical violence.
- Gives immense value to "precedence", and how one "should" be treated.
- In some cases, values honesty and integrity in the "traditional" sense of the word honour.
- The act of the insult deprives a person of "honour"; "Since a reputation for strength is of the essence in the culture of honor, the individual who insults someone must be forced to retract; if the instigator refuses, he must be punished — with violence or even death" (Nesbitt, 1996, p.5).

Expanding on this is a 2022 study (Lin et al.) on the topic of apologies in an honour culture – one of the rare works on the topic globally – where the authors re-affirm the role of honour, and that it exists really only in the eyes of other, and that:

"The logic of honor can interfere with apologizing for one's transgressions, as apologizing often signifies an admission of fault and an acknowledgment of responsibility... By making an apology and admitting wrongdoings, one can potentially damage one's reputation and lose social standing. Put simply, the act of apologizing can cause one to lose honor" (Lin et al, 2022, p.2).

The above background is crucial as forced apologies must not be defined simply through political means but must also come through the Kadyrov regime's use and abuse of cultural norms, specifically concepts surrounding pride and shame. Jaimoukha (2005; 134-135) in his excellent handbook on the Chechens notes what he calls the "Three Pillars of Vainakh Virtue", which are of importance here - *yah*, pride, *bekhk*, the sense of duty and responsibility, and *èh*, shame and guilt. In this way, the forced apologies play into *èh*, by publicly shaming those who have committed a "wrong" in the eyes of the Kadyrov regime, but also by violating *yah*, the sense of pride. Note that these being the three pillars of Vainakh virtue and identity, this means that, in Nesbitt's definition, the Vainakh honour culture falls into the category where all four aspects of the honour culture can be found. In this sense, the forced apology also plays into aspects of anonymity. Jaimoukha noted in 2005 that anonymity was a recent phenomenon for a society traditionally governing itself through customary laws (*adat*, *nokhchalla*, *lamkerst* and *sharia*) and blood vengeance (*chi'ir*) (Jaimoukha, 2005). The novelty of anonymity in Vainakh society comes from the close-knit nature of the teips, as well as the relatively small population in both Chechnya and Ingushetia. The public apologies, as well as, arguably, the prevalence of mass-media itself, undo this newly granted privilege – if someone makes a forced apology, their family, their friends, their neighbours and local community will know about it. This reinforces the standard the regime is out to set, be that a moral standard or a political one (in the case of apologies to Kadyrov and his regime), and reinforces the fear around the practice. Chechnya has a population of a million and a half with an increasingly state-controlled media. If someone apologises on TVGrozny, their relatives are extremely likely to know. Given the examples noted in the introduction, though, it is important to define what constitutes a forced apology. Firstly, these actions are public and conducted through regime-controlled media, such as TVGrozny, or through state-approved (i.e., not banned) social media. Then there is a cluster of variables around whom the person is apologising to and why:

Object of Apology	Reason for Apology
Those who know them (in the example of Yesimat Uspakhadzhieva and other “witches”, her clientele.	Criticism of the regime’s activities, e.g. anti-war protests, speaking out against coercion, etc. Also includes criticism of moral aspects of the regime (e.g. the Russian Orthodox Church)
The Leader (Kadyrov or Putin)	Criticism of the regime itself
The “Nation” or the “Chechen People”	Morally Unacceptable Behaviour (unorthodox religious practices, personal habits, the “almost naked party” are examples)
	Government officials acting in unauthorised ways (as in the case of Islam Kadyrov).

*Table 3.4.1 Objects of and Reasons for Forced Apologies*

This is a difficult practice to define, simply because of the arbitrariness of the process. People can be forced to apologise for almost anything, but some officials close to the leader get away with the behaviour others are being shamed for.

Adding to the complication of this is the fact that similar practices have occurred in the past in the region, specifically during the Soviet Union in the form of practices such as denunciations and *samokritika*, “self-criticism”. The denunciations are the most obvious parallel, wherein the wrongdoings of others were reported to various organs of the Soviet government (Fitzpatrick, 1996). The focus on the broad scale of “wrongdoing” is the main source of this parallel; the key difference is that the denunciations were used, as evidenced

by Fitzpatrick (1996), that the denunciations were a “bottom-up” process. It is possible that the denunciations and their institutional memory influenced the practice of apologies, though I believe the influence to be minimal. Chechen society has, since the years of the denunciations of Stalin, been traumatised to an intense degree, with the wars of independence in the 1990s-2000s bringing traditional culture to the fore once again (Jaimoukha, 2005). Further, we must bear in mind that Kadyrov’s political acumen comes not from a political source, but a theological one; his father was the Mufti of Chechnya during the Ichkerian period, and Ramzan spent much of his formative years in that political climate. Further, given the overwhelming prominence of moral standards in the apologies, as well as Ramzan’s own peculiar issues with his image, it, to my mind, stands to reason that conceptions of honour mean more than institutional legacy, particularly when Chechen society underwent a much more brutal separation from the institution that birthed the denunciations. Still, they cannot be fully discounted; the denunciations are perhaps a small part of this story, but they are nevertheless a piece of the puzzle.

It is worth seeing an apology to understand what the general pattern of apologies looks like. RFE/RL has an apology uploaded on their YouTube channel, along with subtitles; this apology involves a teenage boy apologising for posts criticising Putin and Kadyrov<sup>8</sup>. The formula for the apology goes as follows: firstly, the “offender” outlines what they did wrong; next, they outline why they committed the offence, if applicable; finally, they apologise to the Chechen nation. In some cases, they apologise again, in this case in a meeting with the Grand Mufti of Chechnya.

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<sup>8</sup> RFE/RL, 2019. *Tearful, Terrified, And Televised: Chechen Teen Apologizes For Criticizing Authorities*: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyqM5AB6PV0&ab\\_channel=RadioFreeEurope%2FRadioLiberty](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyqM5AB6PV0&ab_channel=RadioFreeEurope%2FRadioLiberty)



Figure 2.4.1: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyqM5AB6PV0&ab\\_channel=RadioFreeEurope%2FRadioLiberty](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyqM5AB6PV0&ab_channel=RadioFreeEurope%2FRadioLiberty), 0:24



([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyqM5AB6PV0&ab\\_channel=RadioFreeEurope%2FRadioLiberty](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyqM5AB6PV0&ab_channel=RadioFreeEurope%2FRadioLiberty) 0:30)



([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyqM5AB6PV0&ab\\_channel=RadioFreeEurope%2FRadioLiberty](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyqM5AB6PV0&ab_channel=RadioFreeEurope%2FRadioLiberty), 0:37)



([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyqM5AB6PV0&ab\\_channel=RadioFreeEurope%2FRadioLiberty](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyqM5AB6PV0&ab_channel=RadioFreeEurope%2FRadioLiberty) 0:41)



([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyqM5AB6PV0&ab\\_channel=RadioFreeEurope%2FRadioLiberty](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyqM5AB6PV0&ab_channel=RadioFreeEurope%2FRadioLiberty) 1:01)

The whole segment on GroznyTV lasted 46 minutes. There are also several important factors demonstrated here; firstly, the focus on Chechen beliefs and morals, even in this apology about criticising the government, shows that a theoretical grounding via Chechen traditions is necessary. This is doubly important considering the largest category is to do with actions that do not adhere to what the Kadyrov regime deems morally acceptable. Secondly, the apology is to the Chechen nation, a key feature of the apologies. Additionally, the language used is interesting, essentially laying the blame on the immoral actions on the diaspora, both the opposition and associated bloggers in Europe but also on Islamist fighters who emigrated to Syria. It links the work of the opposition and of the Ichkerians to the Islamic State, by lumping them together in one category, delegitimising the European opposition even further. Finally, note the body language in both; the words of the Kadyrov regime are coming out, but the language shows the shame and guilt of the apologist. To do this all so publicly shows the power and reach of the regime; even making comments on social media will result in the offender being named and shamed, with a digital footprint of their crime readily available for all to see. This is part of the effectiveness of forced apologies; as I will argue later, it is also why I believe they decline in their use - because *they worked*. They have scared a good

proportion of the population of Chechnya into simply going along with the regime as Kadyrov further steers Chechnya towards totalitarianism.

Has Putin learned from Kadyrov? In order to answer that, and the questions posed earlier, the concepts of the authoritarian intranational and forced apologies must be defined and grounded. The roots of the authoritarian intranational are described by Stephen G.F. Hall (2023) as part of his book on the authoritarian international, emphasising the role of internal informal networks in the process of authoritarian learning. The term “authoritarian international” refers to the exchange of knowledge and “learning from successes and failures” both internally and externally, a specific term looking at the transfer of knowledge from a subnational authoritarian regime to a national authoritarian regime. The knowledge being exchanged or diffused in this instance is knowledge pertaining to methods of authoritarian survival. What methods of coercion visibly work? Which don’t? What mistakes did the incumbent make, that the other incumbent can learn from? Such an exchange between leaders within the same authoritarian system, as opposed to different authoritarian states, is something that is not mentioned in Hall’s work. The closest this comes to is looking at informal internal networks, such as the *siloviki* (Hall, 2023; 183-185). While this is informative, it does not explain the entire exchange of knowledge here, especially given that Kadyrov has been at odds with the *siloviki* (Yeo & Souleimanov, 2023), and is connected to Putin through both formal and informal networks. Other authors, such as Gel’man (2014: 25-39), do discuss the dynamics of subnational political structures (or Local Regimes as Gel’man refers to them), but do not deal with such an exchange of knowledge. This is all important as the nature of the relationship between Ramzan Kadyrov’s Chechnya and Vladimir Putin’s Russia is unique in the amount of power and autonomy that Kadyrov has been allowed to cultivate. Tolstrup and Souleimanov (2021) have previously discussed this at great length, particularly in the context of overall centre-periphery relations within an authoritarian system. This unique situation is both a “single pyramid structure” and a “dual pyramid structure” of patrimonialism (Hale, 2015: 65), where Kadyrov is loyal to Putin, but

can survive on his own. The authoritarian intranational is, therefore, the exchange of knowledge of methods for authoritarian survival within the confines of a single authoritarian system.

## 2.5 Political Theories: in Conclusion

The above theories presented give us a solid analytical framework needed to ground the analysis of cultural norms and local aspects of governance in broader literature on authoritarian governance. By looking at a mixture of theories of the inner workings of an authoritarian regime, how the regime interacts with the people it rules and how the people interact with it, we have a solid foundation for analysing the inner workings of an authoritarian regime at all levels. These are many different considerations to have, but given that the period of time being researched is ten years long, with a deliberately broad net cast in terms of what is being looked for, they are instrumental towards the perception of governance in North Caucasus. It also presents us with the chance to give as full a picture as we possibly can – a distinct advantage to this kind of research, as asking these questions in Chechnya and Ingushetia would be virtually impossible. This, however, is but one half of the theories we will be examining – it is equally crucial to give an overview of the different cultural norms that are being looked out for.

### 3. Cultural Norms

How and why are cultural norms important for understanding how a society acts politically?

This is an underlying research question if one were to boil down this thesis into the most abstract fundamentals. Luckily, this is not a question that hasn't been asked before, and while modern Vainakh society has evaded study, other societies have not. Before moving on to the theories and literature surrounding the culture of the Vainakh peoples, it is thus important to examine what is meant by cultural norms and how such ideas may influence the political engagement of a people. Cultural norms are defined as:

“rules or expectations of behavior and thoughts based on shared beliefs within a specific cultural or social group. While often unspoken, norms offer social standards for appropriate and inappropriate behavior that govern what is (and is not) acceptable in interactions among people. Social and cultural norms are highly influential over individual behavior in a broad variety of contexts” (National Academies, 2018<sup>9</sup>)

For the Vainakh, there are 3 main cultural norms, or systems which inform them, which will be discussed throughout this thesis: Teips, or clans; Adat, customary law; and Islam.

#### 3.1 Russian Orientalism in the Caucasus

In the introduction to this thesis, I briefly discussed the concept of Orientalism – the concept of the European creation of an “other” (the Orient, or East) against their own civilised selves (the Occident, or West) to bolster their own nascent nationalisms (Said, 1978). It is perhaps best to re-iterate and elaborate the implications and implementations of Russian Orientalism in the North Caucasus before proceeding with the rest of the chapter.

Some of the greatest writers (or at least, classical writers) in the Russian language have used the Caucasus in their literature. Pushkin wrote romantic stories and poems about the “wild” Caucasus, Tatars, savages with “neither a history nor a gentry” (Sahni, 1997). Lermontov,

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<sup>9</sup> accessed 10/05/23: <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/25075/addressing-the-social-and-cultural-norms-that-underlie-the-acceptance-of-violence>

much more sympathetic to the cause of the Caucasians, falls back into the tropes established by Pushkin when writing about the area, with captive maidens, “brave but stupid” natives and “cruel khans” (Sahni, 1997). It is only in Tolstoy that Russian classical literature reaches genuine compassion and solidarity – Russia’s conception of the Caucasus is shattered in *The Cossacks*, in which the romantic hero is met with frustration and rejection as opposed to the view of the civilising, heroic Russian (Sahni, 1997). *Hadji Murat* has an Islamic main character and a strong condemnation of the colonisation effort started by Tsar Nicholas – though Imam Shamil, the leader of a resistance effort against the Russians, is painted as being as despotic as the Tsar (Sahni, 1997).

Russia has been described as an imperial nation (Plokhy, 2018), where, as opposed to Western European nations *having* empires, Russia *was* an empire (Plokhy 2006). This is usually meant in reference to the relationship Russian nationalism has with the nations of Ukraine and Belarus, which, through the lens of Russian nationalism, are the same nation as the Russian nation, just with different dialects of the Russian language (Plokhy, 2018). This is not the case, but understanding this is necessary for framing the role the “other,” i.e. the Orient, plays in the formation of this nationalism (Said, 1979). This greater Russian nation is defined as the entirety of the Eastern Slavic peoples – the peoples of the Russian frontiers, whether or not they belong to a Caucasian, Turkic or other people group, whether or not they reside in the Caucasus (Sahni, 1997), in the heart of the Volga region (Hartley, 2021) or in Central Asia (Sahni, 1997), are the “other” Russian nationalism frames itself against.

How does this play into the present theoretical framework? The answer is twofold. Firstly, it highlights the need for a North Caucasian approach to North Caucasian culture and politics. What the author means by this is a sort of separation from the broader Russian system and culture. While, due to the length of time these Republics have been part of Russia, a complete separation is impossible, for the purposes of examining the local politics of the region through a cultural lens it is necessary to split these as greatly as can be reasonably achieved. The second reason relates to the provenance of some sources. Orientalism did not

stop entirely when the Soviet Union came to power (Sahni, 1997). The Checheno-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (C-IASSR) only ever had one Vainakh leader – the rest were ethnic Russians. Stereotypes of Northern Caucasians continues in the Russian Federation to this day. Some of the sources for this chapter, and this thesis as a whole, come from Russia, are written in Russian and some by Russians. One book which will be referred to is from the Soviet series *Narody Mira*, and another from its post-Soviet spiritual successor, *Narody i Kultury*. As such, it is imperative to bear in mind the possibility of stereotyping in the sources, especially when dealing with the older works.

On the other side of the debate, it is also necessary to watch out for blatantly nationalistic interpretations of North Caucasian history and culture by North Caucasians themselves. This is done for the exact same reason as the Russians making the North Caucasians into an “other” – to create a non-Russian identity by which they can define themselves. Nationalism is an inherently two-way process between countless “us-es” and “them-s” – to pretend that such a process does not apply to the North Caucasus is naïve and may even accidentally play into tropes of the noble savage. Believing the nationalistic discourse from North Caucasians may end up creating an image that is a romanticised fiction – of a people who have not changed for hundreds of years, who only revere those with honour, free from any and all outside influence. This viewpoint is naïve and denies the simple reality that, like any part of the world, the Northeastern Caucasus has had contact with the rest of the world for most of its existence, and that it is also a part of the Russian Federation. It is tempting to believe this romanticism – as is the complete flipside, to believe the “civilising” mission of the Russians was always well-intentioned and noble – however, to believe diminishes the truth of the situation.

### 3.2 Historical Background

A historical background to anywhere in the North Caucasus could go back centuries, if not millennia. It is possible to discuss the ancient history of the Caucasus thanks to its connections with ancient Greece, in the form of trade, cultural exchange and Greek colonies

(Jaimoukha, 2001; Colarusso, 2016). This thesis will start its discussion of the historical background in the nineteenth/eighteenth century in all sections.

Traditional Vainakh social structures and cultural norms do date to before this time – the teip is supposed to have emerged in the sixteenth century, and through this system, it is posited that the Chechens never experienced feudalism (Jaimoukha, 2005). One piece of evidence for this is the relatively egalitarian social structure of Vainakh society compared to the extremely complex Circassian feudal structure (Jaimoukha, 2005; Jaimoukha 2001). However, it is in the nineteenth century, during the Russian conquest of the Caucasus, that most Chechens had converted to Islam from their older “Pagan” belief system, though Islam had been a presence since the sixteenth century (Jaimoukha, 2005). The Caucasian War saw several “holy wars,” known as *Ghazawat*, against the Russian aggressors – famous commanders like Sheikh Mansur and, above all, Imam Shamil have become significant symbols of Northeast Caucasian resistance to Russia and of the Islamic faith in the region. The Ingush also broke away from the Chechen nation around the eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries.

Since 1864, Chechnya has been part of Russia, though there have been rebellions against Russian rule. During the Revolution and Civil War, the peoples of the Northeastern Caucasus formed the Mountainous Republic, a statelet run by Chechen oil tycoon Tapa Tchermoeff, which was eventually re-incorporated into the RSFSR. In 1936, the Checheno-Ingush ASSR was formed – only to be dissolved during the deportation of the Vainakhs in 1944. It was formed again in 1957, after the deported peoples had returned. It would only have one ethnically Vainakh leader, Doku Zavgayev.

In 1991, as the USSR was collapsing, Chechnya declared independence as the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. While there was a modicum of peace for the first two years of its existence, in 1994 war broke out between Russia and Chechnya, killing, wounding and displacing hundreds and thousands – against the odds, Ichkeria survived. Its President,

Dzokhar Dudayev, was assassinated in 1996, leading to Aslan Maskhadov eventually succeeding him in 1997. In 1999, Putin launched the Second Chechen War, causing further destruction and resulting in the ascendancy of former Ichkerian Mufti Akhmad-Hadji Kadyrov, who was installed as President and formally elected in 2003. In 2004, he was assassinated, with militant Islamist Shamil Basayev. From the end of the second war, an insurgency was active in Chechnya, which spread across the whole North Caucasus. In 2007, Ramzan Kadyrov, son of Akhmad, came to power, and has ruled ever since.

### 3.3 Teips

The Teip is one of the primary informal traditional social groupings in Vainakh society. Teips have been described as clans (Jaimoukha, 2005; Vatchagaev, 2019); however, another translation, from Russian scholar Nataev, is brotherhood (Nataev, 2012). He uses this word as he posits that “The Chechen Teip is not a classical [Kinship/family group - in original Russian род] but a brotherhood – an association of related and unrelated (social) groups united by common social & economic interests and mythological kinship” (Nataev, 2012). The author, in part, agrees with this definition of the Teip as a brotherhood – the word is often translated as clan, but due to a complex hierarchy of relations between those in a Teip, there is more to it than the word “clan” implies.

#### 3.3.1 Teip Structure

The teip is a social structure of remarkable complexity; the teip is one of the higher layers of a complex system of varying degrees of kinship reaching from the nuclear family to, arguably, the concept of the nation. The author refers to this as the teip system, though another term, “Teipism” is used by Nataev (2012). This, however, is unsatisfactory – while the author agrees with other findings in that book, teipism implies a political ideology as opposed to an integral part of society in both past and present.

As stated earlier, the teip itself is a clan/brotherhood which claims common descent from a mythological ancestor (Nataev, 2012; Jaimoukha, 2005; Vatchagaev, 2019;). Below the teip is

an extremely complex series of different branches and other forms: for more information, please refer to appendix 2. Above teip there is more contention. There exist unions of teips known as tukhums, varying in size from “a few teips to several dozen” (Jaimoukha, 2005). The tukhum does have some significance – it featured on the emblem of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, one star for every tukhum – and, according to Jaimoukha, there are myths surrounding the formation of the tukhums (Jaimoukha, 2005). However, Nataev does not list the tukhum in his model – in fact, he actively excludes it from the list (Nataev 2012). Above the tukhum, finally, there is the Chechen Nation itself. Governing the teips were councils of elders. Jaimoukha lists three of importance: the Mekhk Kkhel, the state council or, more properly, council of elders; the Ghaala Kkhel, the town council; and either the Èvla Kkhel or Yurth Kkhel, the village council (Jaimoukha, 2005, p.88). While these councils are linked to teips through membership, they are based on laws of Adat and Nokhchalla – discussed more in the next section. Of these groups, one does appear in the research findings – the Ingush Mekhk Kkhel.

The Ingush teip system follows the same structure as the Chechen system, with its own teips and tukhums. Jaimoukha makes no explicit mention of the Ingush teip system in his handbook on the Chechens, but there is information to be gained from other sources. Nicholls notes that there were around 30-40 teips in the 1960s (Nicholls, 2011, p.8). Interestingly, Nicholls never refers to the teips as teips, using clan and sub-clan. Based on the evidence and, importantly, the names, she provides, it can be gleaned that she uses clan to refer to tukhum (lesser in number) and subclan to refer to teips. Albogachieva goes into more detail. firstly, she lists the “distinctive features of such an... organisation were: collective ownership of the means of production; joint unpaid work; having a voluntary character – *belkhi*; uniform distribution of products and territorial community” (Albogachieva, 2011, p.68). This establishes a direct link between the teip and concepts of adat – these, and especially the mention of *belkhi*, will be discussed in a later section. Albogachieva also makes note of the term *Vezherii*, meaning brothers, which she states is

the term for a member of the teip (Albogachieva, 2011, p.68) – this will be a term to look out for during analysis of the news articles relating to Ingushetia. She further states the importance of the teip: “social relations and the life of the whole [of] society were regulated by national traditions. The leading role in the life of the people belonged to societies consisting of representatives of various strong clans – teips” (Albogachieva, 2011, p.72). Finally, she confirms that the Ingush teip, like the Chechen teip, was overseen by elders and, in at least one case, was democratic in nature (Albogachieva, 2011, p.72).

### 3.3.4 Teips, Society and Politics

The significance of the teip has varied over time, particularly since the fall of the USSR and the defeat of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. This is evident in the scholarship and literature on Chechnya and the Teip system since 1991. Lieven (1998) noted that at the time he was writing, many Chechens “have a great unwillingness to talk about [Teips]; there seems to be a conscious or unconscious feeling that this would betray national secrets”. He also reports that it is seen “as something which ought to be cherished and preserved” (Lieven, 1998). However, Sokrianskaia (2005) found that there was a dual meaning to the word Teip – her fieldwork found that, while it was used in the “traditional” sense, even as a way of stereotyping, there was another, colloquial meaning which referred to extended family and those who were close to the respondent. These concepts are, respectively, named teip-1 and teip-2 – however, it could also be argued there is an addition to teip-2, those people surrounding political figures – for example, Kadyrov’s entourage is often referred to as the “Kadyrov Clan,” and those around him are often relations. Going back further, different ‘clans’ – i.e., teips – formed around Chechen leaders during the collapse of the Soviet Union and the struggle for independence, for instance the ‘clans’ focused around Dzhokhar Dudayev and the Communist Leader Doku Zavgayev (Lieven, 1998). Teip-2’s use in reference to close family and relations is relevant to the system of patronalism in Eurasia, a connection discussed in the next chapter, as well as the method of recruitment to the Kadyrovtsy in its

“modern” iteration under Ramzan. In her article, Sokrianskaia concludes that teip-1 has lost its relevance in modern Chechen and Ingush society (Sokrianskaia, 2005).

### 3.4 Nokhchalla and Adat

Nokhchalla is a Chechen word roughly translating to “Chechiness” which refers to the way, means and manner a Chechen should live their life (Jaimoukha, 2005). The term adat is used in a synonymous way – however, where adat refers to a pan-Caucasian (or rather a Pan-North Caucasian) system of customary laws and beliefs, Nokhchalla is the specific Chechen iteration of this concept. Other iterations and variations will be discussed in the following Ingush section.

When writing in 2005, Jaimoukha states that “Chechens obey the rules of *nokhchalla*, if not of their own free will, then out of fear of infamy and compromise of honour in a tight-knit community – the anonymity of modern society is one of the amenities still lacking among the Chechens” (Jaimoukha, 2005). There are various aspects to Nokhchalla, such as decency (*ghillak*), formed of the three parameters of pride (*yah*), a sense of duty and responsibility (*bekhk*) and the sense of shame and guilt (*eh/ekh*) (Jaimoukha, 2005). Other aspects relate to hospitality and guest reverence, respect for elders, blood revenge, modesty, bravery, liberty and tolerance (Jaimoukha, 2005). While some of these aspects will be explored in greater detail soon, it is worth discussing the contemporary relevance of these as a whole – Jaimoukha, as good and helpful of a source as his handbook is, was writing 17 years ago and was recording the ‘ideal’ models of Chechen society. This is something he admits, and is also, somewhat strangely, something more applicable to the society of the Ingush; Jaimoukha relates twice that the Ingush better preserved the “common ancient religion and beliefs” of the Vainakh, along with the Kist (Jaimoukha, 2005: p.10, p.106).

At first glance, to talk of a society without anonymity, where shame and guilt are important social facets and where “blood revenge” is still practiced, can seem orientalist. This is a perspective which must be maintained throughout such discussions – however, these

concepts still have an extremely surprising relevance to Chechen society, albeit in a slightly changed context. A significant example is to be found in the forced apologies, used to police morals and cultural norms (Caucasian Knot, 26/11/19). These often take the form of the ‘wrong-doer’ being taken onto TV Grozny, the main television channel in Chechnya, and apologising to the entire Chechen for what they have done. This fits perfectly into the idea of *ekh*, shame and humiliation, and even Jaimoukha’s idea that anonymity is still lacking among Chechens. As far as blood feuds are concerned, those around Kadyrov have a habit of declaring blood feuds against those who oppose the Kadyrov regime, typically those in exile. One such example is blogger Tumso Abdurakhmanov, who had a blood feud declared against him by Magomed Daudov, one of the closest officials to Kadyrov – after this, he was attacked at his home by men wielding hammers and whom he fought off (Coalson, 2020). Finally, Ramzan Kadyrov has created a strange cult of personality around his assassinated father, playing into the respect for elders and one’s ancestors in Chechen society.

Adat is an old concept in the North Caucasus and has attracted scholarly attention for many years. Even during colonisation in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Russian scholars began to discuss it, though this was to aid integration into the Russian Empire during and after the conquest (Saidutov & Khasbulatov, 2012). Saidutov and Khasbulatov describe it as part of the “legal culture” of the Chechens, which is correct, though themselves state that this isn’t the whole picture and that it is connected with “political, moral and spiritual culture” (Saidutov & Khasbulatov, 2012). The egalitarianism that helped birth the *teip* system has also found its way into the Chechen version of *adat* – as Saidutov and Khasbulatov point out, the main difference of Chechen *adat* to the rest of the North Caucasus is that punishment did not take into account a person’s social status (Saidutov & Khasbulatov, 2012). Chechen *adat* also existed alongside two other forms of cultural legal norm, *lamkerst* and *shariat* (Jaimoukha, 2005). *Shariat* is, in essence, the *Sharia* of Islam, which will be discussed later – in any case, Jaimoukha notes that, despite the efforts of the nineteenth century Caucasian Imamate under Imam Shamil, *Shariat* has/was never imposed on the Chechen people to the extent

that adat was (Jaimouka, 2005). Lamkerst, on the other, was a specific version of adat/nokhchalla specific to the highland communities, which can generously be described as adat but much harsher. Jaimoukha notes the main difference between adat and lamkerst as the fact that women and children were not exempt from lamkerst's version of the blood-feud, recounting an experience of the abrek<sup>10</sup> Zelimkhan in which he witnessed an infant being kidnapped and murdered to avenge a feud (Jaimoukha, 2005). Where the Chechens have nokhchalla, the Ingush have ezdel. Linguistically, the difference is immediate; where nokhchalla means "Chechenness," ezdel translates to "Courtesy" (Nicholls, 2015). Nevertheless, the concept is the same: ezdel consists of "principles of respect and deference to one's elders, formal and dignified relations between individuals and between clans, and courteous and formal public behavior" (Nicholls, 2015); Nicholls further states that "Ingush ethnic identity and social structure rest on *ezdel*" (Nicholls, 2015).

### 3.5. Islam

Islam is the final cultural norm that will be examined in this thesis. When discussing the Vainakh people's and their relationship to Islam, there are three specific forms of Islam to focus on: Sunni Islam's *Shafi* Madhhab; Sufism, specifically the *Qadiriyya* and *Naqshbandiyya* Tariqats; and Salafism, often expressed through Wahhabism. It is best to provide an overview of these in order to discuss their relationship to politics – this will lead us to the discussion of the nefariously hard to define Islamism/Political Islam and having a good understanding of Islam itself is therefore necessary.

At its most basic, Vainakhs adhere to either the Hanafi or Shafi Madhhabs, or schools, of Sunni Islam (Bennigsen & Wimbush, 1986). The Shafi Madhhab, by all accounts, is the more prominent of the two due to its long history among the Vainakh, especially the Chechens (Jaimoukha, 2005); curiously, though, Bennigsen & Wimbush reach a different conclusion and do not even include the Shafi in their discussion of Islam among the "Checheno-Ingush"

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<sup>10</sup> A heroic bandit/partisan found throughout North Caucasian history and literature. They were mostly men, but there were some female abreks – most notably Laysat Baysarova.

(Bennigsen & Wimbush, 1986). This is one of two factual errors which make this source somewhat unreliable for studying the Vainakh – the second is their complete lack of mention of the Kists. That said, they can probably be forgiven for these errors, since they are writing about the USSR as outsiders, and are seeking to provide a complete overview of all the Soviet Union’s Muslims. Discussion of the Madhhabs can be confusing; these are schools of Islamic legal thought that have existed for centuries and, to an extent, all agree with each other. In particular, Hanafi and Shafi jurists would agree on *ijma*, consensus, being of great importance to the law; where they differ is through interpretation of the Hadith, the sayings of the Prophet, and which Hadith are to be recognised as legitimate (Robinson, 1999). This is an important concept, as it forms the backbone of Sharia Law, which itself informs Political Islamism. Therefore, they serve as the backbone of Vainakh Islam, despite, perhaps, the lack of relevance of these terms in day-to-day life when compared to Sufism and Salafism.

Sufism has historically enjoyed a strong hold across the Northeastern Caucasus (Jaimoukha, 2005; Yemelianova & Akkueva, 2020). Sufism is a word which refers to Islamic mysticism and the movements associated with it (Robinson, 1999). To practitioners and believers, however, the words of Idries Shah ring true: “A Sufi, the Sufis, cannot be defined by any single set of words or ideas. By a picture, moving and made up of different dimensions, perhaps” (Shah, 1964). There are two Sufi brotherhoods, or Tariqats, that enjoy prominence among Vainakhs – the Qadiriyya and the Naqshbandiyya (Jaimoukha, 2005). Once again there are theological differences which must be briefly noted – the most obvious of these is the *Zikr*, the “liturgical component” of Sufism in which a mixture of poetry, Quranic verses and the 99 names of Allah are recited (Jaimoukha 2005). Naqshbandis perform a silent, individual *Zikr*, whereas the Qadiris practice a loud, group *Zikr* (Jaimoukha, 2005). The most pressing differences relate to their involvement in the Caucasian War of the Nineteenth Century; the Naqshbandis, under leaders like Imam Shamil, advocated defiant resistance, encouraging “strict hierarchy and... iron discipline and total dedication to its ideals” as well as the “glorification of Ghazavat... or Holy War as a defence against foreign occupation”

(Jaimoukha, 2005). Meanwhile, the Qadiris, known to Vainakh, and especially the Chechens, as the Kunta Haji wurd, advocated “non-resistance to evil and the acceptance of infidel domination for the sake of preserving the nation” (Jaimoukha 2005). It is also somewhat decentralised, with six wurd, or branches, present in Chechnya, with the leader of these wurd being elected (Jaimoukha, 2004). There are other wurd among the Naqshbandi tariqa as well – these form a parallel mode of social belonging to the teip, with 32 present in Chechnya and Ingushetia (Akaev, 2010). This is a very different form of social belonging to the teip – rather than the egalitarianism inherent in a system of clans governed, in theory, by a council, the Tariqa system offers people rigid leadership, belonging extending across the borders, the legacy of resistance to invaders as well as spiritual fulfilment.

On the opposite side of the spectrum stands Salafism. Salafism is a form of puritanical/fundamentalist Islam, with Wahhabism, a variety of this faith originating in what is today Saudi Arabia, being one of its most common forms/denominations (Robinson, 1999). In practice, both names are interchangeable in the North Caucasus, though Kaliszewska notes that Salafi is gaining more use, and is the preferred self-designation by Dagestani adherents of this faith (Kaliszewska, 2023). Wahhabism is a strict sect, advocating a “return” to a “purer” form of Islam; in practice, this means stricter adherence to dress-codes, prayer-times, Zakat (alms-giving) and Islamic law (Jaimoukha, 2004; Kaliszewska, 2023). Crucially, the main form of Islamic law informing this is the Hanbali maddhab, which is not one of the two main schools in the North Caucasus (Akaev, 2010). This opens up the explanation for the rise of Wahhabism; that is, Wahhabism has been experienced as part of a revival of Islam within “Islamic” parts of the post-Communist world (Akaev, 2020; Kaliszewska, 2023). Wahhabism is also treated like a negative buzzword, hence the use of Salafi or “true Muslim” among Russian adherents (Kaliszewska, 2023). Salafism provided a new community not set in the old ways, with a much more global outlook; during the years of the insurgency, it also provided another way of expressing discontent and, at its strongest, martyrdom and the cult of martyrdom, giving adherents the chance, or perhaps ideation, to

give their lives for the cause, or celebrate those who did (Akaev, 2010). More recent scholarship has also found, at least in Dagestan, that the dichotomy is misrepresenting the experience of Muslims in the North Caucasus (Kaliszewska, 2023) – I would agree with this, adding that at their centre, these are two ways of expressing communal identity, and that these are two out of *five*, including *teip*, nationality and citizenship.

Islam and politics is a controversial topic to say the least. Islamism is an expression of this – a political ideology with roots in the values of the religion. Islamism is a broad category, and while it is often used to denote Wahhabism/”Radical Islam” (Akaev, 2010), it is worth noting the sheer breadth of ideologies labelled as Islamist, ranging from Islamic Democrats, such as Tunisia’s Ennahda Party and the AKP of Turkey, to extremist groups like the Islamic State. Further, there is difference throughout this spectrum. While AKP and Ennahda are both democratic, they represent very different forms of Islam – and even democracy, especially as Erdogan has steered the AKP toward authoritarianism. Therefore, while “Islamism” and “Islamist” will be terms used in thesis, it may be used to refer to more than one group – as this is, after all, what Islamism as a term represents.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Introduction

With all the theory in place, the method of study can now be described. In short, the method of research is an in-depth analysis of news articles from 2012-2022 of the North Caucasian Republics of Ingushetia and Chechnya. The methodology of this thesis has changed from its conception of the present; part of this has been out of necessity, since originally fieldwork was planned to take place in the Russian Federation, which it is no longer possible to do meaningful, safe fieldwork in. There are also concerns due to the epistemological/ontological approach to the research regarding tackling issues of orientalism and “putting these peoples back at the centre of their story” rather than just seeing them as case studies of a larger system, in this case the Russian Federation. This chapter explores the reasons and practices of the chosen methodology and how the above concerns play into this.

In its simplest form, the research plays out as follows:

- Caucasian Knot, or *Kavkazskii Uzel*, was searched for news articles. Using its very good search system, articles relating to Chechnya and Ingushetia from 2012-2022 were located and coded.
  - 2012-2022 was chosen to represent the situation following the re-election of Vladimir Putin to his third term, in order to analyse the changes to the norms and processes in these republics in the context of the growing authoritarianism in the Russian Federation to see if their place in this authoritarian system changes.
- Not every article was included, but those relating to politics, political participation/engagement and participation, and cultural norms were stored on Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

- The following data was presented: Date, Author, Title, around three categories/keywords, and whether the event is “top-down” (involving the Heads of the Republics and their officials) or “bottom-up” (instigated by the people).
  - Examples of keywords include:
    - Teip
    - Adat
    - Patrimonialism
    - Religion
    - Opposition
    - Protest
    - Legitimation
    - Coercion
    - Inter-Vainakh
    - Federal
    - Language
- Not all articles were mentioned in the text due to the sheer number of articles found. Instead, a select few, representing the most important, most representative and most interesting news articles were analysed.

When I set out doing this research, I at first discussed “the distinct possibility” of there being over a hundred articles of news found per year; this was wildly off. In total, 2,808 articles were found from both case studies over the 10-year period analysed. 999 came from Ingushetia, the remainder from Chechnya.

#### 4.1 Discourse Analysis

Discourse Analysis forms the backbone of this thesis. While the data collection is, obviously, extremely important, the analysis of the articles is what makes the research what it is. Through the data collection method described in the following section, only a surface level

understanding of the role norms play can be gained through that analysis (as will be demonstrated at the end of this chapter, looking at a brief overview of the results). What is much more important to this research is reading the news stories, analysing them, and seeing how the different norms appear within them.

The rest of this section will tackle several questions that arise from the described method of research.

#### 4.1.1 Why Kavkazskii Uzel?

Caucasian Knot ([www.kavkaz-uzel.eu](http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu)), founded in 2001 with an English language version launching in 2003, represents the most thorough and reliable news source on the Caucasus. Since it has been active for twenty two years, it has a large repository of articles and news stories accessible in both Russian and English – in some cases, like Dagestan, the Russian version can be more thorough in what is reported but the English version covers most of the news stories. Caucasian Knot has two main advantages; its neutrality and its excellent sources. While it was founded with close links to Memorial, including an editor-in-chief who had previously worked for the organisation (Slagt 2012), it has since become much more neutral and independent. Caucasian Knot has an excellent reputation as a news source in the region; there really is nothing else close to it as a source of reliable, daily information. Other sources that are used in research are more open source, leaning toward open-source intelligence (OSINT). While this can be very useful, and has led to very good pieces of research, it is not as useful as the Caucasian Knot. Caucasian Knot relies on local correspondents who are able to interview locals to get a greater, locally-informed insight into the stories on which it reports (these stories being reported on an almost daily basis – for example, I was able to collect multiple pieces of news per day around the early period of the Ingush border protests). This makes it an invaluable source for the region, and for Russia as a whole; independent media in Russia can often mean opposition media, rather than actual, neutral news. Caucasian Knot, therefore, can give researchers a much better, balanced look

into the region. It is however worth noting that since the War in Ukraine, Caucasian Knot has been banned in the Russian Federation, and before this it was designated as a foreign agent. Caucasian Knot's English articles will be analysed first and foremost; however, the Russian version may also be used to supplement these articles. Other websites and sources will be referred to in order to fill in any spaces that Caucasian Knot is not able to. As stated earlier, part of the value of the Caucasian Knot comes from interviews with locals; occasionally, however, the Caucasian Knot relies on social media comments to supplement this. This is especially the case for the forced apologies and other sensitive topics – this thesis has made use of the social media comments on such issues in order to examine the opinion of Chechen society on such issues. The comments, naturally, are chosen by the authors/correspondents, who usually give a good mixture of positions from such comments; nonetheless, it is possible for a bias to appear. These comments are still reliable, giving valuable insight into opinions on controversial topics, but do not necessarily represent the full picture when presented in the different articles. It is my view that, bearing in mind the fact that Caucasian Knot does strive to be neutral and that getting any opinions on some of the practices at all is a risky endeavour, these comments are still a valuable piece of evidence – it is just that we must bear in mind the potential for bias.

#### 4.1.2 Discourse and Content Analysis – Paradigms and Justifications

It has already been stated that discourse and content analysis has been chosen due to this being the best, and safest, option for researching events within the Russian Federation due to the effects of that state's invasion of Ukraine. However, there are other points to this. In this thesis' first iteration, there were interviews scheduled to happen in Russia, concentrating on elite interviews in Moscow – however, content analysis was still planned from the start. Why? The simplest reason for this is that this thesis was being researched at a time when the COVID-19 Pandemic still proved to be a deadly and disruptive force across all manners of life, not just to academia. Thankfully, this also ensured the same quality research

can still be achieved even with the Russian Invasion of Ukraine limiting field research in the Russian Federation.

Discourse analysis takes items of news and other related media and examines them both through the context they were written in and in what is said within (Halperin & Heath, 2025, p.426). Contrasting this with content analysis, this provides a more qualitative approach to the research, rather than just looking for the frequency of words and language within the work. That said, this thesis does, at a small scale, use a form of content analysis, through the categorisation of the news stories with three keywords. While this allows a quantitative look at the cultural norms and political happenings that this thesis is searching for, it does not allow for the full picture. By outlining what these different cultural norms are and what different functions of an authoritarian regime this research is on the lookout for, we have placed these stories into a wider context; by then examining them on a case study level, and then at a “norm by norm” level, this allows for a fuller, better analysis. Looking at the graphs at the start of each of these sections tells us very little; it is what these articles say and how they relate to each other and our wider understanding that gives the results importance.

There are more than practical reasons for discourse analysis being chosen as the primary research method for two of the three case studies. Firstly, content analysis reduces bias – especially when considering a neutral source like the Caucasian Knot – in that the biases, pre-conceptions and other parts of the “interview effect” whereby individuals want to appear to “look good” are eliminated (Halperin & Heath, 2025, p.439). Further, the “Heisenberg Effect,” wherein individuals change behaviour under observation, is also eliminated (Halperin & Heath, 2025, p.439) – both of these result from content analysis being a relatively unobtrusive method of research. Furthermore, content analysis overcomes another point raised in the initial description of this method above – due to so many news articles being used, the right coding can implement a mixed-methods approach, qualitatively analysing the *content* of these various news articles while being able to use quantitative methods to analyse overall trends (Halperin & Heath, 2025, p.442-445). This is also why the different

categories are, in a sense, the different variables which will be used for coding, which will be done manually (Halperin & Heath, 2025, p.444-445). The content is coming from a mixture of the text, themes and, in some cases, the presence of a single word (teip, for instance) (Halperin & Heath, 2025, p.445).

#### 4.1.3 Analysis: Process Tracing

The main advantage for research through this method is process tracing. Bennet and Checkel define process tracing “as the analysis of evidence on processes, sequences, and conjectures of events within a case for the purposes of either developing or testing hypotheses about causal mechanisms that might causally explain the case” (Bennet & Checkel, 2015, p.7). Through obtaining and classifying news articles in the way described, this method of analysis can be applied to multiple processes. For instance, the prevalence of Islam and whether it is prevalent in use by the elite or society at large; forced apologies; and blood revenge. While all such processes will be qualitatively analysed as well, charting these through classification and coding allows for a quantitative analysis to take place – this is especially important for tracing when these processes began, and which processes/categories are becoming prevalent in Russian Vainakh society.

#### 4.1.4 Forced Apologies as a separate database

There is one final justification for the selection of chosen research methodology. During the research, I decided to create a specific database for the forced apologies, employing a more specific search rather than the broad search of the rest of the research. This was done for two reasons. Firstly, this allows no losses in the search for these terms in the research process. By searching more specifically, all instances on the Caucasian Knot could be found and properly analysed, with no stone unturned. Secondly, by recording them both in the main database and their own database, a fuller analysis of this phenomenon can occur. Forced apologies cover a huge range of subtopics and reasonings for apologies; this latter factor is of great importance, as they don't fit neatly in with the other categories in the main

databases. By putting the apologies in their own database, we can categorise them by the reasoning for the apology and analyse them based on this.

## 4.2 Results at a glance

Finally, it is worth seeing and analysing some of the results. In short, as seen in the below figure, 2,808 articles of news were entered into the two databases. 1,809 of these came from Chechnya, and 999 of them from Ingushetia.

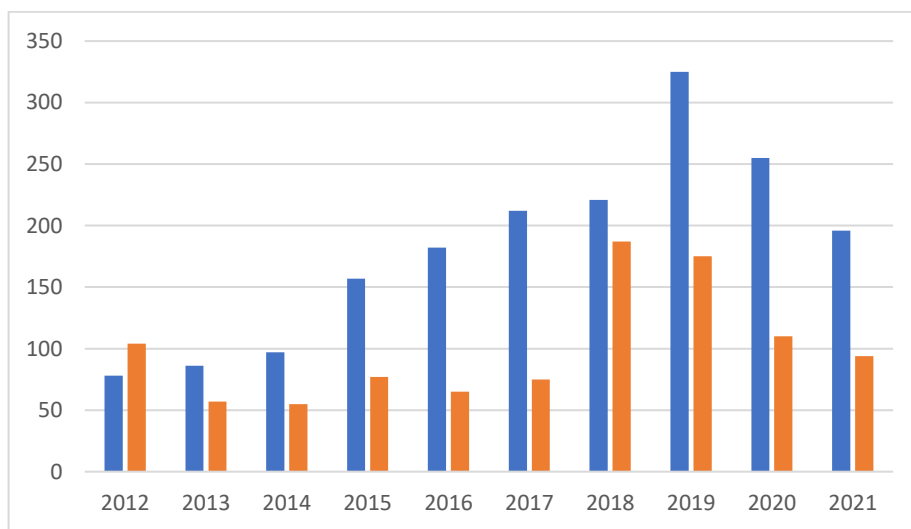


Figure 4.2.1 Number of articles in the databases per year.

In this graph, blue represents articles from Chechnya and orange represents articles from Ingushetia. These do not tell us too much by themselves, but there are some takeaways from this nonetheless. We can see the spike in 2018 and 2019 that result from the border protests in Ingushetia and the peak of the phenomenon of forced apologies in Chechnya; we can see the only time that Ingushetia gives us more data than Chechnya, in 2012 when the insurgency in that republic was still raging. We can see the drop off in stories in 2020-2021, something that is hard to explain. Yet, this is not enough for our purposes. Looking at individual years provides us with a little more information. This was done by using the keywords; up to three keywords were chosen for each article, and through seeing how often these keywords occur, we can trace these processes over a given year collectively. Take, for instance, the following figure, which looks at the results for 2019 in Chechnya:

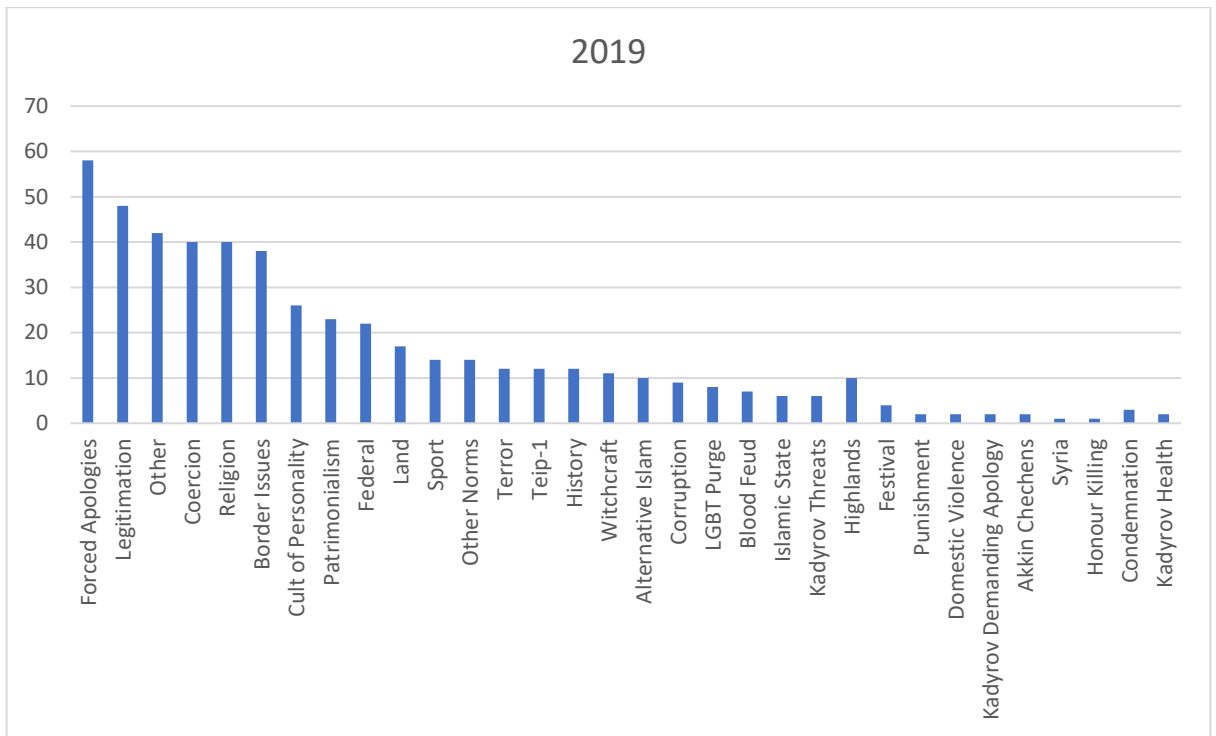


Figure 4.2.2: Example of categorisation of articles; number of articles per category for Chechnya in 2019

This is more useful; we can see the norms and practices that appear more than others. This year in particular is an important one. This is where *Coercion* and *Religion* are dethroned as the top two categories, thus allowing us a modicum of tracing here. For instance, compare with 2018:

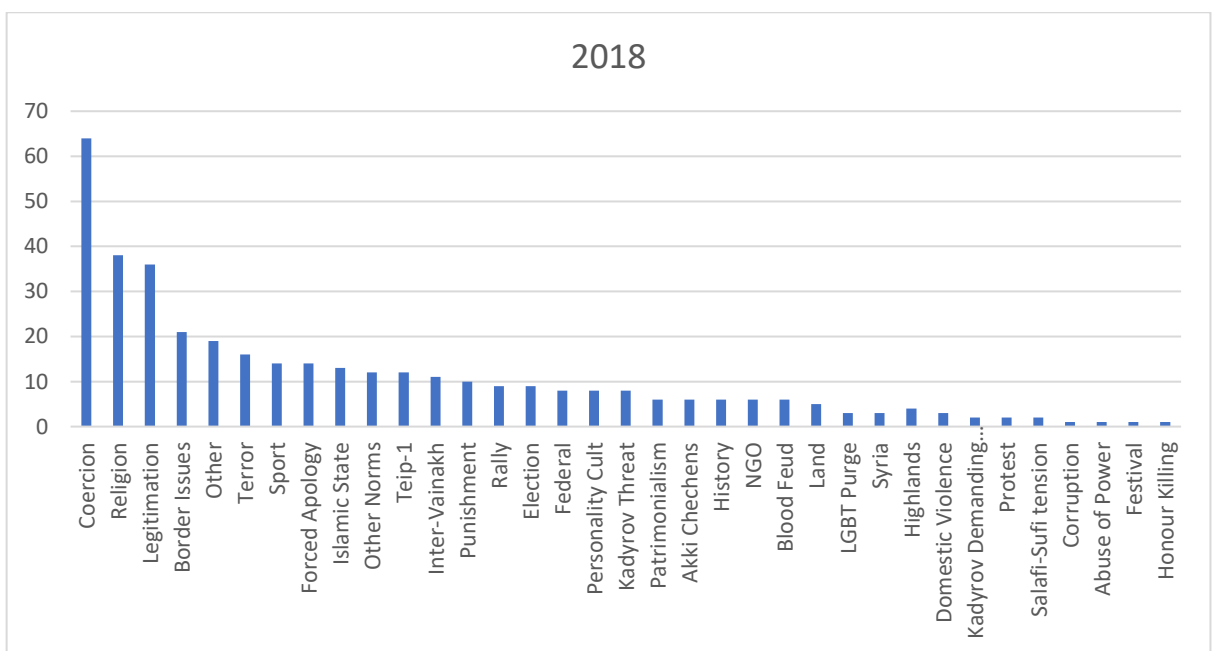


Figure 4.2.3 Number of articles per category in Chechnya in 2018

We can now see what has changed, allowing the process tracing to occur in a slightly better way. However, what I found while visualising the data was that presenting it in this way, while helpful in seeing the relationships between all the norms – in particular how often certain norms occur, and which do not – but this was not the optimal way for both analysis and presentation. What was the best way was to go norm by norm, grouping some together in larger themes to see how different types occur over the years. To demonstrate this, we shall refer to figure 6.3.1, looking at the instances of norms relating to adat – customary law – in Chechnya over the research period:

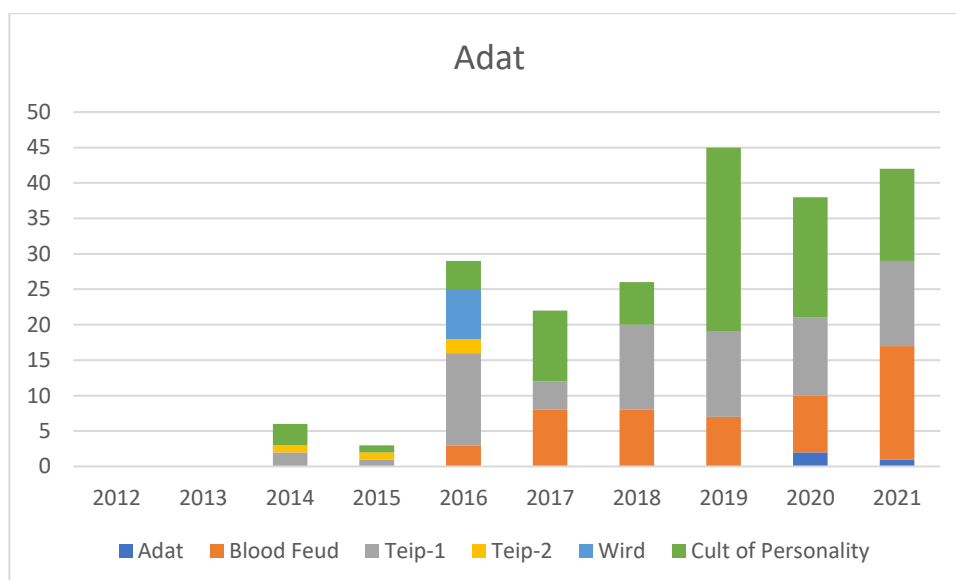


Figure 5.3.1: Occurrence of Adat-related norms in the Chechnya database

This allows us to see how many articles relating to adat occurred each year and which specific norm/practice they relate to. Through this, we can now properly analyse these trends at their most basic level – we can see that, for example, there are no articles in which “blood feud” is a keyword before 2016. There is a relatively stable number of articles where it occurs from 2017-2020, before a large spike in 2021. However, this is only a small fragment of the full picture. To understand the significance of these norms, how these processes appear and change over the years, we must look at them on a case study by case study basis. We will first begin with the larger case study: Chechnya.

## 5. Chechnya

### 5.1 Introduction

Chechnya, in many ways, is the progenitor of this research, the original case study under consideration when this study was thought up. The reasons for this are many; Chechnya today has become almost synonymous with radical political Islam & authoritarian governance and the extravagances and extremities associated with it. Much has already been said of Chechnya, particularly of both the period which is being researched and of the Republic's ruler himself, Ramzan Kadyrov. During the writing of this thesis, Russia's full-scale Invasion of Ukraine brought Chechnya into the forefront of a wider audience's understanding of Russia as a whole; it is, accordingly, of great importance that our understanding of the manner of Chechen politics is deepened. This chapter traces the evolution of Chechen politics across 10 years; it will do so by going through the different norms in larger groupings; specifically, religion, adat and norms of place.

The results from this research show that in the earlier period of 2012-2014, while norms are certainly present in Chechen politics, Chechnya operates as a "standard" authoritarian regime, with non-normative coercion of both types (i.e., high and low intensity coercion), being the most common category alongside religion. The norms then become more prevalent in 2015-2018, as the regime consolidates further. The pattern remains similar, with coercion and religion being the most prevalent categories – however, a plethora of other norms emerge year by year, with the highlands and issues of land use appearing in 2016 and 2018, the LGBT Purge of 2017 and its lingering effects over the rest of the research period, teip becoming important as a method of personnel recruiting for the Kadyrov regime and norms surrounding veneration of larger-than-life characters, be they Akhmat Kadyrov or Sportsmen, all playing a part in the development of politics in Chechnya. As will be demonstrated in the appropriate sections, this is rather sudden and is why this period can be viewed as the

“developmental” phase of Chechen authoritarianism in this period – especially since practices like the forced apologies, key parts of this overall thesis, emerge during this time.

Finally, the years 2019-2021 are perhaps the most significant part of this case study. Religion and Coercion – having dominated the other categories of every other year – are replaced at the top by the forced apologies and the various legitimization strategies of the Kadyrov regime. The Covid pandemic hits, and normative-based repression tactics are employed to keep the republic under control in this moment of crisis. Then, curiously, the forced apologies drop in frequency and public condemnations take their place – these two strategies being so significant that, while they are mentioned here, the next chapter is devoted solely to these practices. As well as these, the Kadyrov regime cracks down on what it labels as “witchcraft” – in reality, folk medicine and alternative Islamic practices – through employing forced apologies and public condemnations, norms relating to marriage and celebrations are policed by the regime and blood feuds make their most numerous and most significant appearance. The name originally chosen for this last section was the Covid Years – it may be more appropriate to label it as “the Normative Dictatorship”. To better understand the development of the importance of norms, this chapter will be going through the findings norm by norm, using analysis and data visualisation to properly trace the processes by which they develop importance. The year divisions stated above will be used to divide these sections, however there are some broader sections where these will not be used. Some of the most important findings, concerning forced apologies and public condemnations, will be covered in their own chapter.

### 5.1.2 What did the research look like?

As outlined in the previous chapter, the research period was decided to be from the first of January 2012 to the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2021. This results in a 10 period in which news articles of interest could be chosen from for analysis. In total, 1,588 articles of interest were

identified and processed into the database. In terms of what each year actually looked like in the database, the following section from 2016 can demonstrate this:

1	Date	Author	Second Author	Title	Link	Keyword 1	Keyword 2	Keyword 3	Above or Below
2	02-Jan	None Given		Kadyrov: relatives will respond for Chechens-participants of rally in Vienna	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/02/kadyrov-relatives-will-respond-for-chechens-participants-of-rally-in-vienna/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/02/kadyrov-relatives-will-respond-for-chechens-participants-of-rally-in-vienna/</a>	Kadyrov Threats	Punishment	Disapora	Above
3	02-Jan	None Given		Resident of Chechnya is accused of recruiting young people into the ranks of militant	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/02/resident-of-chechnya-is-accused-of-recruiting-young-people-into-the-ranks-of-militant/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/02/resident-of-chechnya-is-accused-of-recruiting-young-people-into-the-ranks-of-militant/</a>	Terror	Coercion		Both
4	08-Jan	None Given		In Chechnya, two policemen dismissed because of video showing falsification of evi	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/08/in-chechnya-two-policemen-dismissed-because-of-video-showing-falsification-of-evi/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/08/in-chechnya-two-policemen-dismissed-because-of-video-showing-falsification-of-evi/</a>	Other			Above
5	13-Jan	None Given		Ramzan Kadyrov: Aslan Maskhadov's widow returns to Chechnya	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/13/ramzan-kadyrov-aslan-maskhadovs-widow-returns-to-chechnya/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/13/ramzan-kadyrov-aslan-maskhadovs-widow-returns-to-chechnya/</a>	Legitimation	Diaspora		Above
6	15-Jan	None Given		Human rights defenders condemn Ramzan Kadyrov's statement on non-systemic op	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/15/human-rights-defenders-condemn-ramzan-kadyrovs-statement-on-non-systemic-op/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/15/human-rights-defenders-condemn-ramzan-kadyrovs-statement-on-non-systemic-op/</a>	Kadyrov Threats	Federal		Above
7	15-Jan	None Given		Ramzan Kadyrov spreads struggle with dissent beyond Chechnya	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/15/ramzan-kadyrov-spreads-struggle-with-dissent-beyond-chechnya/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/15/ramzan-kadyrov-spreads-struggle-with-dissent-beyond-chechnya/</a>	Forced Apology	Federal		Above
8	16-Jan	None Given		In Grozny, attendant of school No. 20 awarded medal for bravery during militants'a	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/16/in-grozny-attendant-of-school-no-20-awarded-medal-for-bravery-during-militants-a/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/16/in-grozny-attendant-of-school-no-20-awarded-medal-for-bravery-during-militants-a/</a>	Legitimation			Above
9	16-Jan	None Given		Residents of Chechnya subject their compatriot's family members to public condem	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/16/residents-of-chechnya-subject-their-compatriots-family-members-to-public-condem/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/16/residents-of-chechnya-subject-their-compatriots-family-members-to-public-condem/</a>	Condemnation			Both
10	18-Jan	None Given		Reznik turns to GPO on Kadyrov's statements	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/18/reznik-turns-to-gpo-on-kadyrovs-statements/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/18/reznik-turns-to-gpo-on-kadyrovs-statements/</a>	Federal	Kadyrov Threats		Other
11	20-Jan	None Given		Residents of Chechnya report being enforced to participate in actions in support of	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/20/residents-of-chechnya-report-being-enforced-to-participate-in-actions-in-support-of/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/20/residents-of-chechnya-report-being-enforced-to-participate-in-actions-in-support-of/</a>	Rally	Legitimation	Coercion	Above
12	22-Jan	None Given		More than 57% of Chechen population attend rally in Grozny, MIA reports	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/22/more-than-57-of-chechen-population-attend-rally-in-grozny-mia-reports/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/22/more-than-57-of-chechen-population-attend-rally-in-grozny-mia-reports/</a>	Rally	Legitimation		Above
13	25-Jan	Gadzhieva, Karina		Dagestan: police stop rally in support of Kadyrov because of MurtaZaliev portraits, k	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/25/dagestan-police-stop-rally-in-support-of-kadyrov-because-of-murtaZaliev-portraits-k/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/25/dagestan-police-stop-rally-in-support-of-kadyrov-because-of-murtaZaliev-portraits-k/</a>	Rally	North Caucasus	Coercion	Other
14	26-Jan	None Given		In Grozny, surveillance cameras installed in mosques	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/26/in-grozny-surveillance-cameras-installed-in-mosques/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/26/in-grozny-surveillance-cameras-installed-in-mosques/</a>	Religion	Coercion		Above
15	28-Jan	None Given		Power agents oblige residents of Chechnya to get permits for visiting forests	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/28/power-agents-oblige-residents-of-chechnya-to-get-permits-for-visiting-forests/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/01/28/power-agents-oblige-residents-of-chechnya-to-get-permits-for-visiting-forests/</a>	Coercion			Above
16	01-Feb	None Given		Kadyrov takes aim at Kasyanov in Instagram video	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/02/01/kadyrov-takes-aim-at-kasyanov-in-instagram-video/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/02/01/kadyrov-takes-aim-at-kasyanov-in-instagram-video/</a>	Kadyrov Threats			Above
17	01-Feb	None Given		"RBC": Chechnya under Ramzan Kadyrov is uneasy and unattractive for investors	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/02/01/rbc-chechnya-under-ramzan-kadyrov-is-uneasy-and-unattractive-for-investors/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/02/01/rbc-chechnya-under-ramzan-kadyrov-is-uneasy-and-unattractive-for-investors/</a>	Other			Other
18	02-Feb	None Given		Ramzan Kadyrov offers opposition to go to court because of video with Mikhail Kas	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/02/02/ramzan-kadyrov-offers-opposition-to-go-to-court-because-of-video-with-mikhail-kas/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/02/02/ramzan-kadyrov-offers-opposition-to-go-to-court-because-of-video-with-mikhail-kas/</a>	Kadyrov Threats	Federal		Above
19	03-Feb	None Given		Ramzan Kadyrov bans dialogue between different concepts of Islam in Chechnya	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/02/03/ramzan-kadyrov-bans-dialogue-between-different-concepts-of-islam-in-chechnya/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/02/03/ramzan-kadyrov-bans-dialogue-between-different-concepts-of-islam-in-chechnya/</a>	Religion	Tariqats	Salafi-Sufi tensions	Above
20	05-Feb	None Given		Ramzan Kadyrov opposes merger of Chechnya and Ingushetia	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/02/05/ramzan-kadyrov-opposes-merger-of-chechnya-and-ingushetia/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/02/05/ramzan-kadyrov-opposes-merger-of-chechnya-and-ingushetia/</a>	Inter-Vainakh	Land		Above
21	08-Feb	None Given		Kadyrov reports on work of Chechen special forces in Syria	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/02/08/kadyrov-reports-on-work-of-chechen-special-forces-in-syria/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/02/08/kadyrov-reports-on-work-of-chechen-special-forces-in-syria/</a>	Legitimation	Syria		Above
22	08-Feb	None Given		Yashin arrived in Grozny to collect materials about Ramzan Kadyrov	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/02/08/yashin-arrived-in-grozny-to-collect-materials-about-ramzan-kadyrov/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/02/08/yashin-arrived-in-grozny-to-collect-materials-about-ramzan-kadyrov/</a>	Opposition			Below
23	09-Feb	None Given		Chechen MIA reports no complaints about disappearances	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/02/09/chechen-mia-reports-no-complaints-about-disappearances/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/02/09/chechen-mia-reports-no-complaints-about-disappearances/</a>	Disappearance	Legitimation	Sort of Coercion	Above
24	09-Feb	None Given		Ilya Yashin finds allies in Chechnya for preparing report on Ramzan Kadyrov	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/02/09/ilya-yashin-finds-allies-in-chechnya-for-preparing-report-on-ramzan-kadyrov/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/02/09/ilya-yashin-finds-allies-in-chechnya-for-preparing-report-on-ramzan-kadyrov/</a>	Opposition			Below
25	10-Feb	None Given		Kasyanov associates attack on him with video posted by Kadyrov in Instagram	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/02/10/kasyanov-associates-attack-on-him-with-video-posted-by-kadyrov-in-instagram/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/02/10/kasyanov-associates-attack-on-him-with-video-posted-by-kadyrov-in-instagram/</a>	Kadyrov Threats			Other
26	10-Feb	None Given		Most Russians treat Kadyrov's words about opposition as unacceptable	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/02/10/most-russians-treat-kadyrovs-words-about-opposition-as-unacceptable/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/02/10/most-russians-treat-kadyrovs-words-about-opposition-as-unacceptable/</a>	Opinion	Kadyrov Threats		Below
27	11-Feb	None Given		Head of ICRF Department for Chechnya dismissed	<a href="https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/02/11/head-of-icrf-department-for-chechnya-dismissed/">https://eng.kavkaz-ru.org/news/2016/02/11/head-of-icrf-department-for-chechnya-dismissed/</a>	Federal	Patrimonialism		Above

Figure 5.1.2.1 Example part of the database

Spread out over years, the distribution of articles looks like this:

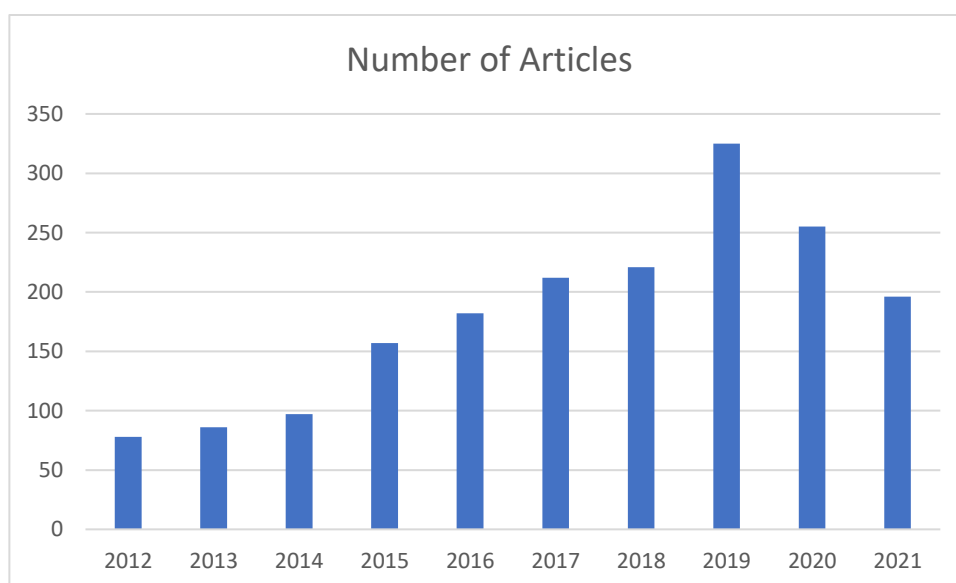


Figure 5.1.2.2 Number of articles per year for Chechnya

There are more articles in the latter half of the research period, by an extreme margin. There are several reasons which can explain this, and in turn lend credence to the overall argument of this thesis and the integrity of the source from which these were drawn. Firstly, since this research aimed to find political news with and without the involvement of cultural norms, the expected turn towards a cultural norm focused government in Chechnya is represented by the amount of articles that emerge in the years when this was expected to occur. For much of the research period, coercion in its most basic, non-normative forms was the most prevalent

instance in the database. Furthermore, in the “early years” of the research period, the Kadyrov regime is still dealing with the fallout of the second Chechen war and the ongoing North Caucasian Insurgency, perhaps necessitating a more “careful” approach. The years with the most instances – 2019 and 2020 – are the peaks of the forced apologies and the beginnings of the condemnations, both discussed in the following chapter, and thus make sense to be the years with the most articles. Secondly, more issues became prevalent – or appeared – as the research went on. Forced Apologies, despite some claims that they began in 2008, did not occur once before 2015 – the same can be said for the Islamic State, the LGBT Purges, etc. As more of the issues that served as inciting incidents for the research emerge, the pool of articles per year is going to increase. The final issue is to do with the source itself. There were several changes to the Caucasian Knot’s reporting that took place over the research. In the first years, most of the articles had a named author. As the research progressed, however, the site came to rely on correspondents who were not named for various reasons (most for their own safety, as much of the reporting involves interviews with local residents). In the latter part of the research, especially 2021, reporting becomes harder. This can be attributed to the beginning of the foreign agent law and the dangers inherent in it, as well as just the danger of free reporting in an authoritarian regime such as that in Chechnya. In a sense, given the state of free media in Russia following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, this makes the articles found valuable. It was a strange finding, that I discovered I was not just tracing the politics and cultural norms of Chechnya over time but that I was also tracing the development and state of one of the most reliable sources in the North Caucasus.

### 5.1.3 Non-Normative facets in Chechen Politics

Before discussing the norms, non-normative parts of Chechen political life should be discussed. Up until 2019, the most common category in the research was Coercion. Recall chapter 2: there are, broadly, two forms of coercion, high-intensity and low-intensity. Defined by several authors but, for the purposes of this thesis, best defined by Levitsky & Way (2010). High-intensity coercion consists of actions like beating and arresting dissidents,

disappearances etc. – in short, violence against opponents (Levitsky & Way, 2010, p.57-58). Low intensity coercion is exemplified by harassment campaigns, surveillance and other, more discrete methods (Levitsky & Way, 2010, p.58). Some forms of these coercive methods – the shaving of beards, the surveillance of mosques, etc. – will be discussed in the next section on religion in more depth, but it is nonetheless a form of coercion. As stated earlier, most forms of coercion noted in these years line up very well with the pattern of counterinsurgency. There are tortures, disappearances, harassment of oppositionists and journalists, the movement of “power agents” into Chechnya, the dispersal of pickets. Not all of these have anything to do with norms – which is important for this research. It is vital to avoid painting the wrong picture here, for the same reasons that were discussed in the earlier chapter on the normative theories in relation to the section on orientalism. Painting everything as having a deep, traditional background plays into the wrong tropes and can damage the quality of the research – it can do even more damage to the instances where the norms *do* show up, or even instances where they *should but do not*. For instance, in 2013, the Caucasian Knot reported that a pensioner was beaten by Chechen Policemen (Caucasian Knot, 17/05/2013), despite the extreme levels of reverence placed on the elderly by these traditional norms. This is the only instance of a norm-based/norm-violating form of coercion that I was able to find in the early years that is not religious – it is the exception that proves the rule. These are minor points to make, perhaps, but considering that 45 articles were on coercion in the year 2014 alone, it *must* be recognised. Coercion remains largely the same throughout the research period, however beginning in 2015, the forced apologies – discussed in the next chapter – become the more relied upon method of societal control within Chechnya.

Further to this, in the early years – particularly 2012 – there were protests recorded in the research. While 2012 was a big year for protests in Russia, the protests recorded had little to do with this – most were in fact hunger strikes either by or in support of internally displaced persons.

## 5.2 Religion in Chechen Political Life

Religion is, after coercion, the most common category to be noted throughout the research; it was the most common norm from 2012 up until 2019, when it was replaced by the forced apologies, a practice which in many cases invoked religion as the reason for apologising (see next chapter). Religion is used by the Kadyrov regime as a tool of legitimation, a way of justifying some of the acts of the regime and its very existence. Yet it is more than this; two forms of Islam, Sufism and Wahhabism, are almost combined by the Kadyrov regime, with Sufism providing legitimacy and Wahhabism providing the moral code that Kadyrov places on Chechnya. Even further than that, it provides Chechens with a way oppose the regime, albeit in a controversial manner; through Islamist politics, most infamously the Islamic State. This section seeks to explore and analyse these four parts, to see their role in Chechen politics and society in this period and to trace the evolving nature of Islam in Chechnya throughout the transformation of Chechen politics. The uses itself for these different aspects of Chechen life may not be surprising on their own, at least at first glance – but it is nonetheless a vital cultural norm to analyse, both on its own and as a part of the larger picture this chapter presents.

### 5.2.1 Mosques and Sufism – religion as legitimation

To the outside observer, this is perhaps the most “obvious,” or at least the most “outward” of Islam’s uses to the Chechen government. Part of this has roots in the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria and the appointment of Akhmat Kadyrov as mufti. While Akhmat’s role in modern Chechnya will be discussed later in this chapter, it is his legacy as mufti and member of the Kunta-Hajji wurd that is of importance here. As related earlier, the *wird* is an order within a Sufi *tariqat* – Akhmat Kadyrov was a part of the Kunta-Hajji wurd of the Qadiri tariqat, named after its founder Kunta-Hajji Kishriev (Jaimoukha, 2005, p.119). Kishriev is slightly controversial in Islamist circles in the North Caucasus, as he was one of the spiritual leaders who advocated submission to the Russian Empire and passive, non-violent resistance “for

the sake of preserving the nation” (Jaimoukha, 2005, p.119). Given the link to the elder Kadyrov, and a similarity of message to a post-independence Chechnya, it is not surprising that there are yearly commemorations to the saint in Chechnya. It is also unsurprising that there are claims that the scale of the commemorations are falsified; notably, the Caucasian Knot reported on the 2019 commemorations with a report that stated that, while the Kadyrov regime claimed 4,000 worshippers had attended one such event, eyewitness accounts stated that fewer than 500 turned up (Caucasian Knot, 04/01/2019). The commemoration of Kunta-Hajji is important for the Kadyrov regime for several reasons. Firstly, by officially promoting the Sufi order, Kadyrov can present to the Kremlin, and to the Chechen people, an alternative to the Salafist/Wahhabist Islam presented by the Caucasus Emirate and the Islamic State. This is a more “proactive” form of counterinsurgency, in that respect; further, it is hampering a “non-traditional” form of social belonging that Wahhabism offers, giving the Kadyrov regime a level of societal legitimacy by promoting the other forms of belonging, such as *wirds* and to a lesser extent *teips* (see next section). Secondly, it presents a further link of continuity to Akhmat Kadyrov and his personality cult, again something dealt with in greater detail in a later section.

There are other forms of religion-based legitimation present in Chechnya, one of the most notable being the construction of mosques. Two stand out as prime examples of this, in Shali and Argun respectively.



Figure 5.2.1.1. Shali Mosque, ©Yelena Afonina, TASS (<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/08/23/chechnya-inaugurates-europes-biggest-mosque-a67006>)

The mosque in Shali is billed as the largest mosque in Europe, able to host around 70,000 worshippers in a town of 54,000 when it opened (Moscow Times, 2019). Elsewhere, the Aymani Kadyrova Mosque in Argun, just east of Grozny, is smaller but is rather obviously another propaganda piece being named after Ramzan Kadyrov's mother. The importance of the mosques is in their scale, style and propaganda value. The Aymani Kadyrova mosque is a sleek modernist design, comparable to the Faisal Mosque and planned King Salman Mosque, both of which are in Pakistan; the Shali Mosque bears a striking resemblance to the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, with its marble-white exterior and similar design for the minarets. These are just the mosques constructed within the timeframe of this research; in the heart of Grozny lies the Akhmat Kadyrov/Heart of Chechnya Mosque, built in a neo-Ottoman style reminiscent of Istanbul's Blue Mosque. These all serve several purposes, all to do with legitimization. The first of these is the obvious – they are grand displays of wealth and power, huge monuments to the regime's ambition and its supposed spiritual authority. Second, related to this, by being home to the largest mosque

in Europe<sup>11</sup> these structures hint at the regime's pretence to being the pre-eminent European Muslim nation, or at the very least, the pre-eminent Russian Islamic republic (this will be explored in more detail in chapter 9). Third and finally, there is the aspect of their design, mimicking that of notable mosques in states that Kadyrov has either visited or has a vested interest in, shows a desire to be closer to said nations. This is perhaps most obvious in the case of the Shali Mosque, with its similarity to Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Zayed mosque, located in a state whose leaders Kadyrov has a great deal in common with and with whom he enjoys very good relations.

This is not the only way Mosques are used for legitimacy, however – there is also the personality cult, an aspect that we have only skimmed over above. In 2021, a mosque in the village of Djamlail Alikhanov, formerly known as Gikalo, that could accommodate 2,400 people was named after Ramzan Kadyrov's great-grandfather, Abdul-Kadyr (Caucasian Knot, 06/09/2021). There are perhaps some merits to this, as noted in the cited article:

““The Kadyrov family members were known for their religiosity, and they provided many scholars of the Koran ... The main merit of Abdul-Kadyr was teaching children the Arabic script and reading the Koran,” notes Professor Vakhi Garsaev, a specialist in genealogy of the Benois teip (family clan), to whom the Kadyrov family belongs” (Caucasian Knot, 06/09/2021).

Whatever the merits, such an act is ultimately meant to benefit the Kadyrov cult of personality. It is not the first such mosque, though it is the last in the research period. Earlier, in 2014, the Aimani Kadyrova Mosque opened in Argun, a uniquely designed mosque that sits right in the centre of the town. In 2015, a mosque was opened in the village of Sernovodskaya named after Ramzan's mother's uncle, Alim-Solta Baisultanov, who, like Abdul-Kadyr, was also a member of the local Islamic clergy (Caucasian Knot, 22/12/2015). Akhmat Kadyrov has the main mosque in Grozny, the “Heart of Chechnya”, named after him, as well as another

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<sup>11</sup> Of course, this falls apart if one includes Turkey as part of Europe, where the Çamlıca Mosque holds the title of largest mosque.

mosque and Madrassa named after him in Gudermes constructed in 2020 (Caucasian Knot, 11/01/2021). In the same article, the Caucasian Knot notes that Chechen state media claims that 30 new mosques were opened in 2020 in Chechnya – two of which were named after Kadyrov’s uncle, Sulim Kadyrov (Caucasian Knot, 11/01/2021). The Pride of Muslims Mosque in Shali was originally meant to be named after Ramzan himself (Caucasian Knot, 14/03/2019). In 2021, locals apparently asked for a new mosque in Grozny to be named after Ramzan (Caucasian Knot, 11/01/2021). These are just a selection; later articles make it seem as if this occurs so often it is not even worth reporting, that people are so used to this that it isn’t really news. This is extremely significant in how it builds the personality cult, a huge part of legitimation for Kadyrov, in that it makes the Kadyrov clan seem much more important. By grounding his legitimacy in these older Kadyrovs who, like his father, were part of the clergy and theological fabric of Chechnya, Kadyrov strengthens his own spiritual authority. This is a much more visible, longer-lasting way of achieving this, more so than any amount of statements. As we will explore in the next section, this is the groundwork that establishes Kadyrov as the ultimate Islamic authority in Chechnya – in his own words, a “Caliph” (Caucasian Knot, 11/02/2017).

Mosque construction does not just occur for the perpetuation of the Kadyrov cult: others serve genuine purpose, though others also serve purposes of legitimation. Some of these are named after rather innocuous figures, such as one opened in Koshkeldy in the Gudermes district, named after a local Naqshbandi religious leader who was expelled by the Bolsheviks (Caucasian Knot, 27/08/2016). Others, however, are more explicitly political. One such example is a mosque built and named in the memory of a dead policeman, Tamerlan Musaev, in the deceased’s home village of Mairtup (Caucasian Knot, 31/07/2019). This may not be a member of the Kadyrov clan, but he was connected to Kadyrov in that he was the head of Daudov’s security service before heading the local law enforcement in Shali – i.e., he was a firm part of Kadyrov’s patrimonial network. This makes this an interesting overlap with patrimonialism – recall that a core component of patrimonialism is the concrete reward. This

act shows that such a reward extends even into death, if the parts of the network are sufficiently loyal. The matter of death is seemingly inconsequential – Musaev died in a car crash in Rostov. However, this example provides us with important insights into local attitudes:

““People have different attitudes to the fact that the mosque will be named after Musaev... After all, he (Tamerlan Musaev) was a law enforcer; and not everyone is happy with the methods our police are using in their work," said Akhmad, a local resident. "I've heard little good about Tamerlan Musaev, same as about other law enforcers. I think it's not quite ethical to name a mosque after such a person. It's customary to name mosques after Islamic figures or theologians, or, as it's common here, after Ramzan [Kadyrov's] relatives, but not after law enforcers," said Khasan, another resident of Chechnya” (Caucasian Knot, 31/07/2019)

These are very illuminating into local attitudes towards this issue. Since the law enforcement is not held in high regard, despite Musaev being a local the act is not treated with as much appreciation as Kadyrov may expect. It is also very notable that the latter interviewee, Khasan, states that it is “customary” to name mosques after Kadyrov’s relatives. This implies that the naming of mosques after Kadyrov’s relatives is implicitly accepted, maybe even tolerated – but naming them after his agents is a step too far. Other mosque openings that are not related to the Kadyrov’s are related to our discussion on the highlands, with mosques opened in two abandoned villages, Khaibakh (Caucasian Knot, 13/11/2018) and Charmakh (Caucasian Knot, 20/11/2018) in quick succession. As opposed to the litany of mosques that serve the personality cult, these mosques have a clear meaning to those who are descended from the victims of the ethnic cleansing in 1944:

““Today, the Galanchozh District is practically abandoned; only ruins of villages remain there; there are no communications, even no normal roads, basically only old paths. It was hard to believe that the area would be restored, even when ... they

started making a road there," Beslan, a native of the Galanchozh District, now living in Grozny, told the "Caucasian Knot" correspondent, adding that after the ancient mosque was reopened in Charmakh, where his ancestors lived, and for the first time they performed a collective namaz (prayer) there, he had a hope that people would return to the village. "Now I believe that our village will be revived, and the district, and that many people from the Galanchozh District will return there, and we'll revive our land," he said (Caucasian Knot, 20/11/2018).

“"Restoration of Khaibakh is a matter of honour for all residents of the Galanchozh District. The terrible tragedy of our people happened here; over 700 old men, women and children were burned down alive during the deportation," says Murad, a historian and a resident of Chechnya” (Caucasian Knot, 13/11/2018).

Note the language in these excerpts. Rather than the dismissive tones in relation to the mosques named after relatives or parts of the patrimonial network, these have language relating to hope, to righting wrongs, to “matter[s] of honour” – especially since Kadyrov is tactfully silent on the commemoration days of the tragedies that cleansed these villages of their inhabitants in the first place. What makes these hopes tragic is the fact that they border the annexed region of Ingushetia, making these a power-move and a cementation of Chechen right to the lands in this region, based on the hope and honour of the locals. Even when the regime appears to be righting wrongs, the Chechen people pay the price, no matter how small an issue it is. One interesting quote on the issue of mosque-building is as follows:

“Local resident Salavdi noted that the announcement of the construction of a mosque in Grozny reminded him of the predictions of Chechen saints, which his ancestors had told him about. "My grandparents told me that many beautiful and richly decorated mosques will appear in Chechnya, but people will not go to them," he said” (Caucasian Knot, 30/11/2018).

The other major aspect of religion as a form of legitimation to focus on is Kadyrov's relationship to Sufism. This is easier to explain, but there is more to it than meets the eye here. Ramzan Kadyrov has, due to the status of his father and other paternal relatives, a fondness for the Kunta-haji Sufi Wird in the republic. Kunta-haji Kishiev himself advocated for cooperation with the Russian Empire, and as such this legacy provides a good justification for its promotion. This is itself a key point, for unlike the Sufi orders in Ingushetia, and the Naqshbandi orders in the two republics, the Kunta-haji wird receives actual promotion from the Kadyrov regime. Year on year, thousands of people pay tribute to the Sufi saint – in 2017 alone, it is reported that 20,000 people performed a mass *zikr* in his memory in the ground of the Akmat Kadyrov Mosque in Grozny (Caucasian Knot, 04/01/2017). In the same article, we get a statement from the Muftiate:

“On January 3, our republic celebrates one of the most tragic dates in its history - the exile to the city of Ustyuzhna, Novgorod province, of our avliya (saint) Kunta-haji Kishiev and his closest associates. The Day of Remembrance and Veneration of Kunta-Haji was celebrated by tens of thousands of people who took part in the performance of dhikrs in mosques, made a pilgrimage to the ziyarat of their mother, Hedi Kishiyeva, in the village of Ertan, Vedensky district. The Foundation named after the first president of Chechnya, Akhmad-Haji Kadyrov, organized the distribution of food packages to low-income and needy families on this occasion,” (Caucasian Knot, 04/01/2017).

This is clearly a very important event for a lot of Chechens – given Sufism's importance in the history of Chechnya, we have no reason to really doubt the sincerity of statements from locals such as the one above. Furthermore, if we want to be a little generous, we can give Kadyrov the benefit of the doubt when it comes to this as well, given his commitment to his father's legacy. Regardless of whether his commitment to Sufism is real or not, he has used it to his political advantage. After all, he has made a show of attending Sufi rituals, such as this instance:



Figure 5.3.2: Ramzan Kadyrov takes part in a Sufi *Zikr*:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vp2Q5942kck>

In this same video can be seen the Mufti of Chechnya, Salakh Mezhev, on the left-hand side of this following figure:



Figure 5.3.3: Mufti of Chechnya, Salakh Mezhev, takes part in a Sufi *Zikr*:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vp2Q5942kck>

The entire video can be viewed at the link below both figures – it is worth viewing for those who are unfamiliar with how the *zikr* for this particular tariqa works. The fact that both these figures, the informal and the formal spiritual leaders of Chechnya, have gone out of their way to be filmed participating in this shows that they believe there to be a tangible political advantage to this.

This is all well and good. However, there are aspects of this celebration of a local saint that led to questions on how supported all this is. Take, for example, this claim from the report on the celebration in 2019:

“According to the Ingush authorities and the Chechen clergy, several thousand people took part in events. Residents of Chechnya said that Imams had warned them about the must to participate in religious ceremonies... "The Chechen Ministry for Nationalities has stated that more than 4000 people visited the event in Nazran. In fact, there were no more than 500 of them,"... the heads of communities were notified about the must to take part in the Day of Commemoration and Reverence of Kunta-haji Kishiev” (Caucasian Knot, 04/01/2019).

This claim that the regime is giving larger numbers of attendees than attended is not shocking – this is a very typical thing done by authoritarian regimes. There are also similar reports of people forced to attend such rallies, even down to being forced to attend sporting events. In 2020, however, a lot more interesting information comes from the annual commemoration. Firstly, the Caucasian Knot gathers some opinions from different Chechens. First, there is this from a believer, again showing that genuine belief in the order is a part of a segment Chechen society:

““My grandparents were very religious and constantly told us about Kunta-Khadji Kishiev. If possible, they visited his mother's ziyarat (commemoration) in the village of Ertan. They said that our nation had survived only thanks to the mercy of Allah and the call of Kunta-Khadji; otherwise, we all had been completely eradicated like some other nations of the Caucasus. I also think so and strictly follow their instructions – I commemorate the Sheikh in my prayers, and several times a year I make ziyarats to the grave of his mother," said Sakhib, a local resident” (Caucasian Knot, 04/01/2020).

This is a rather touching statement, showing the importance of such movements in the republic to their believers – after all that has befallen this community, belief remains strong. It shows the emotive importance attached to the Sheikh and the link between their belief in him and the survival of the Chechen nation – while there is a slight emotive exaggeration in

the “complete eradication” of other nations, it is nonetheless very telling. Immediately following this, however, we are supplied with the following quotes from locals:

“Ibragim, a Grozny resident, treats Kishiev as a rather controversial person. "Calling people to abandon jihad at the height of the war is very serious; for doing so, he was persecuted by Imam Shamil. But he deserves respect at least for bringing our brothers Ingushes to Islam," Ibragim believes. However, in his opinion, Kishiev's person is largely mythologized. Movsar, another local resident, disagrees with allegations that Kishiev is still alive and is spreading Islam. "These are a pure heresy, fairy tales and fables, in which many, especially young people, no longer believe. The Koran clearly states that only the Almighty Allah is eternal, and all the leaving creatures are mortal. If the prophets died, how can one of the hundreds of thousands of saints be alive?" Movsar has asked” (Caucasian Knot, 04/01/2020).

This is a rare case in the reports of the festivities, though not wholly unexpected. The act of surrender earned Kishiev a less than stellar reputation among some Chechens, especially since the wars of independence in the 1990s. It is notable that this individual, Ibragim, thinks the only good thing Kishiev did was proselytise to the Ingush, and that, in the context of the reporting, this is seen as a moderate stance. The real controversy concerns the belief among adherents of the Kunta-haji *wird* is that he is, in some form or another, immortal, and continuing to spread Islam. The strong statement seen here is a typical stance for someone who has a Salafist leaning but is equally likely that is a statement from a more “mainstream” Islamic standpoint. While Kuntahaji members believe in his divinity, it is, for many Muslims, not just in Chechnya but globally, heretical. This comment is what makes the 2020 turn of festivities so interesting – Mufti Mezhiev made a statement like that of the earlier statement by the local man Sakhib, declaring the immortality of Sheikh Kunta-Haji. Other Russian Islamic authorities took something of an issue and, in the words of the Caucasian Knot, sought to clarify his statements, perhaps to cover for the Mufti, or perhaps to show the validity of their belief system (Caucasian Knot, 07/01/2020). The article notes that, as we

have seen above, locals have taken issue with the Mufti's statement as well. However, a day later it is reported that influential opposition blogger Tumso Abdurakhmanov has spoken out against the Mufti's statements:

"The man lived two or one and a half centuries ago, but he (Mezhiev) states that the man is still alive today," Tumso Abdurakhmanov has emphasized in his video on the YouTube. The blogger has expressed his surprise that the Mufti and Kadyrov's supporters see no need to change their rhetoric. "Even your followers are already sick and tired of this ... Even they are shocked by what you say, because today is the 21st century, the age of technologies ... Young people are no longer accepting these tales," Abdurakhmanov has stated (Caucasian Knot, 08/01/2020 (1)).

Again, this is quite true – we have seen the reactions to these claims, and it is also a fact that younger people in Chechnya and Ingushetia are more likely to practice either the mainstream/ “orthodox” or Salafi versions of Islam. However, this comment by Abdurakhmanov leads to its own controversy:

While criticizing a statement voiced by the Chechen Mufti concerning the immortality of Kunta-Khadji Kishiev, blogger Tumso Abdurakhmanov raised questions of faith, which should not be a reason for discussions, some YouTube users noted... The authors of many comments under the Tumso Abdurakhmanov's video posted on YouTube found it unacceptable to express irony about the death of Kunta-Khadji Kishiev. "Kunta-Khadji Kishiev was a holy man!... Of course, it is clear that people surrounded his death with some mystic facts, but he loved his people," user Maiyrbek Devirov wrote (Caucasian Knot, 08/01/2020 (2)).

The reaction here shows that while some people are willing to accept that there is a certain level of mysticism surrounding the circumstances of the Sheikh's death, for even a respected oppositionist to voice opinions against him is a step too far. While this is a natural reaction if

the speaker was, say, affiliated with the Islamic State, but Tumso has no such links and is widely respected by the opposition to Kadyrov.

All of this is to say that usage of Sufism as a legitimising tool has proven to be extremely effective, to the point where, perhaps, it can divide the opposition if needed. It is also worth remembering that the memorial day of January 3<sup>rd</sup> is a Kadyrovite initiative, instigated in the first year of Kadyrov's rule over Chechnya. The *wird* itself, while loosely organised, is a key part of political life, with many government officials being part of it and, through this memorial day and associated actions and statements, it having de-facto governmental endorsement, understanding it is a crucial part of understanding internal authoritarian dynamics in Chechnya. There is another aspect to this – namely, the enforcement of its value upon Chechnya or, as is also the case, the enforcement of *other* strands of Islam's values to create a Chechen "traditional Islam".

#### 5.2.2 Enforcement of "Traditional Islam" and "Islamic Values" in Chechnya

We have seen how Kadyrov latches onto religion to bolster and legitimise his rule – but what form of Islam is Kadyrov trying to enforce? As examined earlier, a large part of this is Sufism, Kadyrov's connection to which is a large part of his basis of rule. However, there is the issue of Salafism which both Chechnya and Ingushetia must reckon with. We will discuss Salafism partly in this section before devoting a section to it in its entirety, but what is important for this section is that the Kadyrov regime enforces certain values from both it and Sufism to create a Chechen "traditional Islam". "Traditional Islam" is a phenomenon in the former Soviet Union and surrounding countries in which the state attempts to create a national version of Islam that conforms to ideals the state wishes to enforce. This is not the last time the issue will arise – we will discuss it at length in chapter 9 – but it is important here as the implicit impetus behind Kadyrov's coercion tactics towards Islam in Chechnya. Towing this line is one of, if not the driving force behind religion's appearance in the research to do with Chechnya and is, by all accounts, an obsession of Kadyrov's which further points to the

foundation of the phenomenon of forced apologies examined in the next chapter. It is here where morally acceptable behaviour arises for the first time – and the different forms of Islam that exist in Chechnya are forced to dance to the tune.

Perhaps the best place to start this discussion is with forced beard shavings. In Islam, having a long beard is a sign of piety – in Chechnya, there is also an implicit connection with the Salafist movement. On several occasions, people have been forced to shave their beards by agents of Kadyrov's regime. One early incident unfolds as such:

“About two weeks ago, young men were caught in the street near the ROVD of the Urus-Martan District. Police officers forcibly cut off hairs and beards of young men and left their moustaches untouched. After bullying, they released young men," ... According to [an anonymous source], the young men live in the village of Tangi-Chu. "Men, their relatives and friends were greatly offended," the source clarified. Officers from the press service of the MIA of the Chechen Republic initially told the "Caucasian Knot" correspondent that was "the first time they heard about the incident" and asked for time to clarify information. Half an hour later, another police officer reported that the Regional Branch of the MIA would not comment on that information” (Caucasian Knot, 27/06/2012).

Another two stories, from slightly later in the research, are more forthcoming with their information:

“The guys were taken to some station, where they were abused and beaten up, blaming for being "shaitans" (devils) and Wahhabis. Then, their beards were shaved off by a blunt shaving device; and they were released with a warning that if they once again try to grow beards and shave off their moustaches, they will be treated still worse,"”(Caucasian Knot, 02/02/2015).

“Raids against bearded men occurred earlier; and every time this happened after Ramzan Kadyrov's angry speech, who demands from power agents, heads of local

self-governments and clergymen to intensify efforts to combat extremism, terrorism and Wahhabism. This is what happened this time as well. Literally on the following day after Ramzan met the bosses of his power structures and once again raised the topic of Wahhabism, they began catching young men with beards in the central marketplace in Grozny,"... power agents detain young men with beards "only by their appearance."" (Caucasian Knot, 15/02/2015).

These last two may be long, but when in the context of the earlier case in 2012, provide a good basis for tracing how this phenomenon developed. First, there is the obvious change in situation between the cases, with the rise of the Islamic State and the subsequent growing fear of the Kadyrov regime towards Salafism. This is highlighted by the fact that the two shavings that occur in 2015 have a trigger event, namely the pro-IS graffiti in Kadyrov's hometown of Tsentaroy (now Akhmat-Yurt). However, despite this event occurring in a comparatively rural place – like the first shaving reported in 2012 – these two take place in Grozny. This could well be to make the case higher profile, more renowned amongst the people of Chechnya, sending a message of collective punishment and conformity to the new standard of Islam. Further, there is the element of how open these later shavings are – rather than an implicit denial as in the 2012 case, there is an explicit link between Kadyrov's comments and the shavings. This does coincide with the growing obsession of Kadyrov's with morally unacceptable behaviour – which leads to the wave of forced apologies. Beard-based coercion reaches a peak in 2015 after these March incidents, with incidents of the detention of young people with beards detained or shaved. The fact that it is almost always young people is also significant – these are profiling incidents of the demographic most likely to join the Islamic State. Much of the coercion to do with Islamic values occurs in the years when the Islamic State is at its peak of territorial control. There are no further incidents of beard shaving in the research period after 2015's wave. This is what makes the beard shavings an informative policy to analyse when it comes to the fractious relationship Kadyrov has with Wahhabism – while Kadyrov is open to some of the ideas of Wahhabism, the

expression of actual, political/theological allegiance to the ideology and its greatest proponents is a step too far.

There are other issues of appearance to deal with – namely, that Kadyrov wishes for Chechens to dress in a “Muslim” way without it being “too Muslim”. In 2013, it was reported that TV Grozny had, apparently at the command of the government, instituted an Islamic dress code for employees, with women being required to wear long dresses and hijabs and for men to wear loose trousers on Fridays (Caucasian Knot, 01/02/2013). The next year, the Kadi of Grozny advises local Imams to supervise the appearance of Mosque-goers:

“The SAM (Spiritual Administration of Muslims) of the Chechen capital has treated the Kadi's intention to strengthen control over the mosques congregation as "right and overdue." "Many of the believers, especially young ones, even for Friday prayer, come in T-shirts with colourful images, not to mention everything else. Prayer is a communion of a believer with his Creator; and people should know that they can't appear before the Almighty dressed like that” (Caucasian Knot, 26/03/2014).

However, just a few months after this, a woman is beaten and arrested for wearing a hijab – now considered outside the norm of Chechen Islam:

“Malina (Amina) Sadakhanova, a resident of Grozny, who study Arabic and teaches religion in one of the Chechen medreses, had been forcibly kept by law enforcers during three days... According to the Human Rights Centre (HRC) "Memorial", the young woman has been severely beaten. On August 17, special operation was conducted in the town of Mayakovsky of the Staropromyslovsky District of Grozny. Law enforcers cordoned off one of the residential houses, and then took 25-year-old Malina Sadakhanova, who lived in the house, to some unknown destination without any explanations. The woman wore a hijab, and that fact was likely the reason for her detention” (Caucasian Knot, 22/08/2014).

There is also banned literature and other “Islamic goods” at this time; from a few months later, Islamic stores are raided by Kadyrov’s security forces:

“Employees of the stores argue they do not always know exactly which books are included in the list of banned literature, the "Caucasian Knot" correspondent was told by Khasan, an owner of a store selling Islamic goods. "If we only had the complete list of banned literature, it would be much easier. And now, prosecutors and policemen from time to time come to us to conduct inspections and always find something forbidden. This time, it was as usual. We have withdrawn from sale some banned books long time ago; however, now, it turns out that there are new bans,"” (Caucasian Knot, 15/11/2015).

The above three stories show the obsession with the correct types of Islam inherent in the Kadyrov regime, as well as how these standards change on a whim. If hijabs are required one second then a sign of terror the next, if certain books and other goods are banned but a list not handed out, what is the point? After all, if the whole point is to enforce standards and a “traditional Islam” in Chechnya then this seems an odd way to do it. However, this may be the point, or at the very least a consequence of the way Kadyrov and his government have handled this subject. The level of vagueness around the standards helps the Kadyrov create a very fluid version of traditional Islam for Chechnya. In other countries, the concept is slightly more rigid, to firmly pit the state’s stance on Islam away from Salafism and other perceived malignant influences. In Chechnya, the vagueness allows for a more adaptive form of the concept, able to respond to new threats and trends. As we have seen in the previous section, Sufism plays a role as the “standard” of Islam, but through the selection of different parts of Islam to co-opt and enforce as above, parts of Salafism can be enjoined to the state whilst simultaneously repressed. It is also possible that this is a mere consequence of the policy that Kadyrov has taken. Further pieces of evidence for this can be found in 2016; on the 30<sup>th</sup> of November, it was announced that the sale of alcohol would be banned in Chechnya

following a drunk driving incident that resulted in death (Caucasian Knot, 30/11/2016). Just one day later, it was reversed, with legal difficulties cited:

“We’ll not toughen the rules of selling alcohol, because we can’t do it under the law; however we can further make use of our religion, customs and mentality,” the RIA “Novosti” quotes Ramzan Kadyrov as saying. According to his story, he has addressed religious leaders with an appeal not to take part in the funerals of the drivers, who have themselves fallen victims to road accidents, while being in the state of alcoholic intoxication,” (Caucasian Knot, 01/11/2016).

This story does end with the fact that there will be punishments for those who have died in drunk driving incidents, but, aside from the legal issue, there is still an appeal to authority; in late 2017, a large anti-alcohol campaign, with detentions for those drinking and the coercion of stores from selling any alcohol, leads to a de-facto ban, with a de-jure ban in Grozny in December (Caucasian Knot, 04/12/2017). The two preceding incidents in 2016 highlight the sporadic nature of the policy; the campaign in 2017 shows how far Kadyrov is willing to go on this issue.

The issue is not simply limited to the main forms of Islam in Chechnya; Kadyrov has also targeted the extremely small Shi’a minority in Chechnya:

“In January, a video appeared on the Internet, showing a group of men in one of the Middle East countries conducting some ritual. Five men had knives driven not deep into their heads. Their faces expressed no visible pain and blood... Aslambek Zubairaev was named the leader of a group of Chechens who took part in the ritual – the followers of one of the Shiite branches that had arisen in Iraq and is headed by Sheikh Mohammed al Kasnazani. The actions of Zubairaev and his followers are contrary to Islam, said the official of the Chechen Muftiate. According to his story, the self-torture rituals are unacceptable from the point of view of Islam. Residents of the

republic also express their concern in connection with the spread of various religious trends in Chechnya” (Caucasian Knot, 11/02/2017).

There is more to this story than meets the eye, and it is revealing about the nature of Islam in Chechnya and Kadyrov’s attitude towards it. Shi’a Islam, firstly, does have a tradition of ritualistic self-harm, most notably on the day of *Ashura*, in commemoration of Hussayn ibn Ali. This is not what the ritual described is, however – these people are part of a Qadiri *tariqa*, the Kasnazani, based in Iraq. They are much more esoteric than the Kuntahaji order, and the ritual described is part of their belief that harming oneself can cause miracles. They do not discriminate between Sunni and Shi’a, despite the labelling of the group as Shi’a. These acts are too esoteric for the mainstream Muslim authorities in Chechnya, with the Muftiate and other associated clergy declaring that these acts are not Islamic. A quote from a representative of the Muftiate proves illuminating for a couple of aspects of this:

“Islam forbids a person to harm himself. This also applies to the various rites of self-torture that the Shiites have. This also applies to driving knives into the head and other "miracles". Such things are simply unacceptable," the representative of the muftiate stressed. He also noted that after the appearance of a video on the Internet with the ritual of driving knives into the head, theologians began to receive numerous appeals from believers. "People are amazed by what is happening. They fear that this sect may spread in the republic and demand to prevent this,"” (Caucasian Knot, 11/02/2017).

While this does rehash some points, it is nonetheless enlightening to hear it from the mouth of one of these key organisations. First, there is the denial that this act is Muslim, and that such an act is unacceptable, in the same manner as the other aspects of behaviour we have examined. Secondly, there is the explanation of where the label of “Shiite” comes from – it is from the Muftiate and likely is because of the noted similarity of rituals and, perhaps, to distance this order from their own Qadiri order, tied to closely to the ruling regime. Finally,

there is another important facet – the last statement on the fear of the ritual spreading. This is a glimpse into the fear of the regime. There may well be people in Chechnya genuinely afraid about this – I would go as far as saying that this is a certainty – but I would also contend that this is the regime likewise being afraid, but for different reasons. Different forms of Islam go against the narrative and stray too far away from the form of Islam that is so crucial to Kadyrov’s legitimation. While other practices receive the ambivalent treatment, going from being part of Chechen “traditional Islam” to not on the whim of the regime, this ritual is a step too far – here, unlike the others, the mask slips. A statement from Kadyrov is equally illuminating and provides a nice way to end our discussion here:

“At the end of the conversation, Kadyrov said the following: "Teach your family. Study religion... Convey this to your murids, to your caliphate. In my caliphate, in this republic, I am a caliph. I don't admit... I don't allow you to do it here, because you don't have the knowledge. Kasnazani will come, we will let him speak, conduct conversations, listen to him, put him on television, because he knows religion” (Caucasian Knot, 11/02/2017).

In Chechnya, Kadyrov is the Caliph, the Successor to Muhammad. He is willing to speak to the Sheikh of this order, because, like Kadyrov, he is one of the few versed on such matters. In one sentence, Kadyrov spells out this central fact to Islam’s role in Chechnya – he is the one in charge, the Commander of the Faithful and it is by his permission alone that certain practices are Islamic, while others are not.

### 5.2.3 Salafism and the Islamic State

We have discussed the selective use of aspects of Salafism in the past two sections, but before concluding our discussion of Islam in Chechnya, it is worth discussing the place of Salafism as a whole. Perhaps surprisingly, there is actually rather little else to discuss. In the research period, while Salafist groups affiliated with the Caucasian Emirate do carry out attacks, by this point the insurgency has moved on to Ingushetia and the rest of the North

Caucasus. However, Salafism, as noted, has proved rather popular among younger people in Chechnya, and despite the threat of punishment and humiliation, it still does resonate as a way of opposition to the government. There are, in fact, three main ways Salafism appears in the research: through attacks against the regime, through people migrating to Syria, primarily to fight/live in the so-called Islamic State, and through tensions between the Salafist and Sufi communities.

We shall examine the latter first. There is a great variety in these different tensions. Most often, these tensions between the communities manifest in Kadyrovite coercion against Salafi/Wahhabi believers. One such example can be seen in this humiliation from 2016:

“According to Kadyrov, members of the group, which was revealed through joint efforts of the clergy and the police, were engaged in "befuddling the youth." "The group leader is a staunch enemy of the true Islam, and hates Sheikhs and Ustazes. This is the first step to terrorism," the head of Chechnya wrote in his Instagram. He reported that on February 11 he met the members of the group, and together with the Mufti of Chechnya Salakh Mezhiev and his advisor on religious matters Adam Shakhidov, "had a long talk with them"” (Caucasian Knot, 12/02/2016).

It is notable that this group is, even by the regime’s own admission, not a terrorist cell; the claim against them is that they were distributing materials related to Wahhabism, though they do claim that part of these materials related to “terrorism”. This in part relates to the earlier discussion on traditional Islam, which also did see coercion against what could be described as either orthodox or Salafi Islam. This, however, occurs explicitly *because* the people are involved are, by all accounts, Salafis. We once again see that these people are declared enemies of “true Islam” because they hate the Sufi saints that Kadyrov has raised to such prominence. The equation to terrorism that occurs immediately afterwards is also significant for a similar reason, namely that this is perhaps the most explicit outlining of the “other” during this policy of Kadyrov’s. Another similar incident, complete with public

humiliation, occurs in 2020 when Mezhiev scolds two women for wearing niqabs on TVGrozny, in which:

“The Mufti has pointed out that in the Chechen society, wearing niqabs can be perceived as the adherence to the ideas of Wahhabism, which "run counter nation's customs and traditional Islam.”” (Caucasian Knot, 01/12/2020).

This is, again, a very explicit statement and a link to the phenomenon we have just discussed. This is to be expected when it comes to this aspect of the issue.

There are, however, other cases which fall into two deviations. The first of these concern the appointment of qadis, judges of Islamic law, in Chechnya, in which there are two noteworthy cases. Firstly, there is the appointment of Adam Ilyasov, in Grozny, which is met with fear from locals, not without reason:

“The "Caucasian Knot" has reported that earlier, Adam Ilyasov already used to serve as the Kadi (Islamic Judge) of Grozny, when he replaced Magomed Khiytanaev in the post in January 2014. Being one of the most consistent opponents of radical ideology, he was instructed to counter the spread of "false ideology and sectarianism" in Islam. After that, Adam Ilyasov ordered imams of the Grozny's mosques to monitor the appearance of believers” (Caucasian Knot, 11/01/2018).

The article also notes that Ilyasov has taken part in verbal attacks against Ingush Salafi preacher Khamzat Chumakov – which, as we will see in Chapter 7, has led to attacks against him. Another appointment occurs in September of the same year, when a new qadi is appointed in Shali after a series of attacks committed (or at the very least claimed) by the Islamic State (Caucasian Knot, 01/09/2018). One of the opinions expressed by a local is more ambivalent:

“"A district Qadi has much more opportunities for direct work with the population, including the youth, making some decisions and so on, than the assistant for

religious issues has. Akhmatov is younger than the former Qadi; his views on certain events may differ from those that Nettiev had as a representative of the older generation. Probably, in the near future we'll see something new in terms of clergy's work with teens and young people," Arbi, a local resident, believes (Caucasian Knot, 01/09/2018).

This is part of the policy of Kadyrov's, and part of how it succeeds – within this move, Kadyrov has responded to the security threat, and appointing a younger person has helped make this less of a tough pill to swallow for the locals. As well as this, there is the idea of a meeting:

“The new Qadi will have to organize a gathering in Shali, which has already caused a wide discussion, Khavazhi, a resident of the Shali District, has suggested. Authorities in Chechnya are preparing this gathering in Shali for public condemnation and deportation of families of the teenagers who had attacked law enforcers, local residents said” (Caucasian Knot, 01/09/2018).

This shows the other part of the policy very well – a new face, a younger face, the idea of which helps make the policy more popular among locals, yet nonetheless this appointment brings coercion to the region and helps cement Kadyrov's authority over the populace. The former appointment, of Ilyasov, shows another facet of this – namely, that this is an extension of patrimonialism. This is not just in the standard, “secular” manner; as we have seen, Kadyrov does seem to see himself as the Caliph of Chechnya. Appointments of such officials show another way in which Kadyrov tries to cement his authority over Chechen spiritual life.

The main way that Salafism appears as an oppositional force, on the flipside, is through the Islamic State. It is perhaps the epitome of how Salafism/Wahhabism is a different form of society from the traditional layout of Chechen society. Not only did it provide a different way of life free of the perceived constraints of Chechen social life, but it also provided a different place to live, free of Kadyrov's meddling in religious life. This *is* the Islamic State we are

talking about, a proto state that, in essence, was a theocratic, authoritarian/fascist state. When approaching this subject, we must bear in mind this reality – nevertheless, we can try, at least, to understand. Unsurprisingly, 2015 and 2016 are the peak of Islamic State activity in relation to Chechnya, given that this was the peak of the organisations territorial strength in Iraq and Syria (as well as their territory elsewhere), and the peak of their terror campaign. The number of Chechens and Ingush who went to Syria is hard to determine – Youngman and Moore (2017) give the rough figure of between 4,000 and 5,000 Russian Muslims going. Official statistics stating that 2,700 people from the North Caucasus, with official Chechen figures stating that 600 residents of the republic were part of this (Youngman & Moore, 2017, p.7). In March 2015, the Chechen authorities announce that nine Chechens are identified as being in Syria, and while one had been in Syria since 2013, most had gone from the summer of 2014 onwards (Caucasian Knot, 25/03/2015). The article gives us the age range of those gone to fight, as well as the two had been detained upon returning to Chechnya:

“Movsar Beluev, the oldest man of them, is 39 years old, and Mansur Saidulaev, the youngest of them, is 20 years old... "19-year-old Tamerlan Dokaev was in Syria since the autumn of 2014 till this February. 27-year-old Imran Elzhurkaev took part in the combat actions in Syria yet in 2013. Both of them returned to the Chechen Republic via Turkey and were detained at home," the MIA spokesman has added” (Caucasian Knot, 25/03/2015).

This is the first of many such reports of Chechens going to take part in Syria; it is also representative of the average age range and gender. There are, however, others outside of this range. Firstly, there is a report of two seventeen year olds arrested for attempting to leave for Syria in 2015:

“"To raise money, the teenagers used the QIWI Wallet electronic payment system and created an account in it. Then, one of the teenagers posted on the social network 'VKontakte' the account details with a request for financial assistance in leaving for

Syria to join [IS] and take part in the armed conflict. Thus, the teenagers managed to collect 13,000 roubles,"" (Caucasian Knot, 15/04/2015).

Additionally, there are reported instances of women leaving/being prevented from leaving to join the Islamic State:

“According to law enforcers of Chechnya, last week, residents of the village of Kargalinskaya, all aged 20-25 years, together with the two young women, one of which is pregnant, and the other is the mother of a one-year-old baby, left the republic for Syria” (Caucasian Knot, 01/09/2015).

Some of those who go are those likely to have large groups of supporters/followers in Chechen society. So, we have our average profile and some of the outliers that go along with it. What of the reasons for leaving? Again, as we have discussed already, Salafism appeals to younger people for a variety of reasons. As seen in one of the examples above, IS specifically makes use of the internet and has a globally oriented view. Compare this to the Sufism we discussed in part 1 of this section, centred entirely on the Chechen experience. Kadyrov, as seen in the previous part, has specifically had the Kuntahaji wird’s form of Islam declared by fatwa to be the *only* valid form of Islam. Against this standard, IS connects young people to a global Islamic community with an actual way of both opposing the regime and, in a broader way, “fighting the good fight” and giving the people who join it a sense of purpose. There is not too much for the reasoning given in the articles – the closest we get are what we have seen above, and the articles from the Caucasian Knot do seem to back this image up.

That brings us to the final issue to discuss when talking about Salafism, the tensions between the Salafi and Sufi communities in Chechnya and the coercion Salafis face as a result. The latter issue we have covered at length already, in the previous part of this section. For instance, one such case of the tensions is the aforementioned attack on niqabs from the Mufti in 2020 (Caucasian Knot, 01/12/2020), with another being the beard shavings. The last of these tensions to cover, then, are some of the most visible of – Salafi attacks against local

Sufi shrines. There are two incidents of this happening, both in 2015 – again, a link to IS cannot be discounted, if not through perpetration, then through inspiration – in the neighbouring districts of Shali and Kurchaloi, south east of Grozny (Caucasian Knot, 18/11/2015). The perpetrators of the attack in Kurchaloi are young men all aged 19 from the next town to the east, Mairtup (Caucasian Knot, 18/11/2015). This incident results in something unusual – an early condemnation, before the trend we see in the next chapter takes off:

“Four young men, suspected of setting on fire a ziyart in Chechnya, are being transported from village to village, where local residents are holding gatherings and voicing public condemnation against them. According to the villagers, the young men have committed an absolutely unacceptable act and put shame on their families (Caucasian Knot, 19/11/2015).

In another event that precedes the later waves of public condemnations, after confessing to the act of attacking the ziyart in Shali months after it happened, the attacker – another young man – and his family are subjected to the same punishment:

“Said-Emin Gazaliev, a resident of the Shali District of Chechnya, has confessed to arsoning the ziyart (mausoleum) of Durdi-Sheikh. After his confession, he together with his relatives was subjected to public condemnation by local residents... On January 15, residents of Shali came to the central square for a gathering to express the public condemnation of the young man, accused by the law enforcement bodies of arson... After Friday prayer, the young man was also subjected to condemnation near the mosque. According to an official of the local administration, Said-Emin Gazaliev stood in front of the local residents together with his father and other close relatives” (Caucasian Knot, 16/01/2016).

This is a shocking practice, a prelude of the wave of public humiliation about to sweep Chechnya. It is, therefore, of extreme importance that this practice preceded the first forced

apology and concerned morally unacceptable behaviour. This is the most common subject for forced apologies and condemnations examined in the next chapter, and here we see it being used to punish for the first time. While these men had, undeniably, committed a crime, it is hard to say whether the punishment was appropriate. We also see here that, in the case of the latter attacker, that the family was not safe by association – another trend when it comes to punishment in Kadyrov’s regime.

In summary, Islam plays a huge role in Kadyrov’s Chechnya. It is a great place to start when discussing the role of cultural norms in Chechen politics as various parts of the belief system are systematically distorted or destroyed to further both Kadyrov’s political needs and to create his strange, imagined version of Chechnya and Chechen society. It is very telling that the version of Islam that Kadyrov championed, one that his father and his extended family are intimately tied to, wasn’t even good enough for him, needing to be reshaped into a new, “traditional” Islam. This may be the first norm we see this happen to in Chechnya – but it is by no means the last.

### 5.3 Adat and Customary Law

Adat and notions of normative social arrangements (that is, teips and other norms of belonging) make several appearances over the course of the research – much like the rest of the norms studied in this research, they increase in frequency as the research continues, with only scant references in the earlier years. However, norms that are part of Adat and Nokhchalla appear with increasing frequency in Chechen political life from 2015 onwards, with a mixture of their usage by the Kadyrov regime and their appearance in wider Chechen society. Specifically, blood feuds, teips and other forms of social belonging, and Akhmat Kadyrov’s personality cult all fit under this category. This section will deal with these three accordingly; for a more detailed explanation of the “traditional” forms of the specific norms, please refer to chapter 4. While some of the other results show a drop off in 2020 and 2021,

Adat-related norms and keywords retain their importance from 2016 onwards, as the graph below demonstrates:

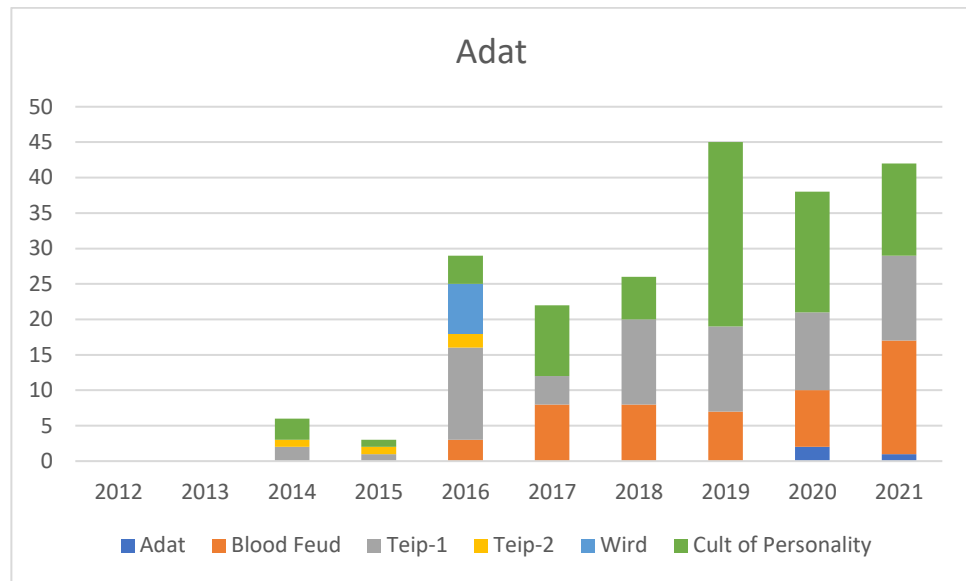
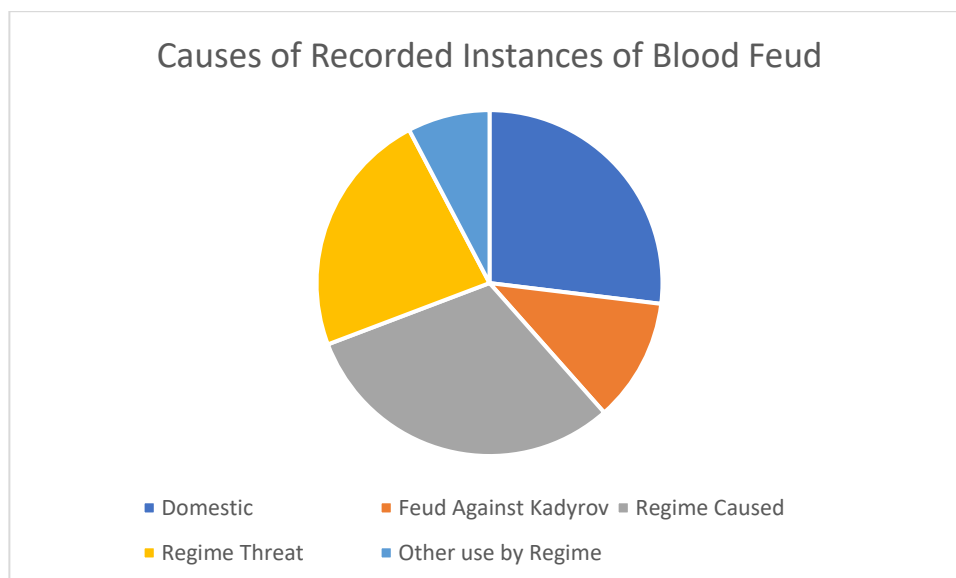


Figure 5.3.1 Results for Adat-related Keywords

### 5.3.1. Blood Feuds in Politics and Practice

Blood feuds (*ch'ir* and *p'ha*) appear in the terminology of the Kadyrov regime in relation to making threats and to its claiming to stop them – however, as the latter point suggests, there are instances of blood feuds occurring, with the participants resolving the issues themselves. Blood Feuds occur over many reasons throughout the research timeframe; of the recorded instances of blood feud (excluding instances of reconciliation of feuds), 61% were related in some way to the Kadyrov Regime, as is demonstrated by figure 5.3.2, while of those not related to the Kadyrov regime, 11.5% were feuds declared against Kadyrov:



*Figure 5.3.2: Causes of Blood Feud in Chechnya from the research*

In this chart, “domestic” is defined as any feud that does not involve the regime; “regime threat” is defined as the instances where feuds are declared against opponents of the Kadyrov regime; “regime caused” is where the regime carries out these feuds; and “other use” relates to the regime’s actions involving blood feuds – sometimes, when the regime takes a stance against the practice. The picture this paints is emblematic of the Kadyrov regime’s relationship to cultural norms as a whole; the regime tries to control the practice, as far as ordinary people are concerned, while twisting the practice in ways that are contrary to Adat law.

Before looking at the Kadyrov Regime’s use of blood feuds as a political tool, it is worth examining the instances of blood feuds that occurred outside the regime’s remit. The feuds occur for many different reasons, including one over a fatal car crash (Caucasian Knot, 29/11/2016), one inter-ethnic case, over a robbery (Caucasian Knot, 16/11/2019) and one involving an attack in Istanbul, with the attackers forcing the declarant to record a video denouncing the Kadyrov regime (08/09/2021) (1). While the causes of feuds are interesting, what is more useful are the instances wherein the people involved resolve the issue. Reconciliation is a key part of the ritual of blood feud – arguably, it is the most important part of the practice, as, to paraphrase Jaimoukha, without Adat and the regulations surrounding blood feud, the North Caucasus would fall into chaos. The report of an inter-ethnic blood

feud comes from the report on its reconciliation. The case involved the death of a female taxi driver in North Ossetia; some time after her death, the families reconciled and feud was averted (Caucasian Knot, 16/11/2019). This is an interesting story as the reconciliation has all the marks of a feud; yet the words “blood feud” are never mentioned in the article. This highlights something that another article by Caucasian Knot demonstrates; namely, that feuds can change character in different circumstances than those found within Chechnya (or the other republics with such a practice). The article in question was about a conflict in Krasnodar between Chechens and Dagestanis, and while it is noted that the different sources of feuding and customary law are different (the article notes that it is Sharia that is more closely observed throughout Dagestan, while acknowledging Dagestani Adats), the provisions and traditions change in outside circumstances (Djalilov, 27/08/2019). Ossetian adat (known as *Iron Æghdau*) also contains provisions of a blood feud; in this case, as opposed to the earlier one, here it is employed in reconciliation. Other cases of reconciliation give us an opportunity to see what Chechens think of the practice as a whole; in 2021, two clans reconciled their feud after a man fled a fatal car crash (a frequent cause of feuds), which led to comments variously decrying the reconciliation both in how it played out and over the manner of the reconciliation in general (Caucasian Knot, 25/11/2021). Such comments in the report include:

““What kind of reconciliation? His driver's license should be taken away for life, and, as expected, he should serve his due sentence in jail,” the user arsensadyrkhanov has written.

““If the perpetrator of the accident would have had remorse, he would not have left the scene of the accident, would have come to the funeral and apologized properly. Such people deserve no generosity,” the user hadidjatkahs has stated.

““The pain will remain forever. But on earth, reconciliation removes a big burden from the family. I wish patience to all relatives. This is a misfortune for both parties. And he

will serve his term in jail anyway," the user di\_ouj has answered" (Caucasian Knot, 25/11/2021).

The second comment, by the user hadidjatkahs, is particularly interesting. The other two are opposite ends of the spectrum, the first condemning the reconciliation and seeking stronger justice; the last, a reaffirmation of why the practice is important. However, the second seems to be admonishing the fact that the practice was not followed to the letter, with a show of remorse and guilt not present.

The main occurrence of blood feuds in this research, however, is in their use and manipulation by the Kadyrov regime. One early use of the norms has a link with the subject of the next chapter, the forced apologies used by the Kadyrov regime, in that it is an early form of punishment used against dissidents within the Kadyrov regime; the burning down of houses. On the 4th of December, an attack by "militants" (i.e., insurgents) occurred in Grozny. The Caucasian Knot reports that all the militants killed in the attack had Chechen passports. After this, a series of reprisals occurs; the houses of the families of the insurgents are systematically destroyed over the course of the month – at least 17 houses were reported destroyed. Nonetheless, this is still interesting as it provides a bridge from hard-power coercion to the more "soft"-power coercion that the forced apologies represent. Cultural norms are also not entirely absent – they are present, just not to the same extent that they are in the later apologies. The demolition of houses must be viewed as a form of vengeance – Kadyrov himself asserts the necessity of collective punishment taken against the families of the militants (Ibragimov, 09/12/2014). This is not blood vengeance, but it is a symbolic vengeance, nonetheless. Further, Souleimanov (2007, p.27-29) notes the collective element of blood revenge in Chechnya, and while no-one is harmed in the demolition of houses, the language, methods and aims are the same. Therefore, the normative element in terms of adat law in the cases of punitive house demolition is clearly present. This brings us to the second point – that the collective punishment is a public, destructive attack on the family honour of the militants. These are, after all, family homes that are being targeted – the

message of familial honour being tarnished is not hard to miss, once viewed through the normative lens. In this light, it is of note that while such house burnings are clearly a form of vengeance, they are targeted against places, not people. Then there are the two concepts of individual pride and individual shame and guilt, yah and èh – not only do the demolitions demonstrate the public shaming of the militants, and applying that shame to their families, they are damaging the “pride” of the militants. They cannot carry out these attacks and go into hiding without repercussions – themselves, their pride and their families will have to pay the price. Therefore, despite this being very violent – as opposed to the more subtle forms of control represented by the apologies – the logic behind the demolitions remain the same. The house burnings are a strange synthesis between two facets of Adat, used and twisted by the Kadyrov regime to great effect.

The Kadyrov regime continues to use blood feuds as a threat throughout the timeframe of the research. The process by which the feuds are most effectively used involves a distortion of the tradition itself. In this format, a feud is “declared” against the party that has offended Kadyrov, after which the vengeance is carried out (or, at least, attempted to be carried out). Perhaps the most well-known case of this is that of Tumso Abdurrakhmanov, an opposition blogger living in the EU (at the start of this story, in 2019, he was residing in Poland; in 2020, he was in Sweden). Magomed Daudov declared a blood feud against him on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2019. He does say that it does not equal a threat of murder, but, as a user quoted by the Caucasian Knot points out, presciently:

“It seems to me, [Magomed], in vain you made the appeal in such a way, he waited for such threats ... Starting from today, if something happens to him, everyone will see it as an attempt, even if you are not involved in it,” in particular, user Turko Nokhcho, addressed Magomed Daudov” (Caucasian Knot, 11/03/19).

The Caucasian Knot also quotes an expert, Isa, on the issues with such a declaration:

“It's totally inappropriate to talk about blood feud here. According to Islam and to our customs, blood feud cannot be announced for an insult. Yes, you can call for an answer, but this is not blood feud,” (Caucasian Knot, 11/03/19).

The next year, Tumso was attacked in his home by assailants wielding hammers, one of many opposition bloggers attacked across Europe (Coalson, 2020). Declaration of blood feud is not unheard of; recall the previous example of the attack in Istanbul – the victim, Akhmed Arsnukaev declared blood feud there (Caucasian Knot, 08/09/2021 (1)), so what makes Daudov's declaration different? There are three reasons; firstly, as stated earlier, there is a trend of norms changing outside the republic, so this fits for the Istanbul attack and its aftermath; secondly, Daudov was declaring a feud over an insult, where Arsnukaev was attacked, making the latter's declaration otherwise in line with the custom; finally, Daudov's declaration was made over an insult not to him, but to *Kadyrov*, someone not related by blood or even in the same teip, whereas Arsnukaev, as per the custom, declared feud against the teip of the attackers responsible.

Worryingly, the Kadyrov regime has, in a way, learned from this event. In 2021, Tumso's brother reported that armed people had come to their mother's ancestral village:

“Mokhmad Abdurakhmanov, Tumso's brother, said that a top-ranking Chechen official “sent dozens of people to the village of Starye Atagi, my mother's ancestral village where her brothers live, and threatened them: ‘If you do not stop your man within two days, then we will return, we will declare a blood feud on you, and we will wipe up you’... In the Chechen traditions, there has never been such a practice for the mother's side to be held responsible for the actions of a person,” (Caucasian Knot, 27/09/2021).

This culminates in December of the same year, when Tumso and four other opposition bloggers reported that their relatives were kidnapped en masse (Caucasian Knot, 25/12/2021). Oddly enough, while these actions were carried out due to their relationship

with the bloggers, as per the custom of blood feud, there was not a public declaration of feud against the other bloggers – the only hint of a declaration being the above quote. This, perhaps, could indicate the lessons learned from earlier attempts, with a lack of blood feud declaration giving an element of detachedness from the kidnappings. If this was the case, Kadyrov's penchant for the dramatic and the threatening undid this effort, as he branded the kidnapped as supporters of terrorism (Caucasian Knot, 27/12/2021). As per Mokhmad Abdurakhmanov's earlier quote, the tradition was violated another way yet again – on the 25<sup>th</sup>, while 6 of the 9 of Tumso's relatives were released, members of his wife's family were kidnapped, a break of the codes surrounding blood feud (25/12/2021). This highlights the main throughfare of the use of blood feud by Kadyrov – the norm is present, but if he needs to twist it in order for his needs to be met, he will do so, a move that, on occasion, generates discourse and dissent about whether or not he's followed the code properly, instead of whether or not it was a good thing to do. This twisting of the narratives surrounding his actions may not create legitimacy for Kadyrov, but they are an effective way of distracting from the true aspects of his coercion.

Therefore, it is evident that blood feud remains an important facet of Chechen politics. When they are committed between ordinary people, not only do stories capture public attention but generate discourse on whether such feuds are acceptable or carried out in the correct way. Kadyrov's use of the blood feud dates back many years, with a period of caution on its use in the middle years of the study and becoming an effective method of coercion during the latter years of the study. Not only that, but it appears that Kadyrov is able to adapt to circumstances and twist the norms to his will. There is usage of blood feud by the Kadyrov regime against Ingush activists, but this will be covered in the Ingushetia chapter – what is important about those for the purposes of this section is that blood feuds not only can get rid of dissenters, or at the very least harm those around them, but they can also achieve political goals and serve as a display of strength. Not every action of coercion is rooted in blood feud, but those that are prove shockingly effective.

### 5.3.2 Teips and Norms of Belonging

Teips and the teip system make expected appearances when it comes to their importance to Kadyrov for appointments to governmental positions. However, teips only make small appearances when it comes to their involvement in Chechen political life in the rest of society in the research timeframe. This contrasts with Ingushetia, where teips retain a significant political role. This makes the limited role that teips play outside of the Kadyrov regime of great importance. Furthermore, the main “manifestation” of the teip is teip-1, the more traditional form of the teip<sup>12</sup>.

The most interesting way that teips appear in the bracket of society outside of the Kadyrov regime is in conjunction with two norms relating to religion deliberately left out of that earlier section – wirts and tariqats, the modes of social organisation provided by the Sufi movement. The way these manifest is in the form of a story from 2016 in which the Kadyrov regime attempted to classify the republic’s youth by teip and wirt affiliation:

“Upon a decision of the head of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov, every young person aged from 14 to 35 years shall pass the "spiritual-moral certification", having reported on his/her religion and tribal (clannish) belonging, said the Chechen Parliament. According to the Chechen MPs, who acted on the instruction of Ramzan Kadyrov, every young person "must obtain a document, indicating his/her personal features, nationality, teip and wirt association... The decision to issue the above passports "was supported by the clergy, and has already entered into force," said one of the Chechen MPs.” (Caucasian Knot, 18/02/2016 ).

This story disappears and re-emerges with some frequency after facing some backlash; most of the mentions of teip-1 and wirts in 2016 relate to this story. Kadyrov refuted the existence of such a document:

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<sup>12</sup> Please consult the teip section of Chapter 3 and Appendix 2 for the more detailed explanation as per Sokrianskaia (2005). In brief, teip-1 indicates the traditional, customary meaning of the term, a Chechen Clan; teip-2 is a more informal term found by Sokrianskaia to refer to close friends not related by blood.

“Some media report that some new 'passport' will be issued in Chechnya to young people. I remind you that our country has only one passport – the passport of a Russian citizen! Everything else is just fudge!” said Kadyrov” (Caucasian Knot, 20/02/2016).

This does not match the reporting that continued in March, which reported 4 separate instances of these “moral and spiritual” certificates, with an element of coercion present. Firstly, a sample of one was leaked online:

“According to the sample of the document, a person should specify in a questionnaire passport data, place of residence, and place of study or work. Besides, everyone should also attach own photo. The questionnaire also includes a line "I confirm that I observe, respect and honour the values of my religion, nation and state. I also give my consent to the processing of my personal data," and a person should select the mark "Agree" or "Disagree"” (Caucasian Knot, 26/02/2016).

They go on to add that “Maxim Shevchenko, a member of the Human Rights Council under the President of Russia, has expressed the opinion that in case of arrest or beating, a questionnaire "can save freedom and even life of a Chechen guy”” (Caucasian Knot, 26/02/2016). One of the reports comes from teachers, who claim to have been forced to make every person from the ages of 14-35 fill out the questionnaire, with one complaining about having to do this on the weekend (Caucasian Knot, 14/03/2016). There is also the element of police involvement; two reports from ordinary Chechens go as follows:

“"District policeman came to us and said that we have to fill in the so-called spiritual and moral questionnaire; and it is compulsory for all males aged from 14 to 35 years," Rizvan, a resident of the village of Pobedinsky, Grozny District, told the "Caucasian Knot" correspondent on March 15. Residents of the republic also note that the need to undergo the "spiritual and moral certification" of the youth, organized by the Chechen authorities, was declared at mosques (Caucasian Knot, 16/03/2016).

One thing of note is that, according to this report, it is only men who need to fill out this form. This is indicative of the fear around supposed members of the Wahhabist insurgency, and the change of the “underground” in Chechnya, as reported by the Caucasian Knot itself (Caucasian Knot, 20/09/2019). On the first point, the same report also notes the influence of the fear of Wahhabism, in a similar vein to the rhetoric surrounding beard shavings, whilst also showing the link between the clerical and “secular” authorities:

"Before the Friday prayer, the Imam said that young people should take part in the ongoing spiritual and moral certification; and that it will protect our guys from the influence of Wahhabis and extremists, and the like," said a resident of the republic named Rasul. The "Caucasian Knot" was told by a district policeman that they and Imams of local mosques were obliged to conduct a certification of young people. The collected questionnaires should be then handed over to municipal administrations." (Caucasian Knot, 16/03/2016).

Why might the Kadyrov regime do this? There are several possible reasons. Firstly, there is what the author believes to be the most likely possibility; paranoia over the Islamic State. The previous section covered the relationship between Kadyrov and radical Islam, namely his shunning of the movement while borrowing some ideas in order to create a new “Traditional Islam” for Chechnya; Islamic State ended up posing a legitimate threat to the Kadyrov regime through terror attacks throughout this period, which also coincided with the large number of Russian Muslims – not just Chechens – going to join the movement in Syria and Iraq. These “moral and spiritual” passports could have been an attempt at public shaming over this. One expert interviewed by the Caucasian Knot in their own reporting concludes that:

“They (the authorities of Chechnya) are going to put everything under control, and this control is worse than the control which used to take place in the Soviet Union. They are going to introduce the feudal control when people can be persecuted for

professing other faith, for belonging to other teip, and so on,"" (Caucasian Knot, 13/03/2016).

Later, another expert adds:

“The purpose of this questioning, like many other things taking place in Chechnya, is to unite people around Ramzan Kadyrov and to subject people to spiritual subjugation. Furthermore, for people, it also means denunciation of own relatives. And what else can I say, what kind of morality can we discuss here? It is absolutely an immoral action," Svetlana Gannushkina believes.” (Caucasian Knot, 13/03/2016).

The first expert seems to have missed the point a little. The focus on the teip affiliation is interesting, which will be examined in the point after this one, but the point that the aim of these is to prosecute people for professing other faiths is not strictly wrong; it is about the public shaming, the self-policing. Young people are those who joined the Islamic State in the most numbers; this way of reinforcing a “Traditional Islam” by making that demographic have a document which, if you recall the earlier statement about these documents perhaps saving people’s lives, can make a tangible difference to people, makes Wahhabism seem like a risk not worth taking. There is however the obvious fault that one might secretly still profess Wahhabism. In this instance, the aspect of shame may still apply since this is a small society and that Imams were asked to help carry out these checks at Mosques and at the important Friday sermons. That said, there is an element that these may not have strictly worked – after all, attacks do continue in the years following these checks, and hideouts are still found afterwards.

The inclusion of teips is interesting. Some may argue that it could be done for the purposes of blood feud, but there is really no connection to this norm other than the tangential “saving someone’s life” and clans being part of the consideration of a blood feud. Instead, this also adds to the shaming aspect; it is a reinforcement of the traditional methods of belonging that Salafism opposes itself. Note the earlier pledge that was recorded in the leaked

questionnaire: “I confirm that I observe, respect and honour the values of my religion, nation and state. I also give my consent to the processing of my personal data,”” (Caucasian Knot, 26/02/2016). This adds pressure onto people – it is a veiled question asking “do you respect the traditions and beliefs of your elders and ancestors?” to members of a society in which veneration of the elderly and the ancestors are intrinsically important to the sense of belonging (Jaimoukha, 2005, p.90, p.136).

While this does represent an interesting facet of the Kadyrov regime’s quest for control over as many parts of Chechen life as possible, as stated previously the main way that teips emerge in the research is through patrimonialism and Kadyrov’s personnel policy. The main form of teips present is the more traditional version of the teip, teip-1, as opposed to the more “informal” version of the teip, teip-2, that Sokrianskaia (2005) describes, despite both making an appearance. For example, the appointment of Ramzan Kadyrov’s nephew, Islam Kadyrov, to mayor of Grozny in July 2015 (Caucasian Knot, 09/07/15) fits teip-1 perfectly, as this is a clan member and very close relative. On the flipside, for the more informal teip-2, is the appointment of Magomed Daudov to the position of Speaker of Parliament earlier in the same month (Caucasian Knot, 05/07/2015) – Daudov is a close friend and ally of Ramzan, but he is not a blood relative. Teip-1 is the most common form when it comes to patrimonial appointments, with many of Kadyrov’s close relatives and other nephews serving in key positions, from head of his personal secretariat (Caucasian Knot 04/04/2016) to deputy prime minister (Caucasian Knot, 15/03/2016) to the chief of police in Grozny (Caucasian Knot, 21/12/2017). Kadyrov’s favour of his clan is an interesting tactic, in line with the notions surrounding patrimonialism – the people he appoints are more likely to be loyal to him due to the teip connections and the “weight” that these bonds have in Chechen society, while at the same time the importance of the “concrete” rewards and punishment remain. These people, while very inexperienced and, arguably, unqualified for the positions they occupy are loyal to Kadyrov. They get enriched with the benefits of their position - and they do suffer concrete

punishments for indiscretions, as seen with the case of Islam Kadyrov's forced apology for his crimes whilst mayor of Grozny.

What can we say of the state of the teip in Chechnya, then? Whilst this thesis was being written, Ekaterina Sokirianskaia published her book *Bonds of Blood? State-building and Clanship in Chechnya and Ingushetia* on teips. In this book, she argues that the teip is, effectively, dead in Chechnya, as Chechen society has closed and the teip has lost its functions whilst retaining a larger cultural value due to the closing up of Chechen society (Sokirianskaia, 2024, p.226-228). She further argues that the "clan" in power in Chechnya is a marked departure from the teip – there are 16 members of his extended family in power (Sokirianskaia, 2024, p225-226), but it is based less on the traditional definition of the teip, and on a more "informal" definition of the teip as set up in her earlier work (Sokirianskaia, 2005). In this definition, the teip is a name given to an informal group of close friends and family, which is arguably what we see with Kadyrov's personnel policy. This does match up to the people this group is made up of, which, while including his children, his mother and his wife, also includes his nephews, one maternal cousin and his sister's husband's brother. Coupled with the earlier discussions on the clamping down on teip identity as part of the "moral-spiritual certificates", this makes the teips an excellent demonstrator for the breaking and repurposing of traditional cultural norms in Chechnya under Kadyrov. The "actual" teip, which in Ingushetia is a semi-successful column of power outside of governmental control, is neutralised as a potential source of disruption; the norm is remade to suit Kadyrov's will, a tale seen elsewhere in relation to religion and the norms relating to customary law.

### 5.3.3 Veneration of the Elders and the “Big Men” – the Cult(s) of Personality

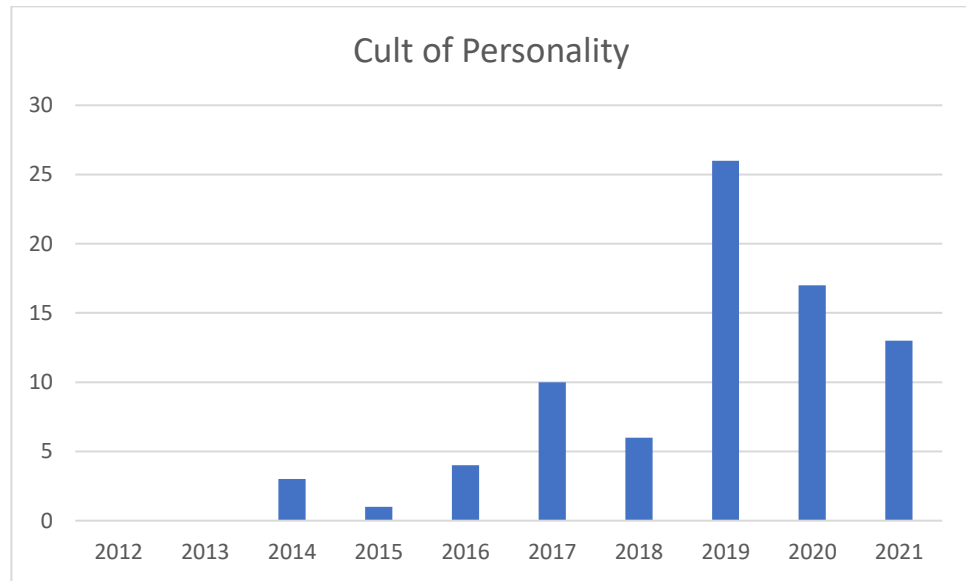


Figure 5.3.3

This may seem, at first, an odd place to include a discussion on the cult of personality – or rather, as will be discussed, the cults of personality – and its place within Chechnya. After all, with such a storied history of the cult of personality in Russia as a whole, it may seem more logical to lump in such a cult within the framework of a wider political history. However, there is much more to this story than that – this section will demonstrate that there are different origins for the cults of personality here which, while perhaps “fitting in” with the wider discourse on cults of personality, draw upon cultural norms. Specifically, there are two cults which draw upon the veneration of elders and the concept of the “big man”, with the cults of Akhmat and Ramzan Kadyrov using these concepts respectively.

#### ***Akhmat Kadyrov’s Cult of Personality and the Veneration of Elders***

Akhmat Kadyrov’s Cult of Personality is, perhaps, the most “visible” of the cults of personality present in Chechnya; it is by far the largest contributor to the category of cult of personality. Akhmat’s name and image have become ubiquitous around Chechnya; his name leant to tools of control such as the Akhmat Foundation and the Akhmat Battalion, representing low and high intensity coercion respectively; his image placed alongside that of Putin’s and Ramzan’s. That is to say nothing of the Kadyrovtsy, the private army of Ramzan

formed by and named after his father, Akhmat Kadyrov. There is the Akhmat Kadyrov Mosque, the Akhmat Arena – home of FC Akhmat Grozny – and the village of Akhmat-Yurt, previously Tsentaroy, the hometown of the Kadyrov family. The cult of Akhmat makes its way into many aspects of life over the research period. In 2014, commemorations of the 1944 deportations were timed to coincide with the date that Akhmat was killed, May 9<sup>th</sup> 2004 (Caucasian Knot, 10/05/2014) – a repeated comment throughout the research period. The 2015 reports gives us a powerful quote from a local:

““Whatever the authorities contrive, for each of the Chechens, the date of February 23, 1944, has been and will always be the mournful date. The date of February 23 was treated as the mourning day even after in 1994, when Djokhar Dudaev declared that our republic would no longer live in mourning and that the date of February 23 would be the day of revival of the Chechen nation. The current authorities have gone even further and wilfully transferred the date to May 10. This date is also the mourning day, but for the Kadyrov family, since Akhmat Kadyrov, who was killed on May 9 during the parade in Grozny, was buried on May 10. If any new leader begins to bind dates to his personal tragedies, then we will soon forget everything and everyone,” the "Caucasian Knot" was told by Nasruddi, a resident of Chechnya” (Caucasian Knot, 10/05/2015).

Likewise in 2014, we get the first of several official birthday celebrations for Akhmat, treated as a public holiday (Caucasian Knot, 20/08/2014). These are early examples, but the “Akhmatisation” of Chechnya peaks, as can be seen in the above graph, in 2017-2021. This is when we get the aforementioned renaming of Terek FC into Akhmat FC, the renaming of Tsentaroi into Akhmat-Yurt, and an interesting example of a forced apology, when Kadyrov made a Chechen man in Moscow apologise for shouting a slogan related to the personality cult – “*Akhmat – Sila!*”, or “Akhmat is [our] Strength!” – in the metro (Caucasian Knot, 11/10/2018).

It does make sense for Ramzan to prop up this personality cult; his father is, at the most basic level, the root of his own power. Yet, the reverence for his father may well be rooted in Chechen veneration for both elders and the dead and dead warriors. This is an easy thing for Kadyrov to do, given that this is an aspect of Chechen tradition that is still maintained and could be said to be stronger given the recent history of war and conflict in Chechnya. Since family honour is also a key factor in this tradition (Jaimoukha, 2005, p.90), it may also be seen as a final triumph of the Kadyrov family over their enemies, given Kadyrov's penchant for humiliation.

### ***Ramzan's Cult of Personality***

Oddly enough, the cult of Ramzan himself may, at first, be seen to take a backseat to the cult around his family members and his father. Yet, it is equally all-imposing on Chechnya and is present throughout the entire research period. It ranges from commemorative coins (Caucasian Knot, 01/11/2014) to mass celebrations for his inauguration/birthday (Caucasian Knot 05/10/2016) and an allegedly million-strong rally in his general support that was meant to be in honour of Chechen Constitution Day (Caucasian Knot, 23/03/2016). There is anger from his patrimonial network over the blocking of his Instagram page (Caucasian Knot, 23/12/2017); Chechen civil servants reported being made to subscribe to his new social media accounts afterwards (28/12/2017). Ramzan received his fortieth reward/medal in 2018 (Caucasian Knot, 10/05/2018), he has received a prize from TVGrozny for being a "mobile reporter" (Caucasian Knot, 12/08/2021), he has instituted a competition for who can make the best portrait of him and his family (Caucasian Knot, 08/09/2021) (2), he has received oaths of allegiance from his patrimonial network following reports of a plot against him (Caucasian Knot, 09/10/2019); the list goes on. It has proven so all intrusive that, in 2019, a video of Kadyrov meeting a six-year-old child was posted to his social media, in which the young boy

“talks about his readiness to defend Ramzan Kadyrov. "When I grow up, give me to Ramzan Kadyrov! I'll let myself be shot instead of him! Ramzan Kadyrov is good, he's stopped the war," the child states. "Despite his age, the boy is full of courage. He is ready to stand up for me and repel any attack!" wrote Kadyrov” (Caucasian Knot, 28/07/2019).

Ramzan’s cult is harder to ground in tradition than Akhmat’s – however, there may be sociological/anthropological aspects that can explain this. Central to this is the idea of the “big man”, which is present throughout the North Caucasus, especially in Dagestan; essentially a larger-than-life figure who commands respect and acts as a political rallying point of sorts (Yeo, 2022). There is an element of this, in Kadyrov’s macho streak, his supposed military prowess and his many, many threats to other political and cultural threats. Ramzan’s cult is rather different to the cult that has propped up around his father. While there is a much more coherent argument for the cult of Akhmat being based in a form of Chechen tradition, it is much more difficult to say the same for Ramzan’s. Ramzan’s cult seems much more like it serves a personal end for Ramzan, self-aggrandising – and, given that he backed down from calling the Shali mosque the Ramzan Kadyrov Mosque, it is the only form of legitimation where he seems comfortable conceding.

#### 5.4 Land, Mountains, and Minorities: Norms of Place in Kadyrov’s Chechnya

If one recalls the previous chapters, specifically chapter 4 in which the norms which were expected to be of prominence were lined out and described, then the trend in this section – norms relating to the land itself – may come as a surprise. Furthermore, there is an element of non-Vainakh peoples coming into importance in relation to this section, both in the neighbouring republic of Dagestan and in the Chechen highlands. The issues that are highlighted here are varied, somewhat disparate, but represent a key aspect of political life in Chechnya as they relate to the oft-forgotten rural and mountainous parts of the republic.

Much of the Chechen population lives in the lowlands, specifically at the feet of the Republic and the south-bank of the Sunzha river; Grozny alone accounts for 22% of the population of the republic. Ustaev, in 2012, notes that according to the Russian census in 2002, the percentage of the population based in urban centres was 33.8% (Ustaev, 2012, p.16); more recent estimates put the number at 37.21% (Federal State Statistics Service, 2022). While this indicates there is still a large percentage of the population living in areas classed as “rural,” the trend is still relevant, with the population concentrated in the lowlands. Figure 5.4.1. demonstrates this:



Figure 5.4.1: Population centres of the Chechen Republic. Source: Wikimedia Commons and Federal State Statistics Service

Легенда карты (при наведении на метку отображается реальная численность населения):

- Республиканский центр, 333 672 чел.
- от 20 000 до 100 000 чел.
- от 10 000 до 20 000 чел.
- от 5000 до 10 000 чел.
- от 3000 до 5000 чел.

Figure 5.4.1.1: Key to the above. Translation, top to bottom: Centre of the Republic, 333,672 people: 20,000 to 100,000 people: 10,000 to 20,000 people: 5,000 to 10,000 people: 3,000 to 5,000 people.

Ustaev further notes that the mountains remain vastly depopulated, with those who were deported in the 1940s only starting to trickle back to these settlements in the last few decades, with settlements remaining pastoral and agricultural in terms of economics (Ustaev, 2012, p.22-23). He also notes the axis shown in figure 6.4.5 (Ustaev, 2012, p.23). This means that the land issue becomes very important in 2018 when it takes up a political aspect rooted in normative and customary issues, when a controversial land swap was agreed upon by Chechnya and Ingushetia, in which Ingushetia gave up 9% of its land in exchange for pitiful returns. The Caucasian Knot provides this map to show the exchange:

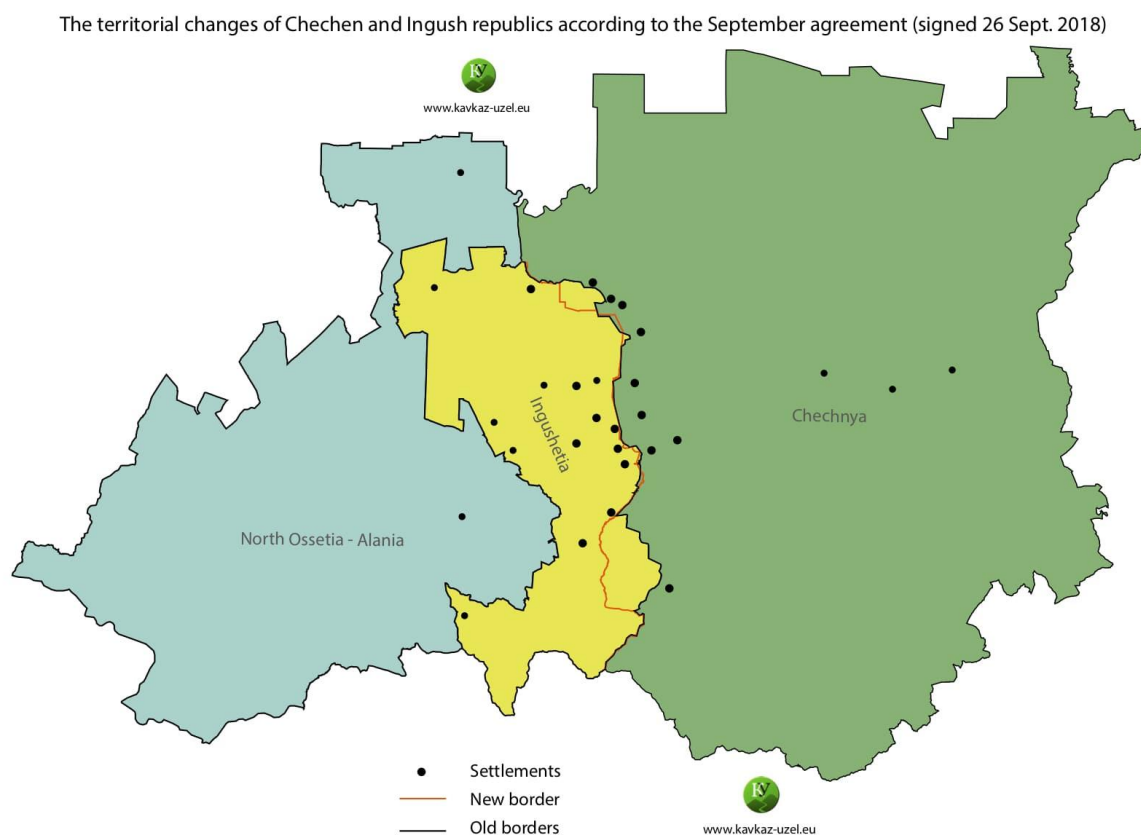


Figure 5.4.6: Territorial Exchange between Ingushetia and Chechnya. Source: Caucasian Knot, 26/10/2018: <https://eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/44880/>

Land, then, is an issue worth examining in greater detail – the geographic element of norms was something that the author failed to consider when setting out the parameters of

research for this thesis, and that other researchers have not neglected but not necessarily examined in the same detail that one would examine a norm like blood feuds.

Since this thesis deals with both the republics, this section will only address the argument from the Chechen side as far as possible. Furthermore, other key issues involve both Dagestan and some of the Dagestani peoples; oddly enough, the people this thesis is concerned with in Dagestan are Chechens, and those within the Chechen republic are Dagestanis, specifically Avars.

#### 5.4.1 Geography and Vainakh Cultural Practice: an overview

Before examining and analysing these issues, it is important to take stock of the norms relating to land, as well as a brief look at the state of recent literature on the subject, in lieu of its lack of mention in the earlier theoretical reviews. Jaimoukha notes several important aspects to land in Chechen norms and society, and while they are all very interesting, there are two comments that matter for the purposes of this thesis. Firstly, “Land had always been scarce in mountainous Chechnya... each *teip* claimed a definite area of land. At first land was claimed and cultivated collectively, but later, although common ownership was maintained, individual cultivation of land became the norm” (Jaimoukha, 2005, p.89); and secondly, that “land disputes were very rare on account of the extended collective and personal memories, and because the delimitation of land was accompanied by oath-making rituals” (Jaimoukha, 2005, p.90). Khasbulatov, writing in Tishkov’s edited volume, notes the actual use of land, but also notes different types of land ownership than Jaimoukha: “Jamaat (communal), tukkhum (tribal), myul’kovaya (individual peasant, private), feudal, waqf (mosque-owned), state owned ([specifically] Russian-state) (Khasbulatov, 2012, p.148). Khasbulatov further elaborates that ownership of land, and of surplus land outside the differing communal ownerships, are codified in Chechen Adat (Khasbulatov, 2012, p.149). Additionally, he mentions that forests were included as part of the parcels of communal land (Khasbulatov, 2012, p.149-150) but does later say that

“H.-M.O Khashaev writes ‘a rural community separately, or several communities together, owned pastures, pasture mountains, partially hayfields, forests and irrigation canals in some places. De jure, all members of rural communities had the right to use this communal property, but de facto only those who had cattle used it. The rural poor, deprived of livestock... could not exercise their right to graze cattle on communal pastures, at the same time they could not demand from society that it allow them to lease that part of the communal land that fell to their share” (Khasbulatov, 2012, p.151).

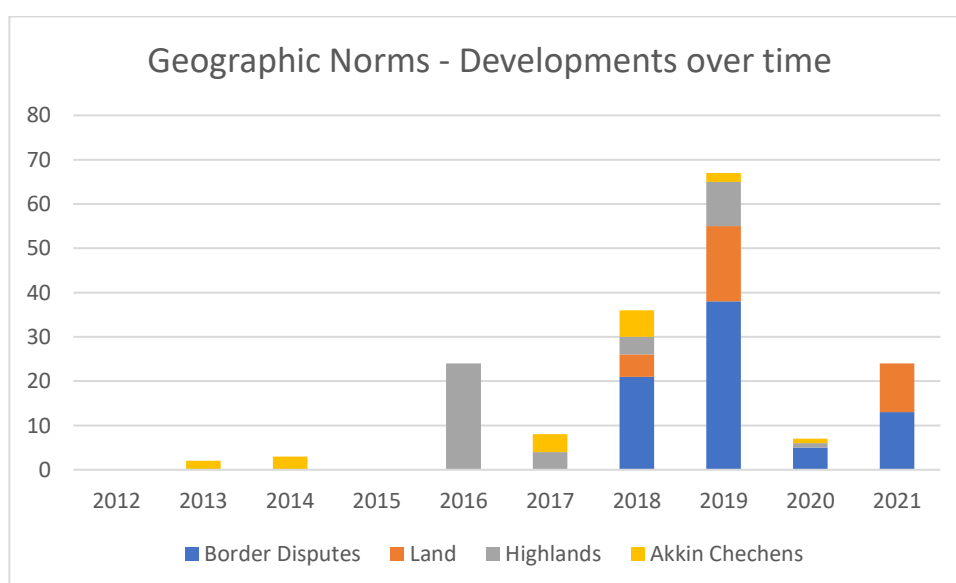
This is important for reasons that may, at first, seem hard to determine. After all, the stories to do with land have little to do with cattle grazing. However, the above quote demonstrates that despite norms and customs around land use being present, they were not that respected, or at least poorly followed. Lanzillotti (2023, 219-234) further elaborates that, as well as norms being more fluid in this instance as opposed to other norms, the situation is further exacerbated by the effects of the deportations in 1944; the Chechens were not, in the times of the USSR, properly integrated into the industrial economy, nor were they able to properly return to the traditional forms of land use. This, and the stories that will be analysed here, particularly the Chechen-Ingush border dispute, point to another use of land – a form of legitimation, of “reclaiming land”, of promising to “re-settle” land then never following through, and through giving away pitiful amounts of farmland in exchange for large parcels of the smallest republic of the Russian Federation.

Lanzillotti’s book *Land, Community and the State in the Caucasus* focuses on the Kabardino-Balkarian example, as an exception that proves the norm to the realities of land use in the modern Caucasus. Lanzillotti points to the shared use of lands between ethnic communities in Kabardino-Balkaria (as well as shared use of land *within* ethnic communities), and its history regarding pastoral use and the evolution of these over nearly 300 years, as a way of explaining the relative peace in Kabardino-Balkaria since the fall of the USSR. There are other factors that explain the lack of peace in other republics of the North Caucasus, that is

something that is undisputable, but it is an interesting perspective, nonetheless. A further perspective that Lanzillotti notes are “ethnic geographies”, such as the drastically changed demographic picture of the Checheno-Ingush ASSR pre and post deportation, the largely ethnic-Russian dominated oil industry in the ASSR, as opposed to the largely “native” controlled, relatively poorer agricultural sector and the demographic changes following the Chechen Wars (Lanzillotti, 2023, p.225). Finally, there is the overview given by Yemelianova & Akkiewa which notes the role of geography in the promulgation of other norms, namely Adat. Specifically, they mention that Adat law is much stronger in highlander/mountaineer communities of the North Caucasus, with Sharia being a preferred traditional law on the plains (Yemelianova & Akkiewa, 2020, p.73). Further, they note that under several Adat codes in the North Caucasus place the need of the individual under the need of the community, with the caveat that the community would help (in their words “rescue”) the individual or their family should something bad befall them (Yemelianova & Akkiewa, 2020, p.77). These all may seem far-flung compared to the more “rigid” norms of teips, adat and Islam, but these are all mentioned as they do arise in the research.

#### 5.4.1.1 Examination of Results

Before analysing the different aspects of geographic norms, it is worth examining the results first. Figure 6.4.7 displays the totals over the years:



*Figure 5.4.7: Occurrence of Geographic Norms and Issues throughout the research period*

The results display the overall trend of the 4 categories which occupy what can be referred to as “Geographic Norms” or “Geographic Cultural Norms”. The Akkin Chechens may not be a norm themselves, being a people-group, but they prove to be of importance throughout the research period and have thus been included in this category. The graph demonstrates that in the early years of 2012-2014, there is hardly any mention of these norms in the Caucasian Knot’s reporting. In the ISIS years, 2015-2018, like in other categories, the norms make increasingly frequent appearances. The norms peak in 2019, then decrease in subsequent years – the pattern is very similar to the forced apologies, the subject of the next chapter. This graph demonstrates the true longevity of the border disputes, beginning with the annexation of the Sunzha region from Ingushetia – though, somewhat oddly, the disputes are mostly with Dagestan from 2019 onwards, as the Chechen and Ingush governments considered the dispute “resolved”. In other words, since an agreement was signed, the two governments have stopped disputing their respective borders. However, since no agreement was properly reached with Dagestan, the claims on Dagestani border regions continue to persist from 2018, when they first arise amid the Checheno-Ingush agreement and dispute. The Akkin Chechens, mentioned only a handful of times around certain commemorative events (such as the commemoration of the Vainakh deportations) become more important as the disputes with Dagestan increase, despite not necessarily being the focus of said disputes. Before this, other norms focus on the highlands of Chechnya – something there is very little news of – and around the village of Kenkhi. There is considerable overlap between the norms relating to land and the border disputes, particularly where Dagestan is concerned – therefore, given this overlap as well as the importance of the border disputes, it is prudent to begin here.

## 5.4.2 Border Disputes from the Chechen perspective

### 5.4.2.1 Background

The border disputes in the Northeast Caucasus represent the most significant instance of land use norms found in the research. Beginning in 2018, the Chechen leadership began to dispute its borders with Ingushetia and Dagestan, claiming ownership over parts of each that they claimed were taken away from Chechnya at various points of the recent history of the region. In both instances, these sparked protests against the actions of Chechnya; in Ingushetia, these turned into anti-government protests that resulted in the Head of that Republic being replaced by the Federal government. This section, as previously stated, will only deal with the Chechen perspective of that dispute – please consult chapter 9, the Ingushetia case study, for the effects of the dispute within that republic. However, due to Dagestan not being a case study for this research, effects within Dagestan from the border disputes will be examined within this case study.

The border disputes began in September 2018 with a series of reports that predate the actual agreement between Kadyrov and Ingush Head Yunus-Bek Yevkurov by 20 days. The first reports, on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of September note that road works were being carried out in Ingushetia under the supervision of Chechen law enforcement, specifically in the part of Ingushetia that would later be given to Chechnya, the Sunzha district, and appear to have begun in late August (Caucasian Knot, 06/09/2018; 07/09/2018). These same reports note territorial claims made to the region in 2012 and 2013 which went largely unnoticed. On the 8th of September Kadyrov issued a decree demanding to “clarify” the borders of the Republic (Caucasian Knot, 08/09/2018), followed by the secret deal between Kadyrov and Yevkurov on the 26th (Caucasian Knot, 26/09/2018). In early October, the borders were approved by the Chechen parliament as protests broke out in Ingushetia; however, the Caucasian Knot reports discontent amongst Chechens who lost land in the deal (Caucasian Knot, 03/10/2018; Caucasian Knot, 04/10/2018). This is an interesting aspect which highlights the importance of analysing land-centred norms; recall figure 6.4.6, which demonstrates the

sheer difference between amounts of land exchanged between the two republics. That such a (comparatively) small amount of land could cause discontent is worthy of examination; it was not to the level of discontent in Ingushetia, but that is also an interesting outcome. Adding to this that the opposition bloggers, both within the republic and in the diaspora, largely kept silent on the issue suggests that, at this juncture, there existed agreement between government and opposition. Initially, the only thing that is criticised is Kadyrov's threats towards Ingush activists, and even then, it is not from opposition bloggers but from ordinary residents of Chechnya (Caucasian Knot, 18/10/2018).

Later, in late 2018 and 2019, Chechnya began to claim land in Dagestan. The dispute here was different, being less concentrated than Ingushetia, with claims to lands on the immediate border with Chechnya being claimed as well as the issue of the Akkin Chechens (*Akkintsy, Aukh*) of Dagestan being raised. The Akkintsy have thus far not been mentioned, but fortunately the explanation is a simple one – these people are descendants of Chechens whom returned to their ancestral homes after the deportations, during which the borders of the Checheno-Ingush ASSR had been changed and their homeland transferred to Dagestan, becoming one of the republic's titular ethnicities (Jaimoukha, 2005, p.22). As opposed to the Ingush case, not much came of these disputes – lands were agreed to be transferred on some occasions, but never were, and several commissions created jointly by Dagestan and Chechnya never made much of a change. However, there were fears among Dagestanis about what might happen to their land, as well as disputes and protests over road signage. Unlike Ingushetia, Dagestan is not a case study, but it *does* have a sizeable Chechen population – therefore, reactions within Dagestan will be examined, though admittedly to a smaller extent than the Chechen case.

#### *5.4.2.2 Chechen Land Usage and the Border Disputes with Ingushetia*

As stated previously, one of the first reactions from people within Chechnya noted by the Caucasian Knot was from some locals near to some of the land that was exchanged by Chechnya. One local resident, named as Ibragim, states that:

"The Ingush people got farmlands in the vicinity of Goragorsk and Komarovo ... This is a hilly area, but rather comfortable for farming. These lands have been handed over to Ingushetia. We have got nothing in return" (Caucasian Knot, 03/10/2018).

The Russian language version of the article does not add much, save for a couple of other residents complaining that they have gotten nothing in return, that they are naturally unhappy about this but that there is nothing they can do. One thing that is noted is the difference between the lands exchanged – the land taken from Ingushetia has less economic value, instead being hilly and forested with monuments and memorials, in contrast to land that Chechen people, such as Ibragim, rely on economically. This article is representative of the disparity between the Chechen government and its people – securing such a large piece of land from Ingushetia is an expression of great regional power, but it has come at the expense of the people who live near the areas affected.

Later, in 2019, this disparity emerges again, with a complaint surrounding the use of lands near the Ingush border used for harvesting wild garlic. The Caucasian Knot has two quotes from locals detailing this, firstly from a local, Raisa, on their English-language website:

"Usually we gathered wild garlic under Bamut, in the forest in the direction of Arshty (in the Sunzha District of Ingushetia). The wild garlic was always in good demand. But for almost a month people could not gather it because of a special regime introduced in the border area," (Caucasian Knot, 04/02/2019).

Secondly, their Russian-language website offers this from local Said-Ali, going into more detail about the ban:

"The ban on the collection of wild garlic in the border zone really existed from January 1 to January 31. The security forces talked about special events in the forest, and it was forbidden to go there for wild garlic. Now these restrictions have been lifted. Since February 1, people have been collecting wild garlic without any problems near Bamut, and in the vicinity of Yandi, and other places," (Caucasian Knot, 04/02/2019).

The Caucasian Knot gives a figure for the price wild garlic can fetch in a Grozny market: on February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019, the day the article was published, wild garlic from the region cost 150-160 roubles per kilogram; in early January, it was much higher, at 230-250 roubles per kilogram (Caucasian Knot, 04/02/2019). The exchange rate between the rouble and the British pound stood at 1 rouble = £0.0115 on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019, giving the 250 rouble figure an equivalent exchange of £2.88. According to Statista, using statistics from RIA Novosti, the average monthly wage in Chechnya between September 2018 to August 2019 was 21,300 Roubles – around £244.95, going by the earlier exchange rate.<sup>13</sup> Assuming that sellers were able to collect, say, 5 kilograms of wild garlic, this means that, should the seller be able to sell all of it, they would earn just under 6% of their monthly wage; 10 kilograms earns 11.7% - not an insignificant amount of money, especially considering the poor wage levels.

Both stories are given less attention than the grander story of politics that played out with the seizure of land by Chechnya (most of which will be demonstrated in the Ingushetia case study). Kadyrov was able to secure a large amount of symbolic land from Ingushetia, an effective display of might and power that can necessitate analysis akin to that commonly used for international relations. Kadyrov stresses the bilateral nature of this demarcation in a way that highlights what for him is the important part of this, in a statement that is bizarre both in its original Russian as well as its English translation, as reported by the Russian-language version of the Caucasian Knot:

"I did not say a single word during the meeting of the commissions. They themselves... I have not read a single document, I have not looked at a single paper. Are you a commission? You will be responsible to the Almighty and the people, I put my signature under the work that you have done. This is history for our descendants"

(Caucasian Knot, 02/10/2018).

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<sup>13</sup> Statista, 2019: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1079149/russia-regions-with-lowest-median-wage/>.

The mention of history is the key part here. The exchange is a historical achievement, righting a wrong that only occurred because of a hasty demarcation of borders following the dissolution of the Checheno-Ingush ASSR. Jaimoukha even notes this in 2005; a map notes that the border between the two is “approximate” (Jaimoukha, 2005, p.18), whilst earlier noting the hasty nature of the demarcation, noting that disputes “could escalate into destabilising conflicts, as the Chechen people try to recover their traditional territories” (Jaimoukha, 2005, p.16). Jaimoukha was almost right, although it was not the Chechen people but the Chechen leadership who sought this – to the detriment of the people who live near the territories. There is also the aspect that Kadyrov is selling himself as not an active participant in these negotiations, that he merely signed it – a clever distancing himself from the dispute. On the one hand, he is merely serving the “people” (via their representatives, whose representativeness is questionable) and enacting their collective wishes; on the other, he is providing himself just enough distance to claim he had nothing to do with the whole process in case it goes wrong and he faces pushback on this. The opposition’s lack of response, and, perhaps, their agreeing with Kadyrov also highlights the sad reality of the situation – that despite locals suffering from this exchange of land, those with power and influence did not really care, and neither did those who lived further away from this border.

In fact, there is evidence that Jaimoukha was, in a way, right in his prediction. Following the dispute, another commission was announced to investigate re-settling the Galanchozh district of Chechnya, bordering the annexed Sunzha region. This began in November of 2018, with an announcement from Kadyrov (Caucasian Knot, 06/11/18), followed in January of the next year by a report of locals being sceptical of the project. The report notes that before the 1944 deportations, there used to be over 150 villages and farms, with returning forbidden once the Chechens returned to their homeland, and that despite scepticism over modern living conditions being feasible in a re-populated district, there were interested parties (Caucasian Knot, 12/01/2019). After this report, the government organised a free trip for interested locals and reported that there were around 6,500 people interested in relocating

to the district (Caucasian Knot, 17/01/2019; Caucasian Knot, 05/04/2019). After this, the reports die down and nothing much comes of this situation. This episode is perhaps indicative of the wider Chechen attitude to this border issue in particular – they are supportive of the annexation, they believe they have a claim to the land through ancestry, but when it comes to acting on these claims, actually going forward and moving back to the mountains and highlands, the enthusiasm is then punctuated by hesitation. Once again, for all this showboating, the Kadyrov regime wins a propaganda victory, people within the republic are given an opportunity to right a supposed wrong, and choose not to – all at the expense of the Ingush, whose lands have been taken from them, and the Chechen people who live at the border area.

#### *5.4.2.3 Chechen-Dagestani Border Disputes*

The Chechen-Dagestani Border disputes have a different nature to the Ingush border disputes from the outset. Rather than a behind-the-scenes affair, with the existence of a border commission only becoming known after the fact in Ingushetia, the existence of a border commission between Chechnya and Dagestan was public knowledge, there was an impetus from both sides of the border (though not between both regional governments) and, in a sense, the situation was more charged than the Ingush case. There are several causes for this; the presence of ethnic Chechens in the west of Dagestan; the fact that the disputes concern villages, rather than the rural terrain of the Sunzha district; and the nature of land use in these disputed regions.

While the first rumblings of the issue no doubt can be traced to Kadyrov's demand to "clarify" the borders of Chechnya, the same as Ingushetia, the actual dispute with Dagestan is not started explicitly by Kadyrov but by the Akkintsey Chechens themselves. The Congress of Chechens in Dagestan held a meeting in November 2018; during this, the attendees – including a State Duma member – expressed their concern that there was not a "mono-ethnic" region for Chechens in Dagestan, and that since borders were being discussed in the North Caucasus, that perhaps the Aukh District – the former part of the Checheno-Ingush

ASSR where the Akkinty now live – could be restored (Caucasian Knot, 26/11/2018; Caucasian Knot, 27/11/2018). This is not the first time the issue comes up in the research timeframe; as early as 2013, there were protest actions held by the Akkinty demanding the return of ancestral lands (Makhmudova, 2013). In 2017, a brawl in the village of Leninaul sparked into a border crisis when Magomed Daudov visited and was pelted with stones, with the villagers eventually appealing to Kadyrov (Caucasian Knot, 10/07/2017). Thus, with a history of violence and discontent present in this border region, it is not surprising that the then-Head of Dagestan, Vladimir Vasilyev, agreed to meet with Kadyrov less than a fortnight after the Congress met (Caucasian Knot, 07/12/2018). In February of the next year, it was reported that the two republics had divided Lake Kezenoi-Am; in April, the process was suspended (Caucasian Knot, 06/02/2019; Caucasian Knot, 16/04/2019). Tensions flared up once again in June, over Chechen road signs appearing near one of the disputed territories, which resulted in protests from both sides of the conflict, inflamed with the visit of Magomed Daudov to the scene – though, in the end, nothing came of this conflict, which died down shortly afterwards.

This conflict has a much different character to the Ingush-Chechen conflict, namely a more nationalistic turn, with a lesser impulse to give over land to Dagestan and more of a sense of “righting wrongs.” That is to say, the conflict is more nationalist in nature – which perhaps is an explanation of why, in the end, nothing really came of it. Unlike with the Ingush case, no vast swathes of land were swapped, there were no protests (save for sporadic clashes lasting only a day or two) and both leaders remained in power (with the Head of Dagestan, Vladimir Vasilyev, only being removed from the post long after the fact). Yet, with clashes occurring over the issue, this dispute is as bitter, perhaps slightly more so, than the dispute with Ingushetia. One such example of the nationalistic element is the conflict over the Vainakh Tower in Ansalta, Dagestan. This is a relatively new tower, built in 2016, yet its ownership was disputed by Magomed Daudov, who claimed that Dagestani claims of ownership over it, specifically from the Dagestani Government, was incorrect and stated that it was

tantamount to “inciting ethnic hatred” (Caucasian Knot, 22/07/2019). The locals agreed with Daudov over the tower’s ownership, stating that the land around the tower did, in fact belong to Chechnya, with villagers not seeking to enter a conflict over the issue (Caucasian Knot, 24/07/2019). Given this, the original dispute could well have been a provocation; it also may have been a display of strength of position by Chechnya. In the end, the tower is not mentioned again by the Caucasian Knot, including when the border demarcation process was cancelled.

It is a minor point, but it does highlight a theme with these border disputes; namely, the continuing ignorance of the needs of ordinary people in the name of political gain. This time, though, it is the Dagestani people who suffer from this dispute. Pastures are a key part of this; in one report, villagers from a settlement next to the border with Chechnya are interviewed on this issue: the villagers “have about 1600 head of cattle, and the total pasture area is 300-400 hectares. "There's a catastrophic shortage of pastures. Villagers collect 500 roubles per cow and pay Chechens for the pastures in their territory ... and graze cattle there," Mr Saidov has explained” (Caucasian Knot, 13/04/2019). This arrangement, informal in nature, demonstrates once again that for those living in these disputed regions, the land itself is of great economic value. However, in this case, while the Kadyrov regime was concerned with the political value of the Sunzha district, there seems to be concord between the Chechen government and the people it rules; a demarcation would only add to the Chechen’s pastoral land, meaning that the Dagestani villagers would not only lose their already sparse pastures but may have to pay more to the Chechens for the right to graze cattle. At a rate of 500 roubles per head of cattle, the villagers would have to, between them, find 800,000 roubles in total for all them – or, the mean monthly wage for 42 Dagestanis in 2019<sup>14</sup>. The economic value and output of livestock for the people on these border regions is immense – which may, in fact, explain the fact that in July of 2019, a fight broke out between

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<sup>14</sup> Statista, 2019: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1079149/russia-regions-with-lowest-median-wage/>.

Dagestanis and Chechens, after the Dagestanis claimed that Chechens had expelled Dagestani shepherds from pastures within Chechnya (Caucasian Knot, 17/07/2019). The Caucasian Knot provides a good example of the thinking from Chechen officials in regard to such issues in this article:

According to [the official], when shepherds from the Botlikh District grazed their sheep on the land belonging to the territory of the Vedeno District, they did that unofficially, on the terms of oral agreements with local residents. "In fact, those actions were illegal, since there were no relevant rent agreements. Two weeks ago, officials from the local administration warned the shepherds that they should take their sheep back. Most of them followed the instructions. In one case, there was a small fight between the local and Dagestani shepherds, but the conflict was resolved. [...] There was a small incident of domestic nature, and that was all," said the official" (Caucasian Knot, 17/07/2019).

This is an interesting, revealing statement. The arrangement – presumably of a similar nature to the arrangement noted earlier – has been drawn up by the people living in the region. Presumably, the arrangement was that the Chechens get money, and the Dagestanis get access to land to graze livestock, in this case sheep, to keep their practice sustainable. However, when the issue of land demarcation comes up, officials from the local government appear, tell the Dagestanis that the arrangement is not legally sanctioned and that they need to leave. The Chechen people, for whatever reason, perhaps thinking they will come out of this with more land, go along with this and the issue escalates to mild conflict (though the official says there was no conflict or fight, but there was a “small incident of domestic nature”, which de-facto is the same thing). In fact, previous research has highlighted that transhumance in the Dagestan and Chechnya has been marked with ethnic tensions (Gunya et al, 2019, p.7-8). The same research by Gunya et al notes the symbiosis of the state institutions and informal institutions governed by local arrangements and customary law – a

symbiosis which appears to have either fallen apart here, or worked in the favour of one ethnic group over the other (Gunya et al, 2019, p.5-7).

Nothing came of these disputes. Perhaps the repeated conflicts over issues as large as what republic a village belongs to and as small as what language the road signs are in dissuaded the powers that be – whether that is the Kadyrov regime or the Kremlin. In the end, then, all that really happened was a lot of posturing, ethnic tensions – and the lives of some of the poorest strata of Dagestani society being changed all for nothing.

#### 5.4.3 The Highlands and Kenkhi

The final part of this section deals with the highlands of Chechnya, an area that does not arise much in this research – or in other pieces of research, for that matter. As stated earlier, most people in Chechnya live in the lowlands of the Republic, particularly in or surrounding major cities like Grozny and Shali. The highlands are a strange place, variously a curiosity used by Kadyrov to promote tourism, a place of commemoration and remembrance and, finally, a place where people do live and the various methods of coercion used by Kadyrov are shown in their most blatant light. One of the few times this area comes up consistently is through commemoration of the deportations and restoration of the area. We have seen one such case already in the section around mosque building, where the rebuilding of mosques in the highlands, while blatantly self-serving, does seem to give communities hope. A larger scale ambition is that of resettlement of the villages of the highlands – in 2019, it was announced that the highland settlement of Galanchozh would be resettled (Caucasian Knot, 12/01/2019), though this plan was met with scepticism:

“The district has no roads, no electricity, no gas, no water supply, and, most importantly, no workplaces. I'm not ready to leave everything and move there," said Ramzan, a resident of Grozny. Patimat, a local resident, is also sceptical. "I don't think that at the beginning there will be a lot of people willing to move to Galanchozh

... Life in remote villages is difficult enough; and modern young people, especially urban ones, are not ready for this," she said" (Caucasian Knot, 12/01/2019).

Nonetheless, there was apparently interest: around 200 families are reported as wanting to move to the region (Caucasian Knot, 19/01/2019). No one ever went, by all accounts: satellite imagery shows the foundations of houses, aside from the ruined main village of the district, but nothing more. Even the commemoration of the deportations that cleansed this region of its inhabitants is not without dispute, as we have seen earlier as well: the commemorations become about Akhmat Kadyrov, with Ramzan only occasionally giving lip service to the memory of this tragedy.

There is, however, one story from the highlands that works well as a final one for this chapter. In the village of Kenkhi, an Avar man named Ramazan Djalaldinov made the news for voicing his frustrations about the state of the highland village in an appeal to directly to Vladimir Putin (Caucasian Knot, 15/04/2016). The complaints concern the general state of the village, including effects of the recent conflicts to much more recent flooding, as well as generally inadequate infrastructure. This incident, for whatever reason, seems to have gotten under Kadyrov's skin, for over the next month Djalaldinov was made into an example, covering many of the forms of coercion we have already seen. The day after the appeal makes the news, a condemnation of him is held in Kenkhi (Caucasian Knot, 16/04/2016); after a journalist, Vasily Polonsky of TV Rain, visits the village, his driver is arrested (Caucasian Knot, 30/04/2016) before questioning the villagers he spoke to (Caucasian Knot, 01/05/2016). Djalaldinov claims that his relatives were offered bribes to claim he was mentally unwell a few days later (Caucasian Knot, 03/05/2016). Kadyrov then held a press conference, meeting with some villagers, in which he promised to solve the issues of the village in three months; however, this opportunity was used to level more claims against Djalaldinov:

During the meeting, one of the women stated to Kadyrov that Djalaldinov had threatened to kill her with murder, and for a long time traded in weapons. A law

enforcement source said, in his turn, that Djalaldinov was a militants' helper. Kadyrov has also stated that Chechnya's opponents are jealous of how successfully the region is developing. Among the main republic's opponents he mentioned "some human rights activists." At the meeting with Kadyrov, four or five people tried to speak and support Djalaldinov's words... Residents of neighbouring villages were going to support them, but they were not admitted to the meeting" (Caucasian Knot, 07/05/2016).

During the same meeting, Kadyrov went over his plan which includes several typical methods of legitimization in this manner, namely the construction of "several mosques" and the restoration of some of the older tower complexes associated with the village (Caucasian Knot, 07/05/2016). Less than a week later, Djalaldinov's house was burnt down by "unidentified masked men", with villagers allegedly prohibited from discussing the event on threat of having theirs burnt, too (Caucasian Knot, 13/05/2016). Three days later, the village is cordoned off by law enforcement (Caucasian Knot, 16/05/2016). Ramazan left the village for neighbouring Dagestan, with help from the republic's authorities, along with his family (Caucasian Knot, 17/05/2016); the following day, masked men attempt to kidnap him (Caucasian Knot, 18/05/2016), though he also claims that, citing dissatisfaction with the situation, eight other villagers leave Kenkhi (Caucasian Knot, 23/05/2016). His departure is followed by another condemnation, this time the accusation being that Djalaldinov was inciting ethnic hatred (Caucasian Knot, 21/05/2016). Finally, on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May, Ramazan Djalaldinov apologises to Kadyrov and says that he will return to Chechnya; given that it was on TVGrozny, with a segment of programming put aside especially for the apology, it fits the bill of a forced apology in the manner we will discuss in the next chapter (Caucasian Knot, 30/05/2016). A year later, it is reported that Djalaldinov is still in Dagestan, fearful to return to Chechnya (Caucasian Knot, 16/06/2017).

This entire incident is a microcosm of the Kadyrov regime's approaches to the issues it has to face. Given that development and settlement of the highlands is an aim, one would think that

the inciting incident would spur this on for Kenkhi. Yet, the opposite has happened. Further, given that peaceful ethnic relations is a goal of Russia (and Dagestan, it should be noted), one would think this would play a part; instead, people leave the village out of fear and “good ethnic relations” are used as a tool against Djalaldinov. Djalaldinov was not necessarily an enemy – this could’ve been a great propaganda victory for Kadyrov, showing his actual commitment to the people, he rules. Instead, it was used as a display of the coercive power. It is also telling that this all happened because, apparently, Kadyrov could not stand being skipped over for Putin in terms of how the complaint was handled. The incident made him look bad, and his response was to, frankly, ruin the lives of a family who did nothing wrong. Is there a better example of Kadyrov’s mindset?

## 5.5 Conclusion

As has been demonstrated, traditional cultural norms play a large role in the politics of Chechnya; there is a wide variety of uses in their politics, and they are, frequently, twisted into a form that suits him depending on the context, what the norm relates to and – as will be better demonstrated next chapter, but applicable here in instances like traditional Islam – whether or not Kadyrov is “embarrassed” by it. Chechnya has turned up the most articles by far, and as such there is so much that could not be mentioned for want of time. The most glaring omission are the LGBT Purges, grounded in the unpleasant reality of homophobia that comes up in both Islam and in the broader culture of both Chechnya and Russia. This is a tragic situation – thankfully, there are the works of others, much more qualified than I who have researched this and those who helped the survivors. There are also the issues surrounding Kadyrov’s health, which, while much more prominent following the invasion of Ukraine and heightened attention on Chechnya, fall a little out of the reach of this thesis’ scope.

Over the period of 2012-2021, Chechnya underwent a transformation of sorts. Kadyrov was secure enough in his power to “branch out”, from using Islam as a tool of legitimation to

policing what forms of Islam are permissible and even what aspects of the more “permissible” forms of Islam are acceptable to his vision. Blood feuds, prevalent in Ingushetia (as will be seen in chapter 7), are present in the form of retributive justice inasmuch as the regime can control them; later, the regime then twists the language surrounding the feuds and turns it into a tool of attacking their enemies. The regime pronounces a desire to right wrongs of land ownership, starting border conflicts with Chechnya’s neighbours and in the process disrupting current land ownership practices and harassing an elderly man from a minority group to the point of forcing him into exile from his village. Throughout all this, he has, in effect, destroyed the Chechen teip, forcing it under the surface and neutralising it as a form of opposition, all the while filling government roles in Chechnya with his relatives, including some that seem to fit the pattern of teip membership. All of this speaks to a desire for a level of control over the lives of ordinary Chechens that is less comparable to the wider Russian state in this same period and more towards some of the most totalitarian states of our times.

Yet, this is not even the end of this aspect of the results from this work. There is an aspect of Kadyrov’s government that is so ubiquitous, rooted in Chechen traditional cultural norms and used overwhelmingly to police Chechen cultural life and society. This chapter has alluded to them, and to an extent has written around them, as they are such a strange, harrowing and worrying phenomenon that they warrant examination by themselves. These are the forced apologies and public condemnations, which in 2019 dethrone coercion and religion as the most common category and keyword in the research for Chechnya and demonstrate the true extent of Kadyrov’s desire for control over Chechnya.

## 6. Forced Apologies and Condemnations in Chechnya

### 6.1 Introduction

Forced public apologies are an alarming trend within the Chechen Republic, a coercive phenomenon aimed at punishing those who have gone against the wishes of Chechen Head Ramzan Kadyrov and sending a warning to others who may take part. This trend has been reported since at least 2015<sup>15</sup>, with an increasing frequency as a preferred method of coercion within Ramzan Kadyrov's regime. The practice is simple, deceptively so; people who have gone against the Kadyrov regime in some way are forced to apologise to Kadyrov and the Chechen people for their transgressions, typically on TV Grozny or, especially towards the end of the research period, social media (Instagram, before it was banned in the Russian Federation, was a particular favourite). This is a phenomenon with a rooting in Chechen traditional cultural norms – please refer to chapter 2 for the theoretical grounding of this chapter – and overwhelming occurs in Chechnya. However, since the beginning of Russia's Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine in 2022, an equally alarming trend has been noted: the spread of forced apologies to the wider Russian Federation. While there are the famous apologies from Russian celebrities who participated in an “almost naked” party, the NGO OVD-Info recorded 94 cases between the start of the invasion, the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2022, and June 2023 (Krupskiy, 2024). The NGO notes that of these, 66 apologies came from Crimea alone, and of the total number of apologies, only 7 could be classed as “other” (OVD-Info, 2023). However, there are others from before the invasion of Ukraine – there are apologies from Ingushetia, the North Caucasus and the wider Russian Federation recorded. Further, there is evidence from outside the Russian Federation, out into the former Soviet Union, that the practice has spread to other nearby authoritarian regimes. The rate at which these apologies have spread is alarming, especially given the use of social media for some of these apologies, and necessitates a scholarly analysis to better understand the trend.

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<sup>15</sup> Caucasian Knot, 19/12/2015. Жительница Чечни после обращения с критикой Кадырова публично отказалась от своих слов. Link: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/274623/> (last accessed 19/03/2024).

Despite, this forced apologies remain intrinsically related to Chechen culture and the governing capabilities of Ramzan Kadyrov. Their nature is an evolving one, making understanding them an even greater necessity. There is also the matter of other methods of shaming perceived opponents emerging; in 2020, after the apologies reach their peak, forced public condemnations make an appearance, becoming another preferred method of coercion and societal control in Chechnya. The practice is much the same as the apologies, though instead of a person apologising personally, their family, friends and community condemn their actions instead. There are instances of these occurring when the families of opposition bloggers living in the diaspora condemn them; other times, figures such as Akhmat Zakaev, the exiled prime minister of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, are condemned, with Zakaev being subject to a campaign of condemnations.

This chapter will analyse the different trends and reasons for forced apologies. As mentioned in the introductory paragraph, it will rely on the theoretical framework set out in chapter 2, section 4 to examine the different ways that apologies are used. Firstly, we need to look at the numbers; how often these apologies occur, when and, only to an extent for this first part, where they occur. We will then move on to analyse some of the more important reasons for apologising across the practice, starting with the most important and numerous reason; Morally Unacceptable Behaviour. Other reasons analysed include criticism of the regime, the governance of Chechnya and of Kadyrov himself. Finally, we will look at the spread of the practice, reasoning why and how this has happened and what we can learn about the networks of authoritarian learning in this region, via the concept of the Authoritarian International as described by Hall (2023) and through internal authoritarian networks (the “Authoritarian Intranational”).

## 6.2 Forced Apologies: Numbers, Trends and Miscellaneous Factors

The research into forced apologies and condemnations is slightly different to the rest of the research. Firstly, I have tried to find every instance of forced apologies and condemnations

since 2015 by looking over the English and Russian versions of *Caucasian Knot*; whereas, in the original research, I have used English exclusively when finding news stories and referring to the Russian sources for added detail. Secondly, I wanted to demonstrate what it was people were actually apologising for. Therefore, I have created a second database to store all this information separately; any mentions of forced apologies in previous chapters has been done in the un-elaborated, original research.

The research into the phenomenon of forced public apologies necessitated a slightly different approach to the research undertaken elsewhere, including a separate database exclusively for finding instances. This has already been elaborated upon in chapter 5, but as a reminder, here is the brief outline:

- Due to the sheer variety of reasonings and subcategories of forced apologies, a separate database allows for a better, clearer way of displaying the stories and their place within the phenomenon.
- Rather than the much more general combing that was done in the main research, this was done by searching for the specific terms associated with the practice, namely “apology,” “repentance,” “reprimanding,” “condemns”, and “curses,” among others.
- By employing sub-categorisation, we can trace the evolution of this phenomenon/process – it allows us to see when certain categories appear, how often they do, etc.
- Forced apologies are still in the main database so their position within the wider context of the research.

In total, 128 instances of forced apologies and 62 instances of condemnations were identified over the period of 2015-2021. Figure 7.3.1 shows the distribution of these: as can be seen, the number spikes extremely sharply in 2019 and 2020; following this, in 2021, forced apologies fall while public condemnations rise.

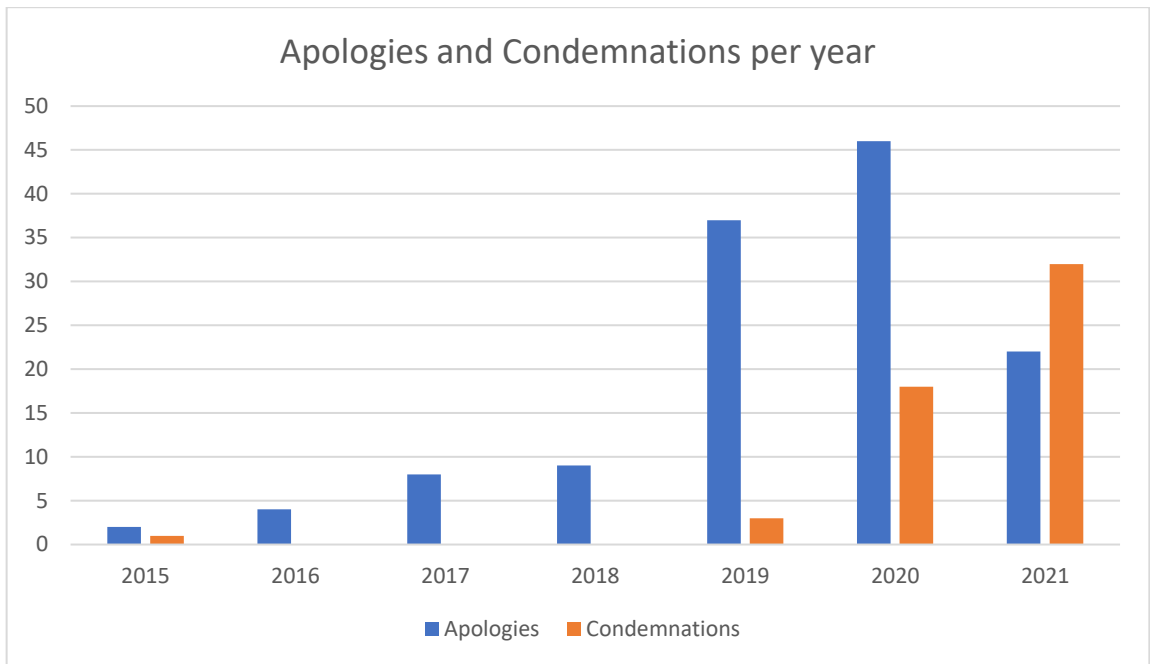


Figure 6.2.1: Apologies and Condemnations in Chechnya per year, 2015-2021

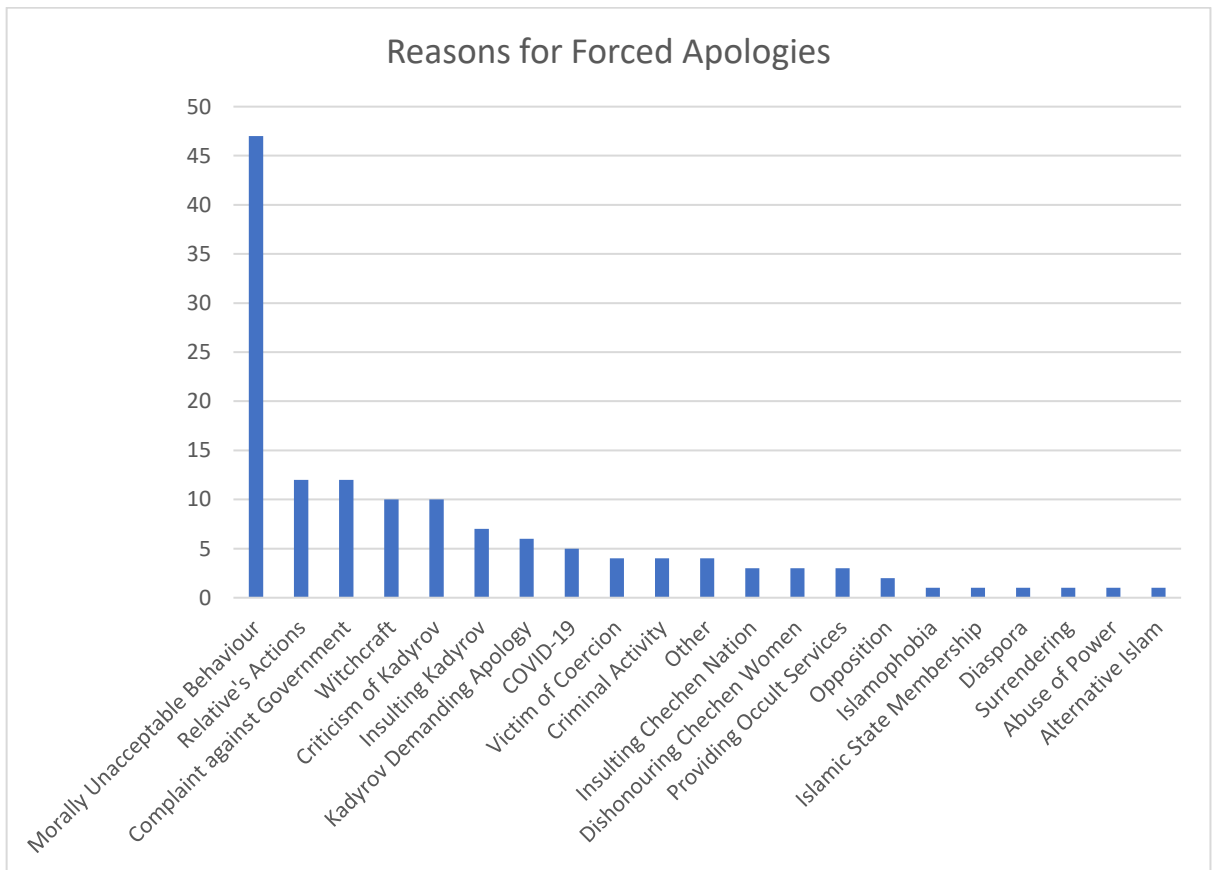


Figure 6.2.2: reasons for forced apologies

The above figures demonstrate the key findings exceptionally well: firstly, forced apologies peak in 2020, before a dramatic fall in the next year, with condemnations rising; secondly, the amount of reasons that people have been forced to apologize is staggeringly large; and finally, that of all the reasons, moral standards – “morally unacceptable behaviour” – is the

largest category by far. In terms of reasons for condemnation, the reasons are different, with many, but not all condemnations, being due to the relative's opposition activities; many are opposition bloggers living in the diaspora. However, other political figures, such as Akhmed Zakayev, the leader of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria's Government-in-Exile, are also subjected to condemnations, in Zakayev's case being subjected to campaigns of condemnations.

There are other patterns that cannot be discerned from the graph alone – for example, Kadyrov is himself present in some of the earlier apologies, though as the practice accelerates, he becomes less involved. The very first apology, from 2015, is an actual, face-to-face apology to Kadyrov (Caucasian Knot, 19/12/2015). In mid-2016, he received the apology of an opposition religious figure, Shopi Tutaev, for criticising his rule (Caucasian Knot, 12/08/2016). One year later, he is taking apologies and oaths from people whom have been driving under the influence of alcohol, overseeing the punishment personally and addressing them (Caucasian Knot, 29/10/2016).

Overall, the picture the numbers paint is an interesting one; thanks to these, and the prior theoretical grounding, we now know the root of the practice, i.e. the Chechen conceptions of pride, shame and guilt, and that the practice, while used for political repression, is used mainly for social control. We also know that the practice declined and shifted to public condemnations beginning in 2021. This presents the three questions to answer over the course of this chapter:

1. Why is there a focus on morally unacceptable behaviour?
2. Why was there such an increase in apologies starting in 2018?
3. Why do apologies decline? Why do condemnations rise?

Before answering these, there are some additional factors to consider, arising from the above findings.

### ***Blame***

While analysing different categories of apologies is the better way to understand the apologies, a common element that can be examined beforehand are the patterns of blame in apologies. Not all apologies can have a scapegoat/object of blame, but those that do provide a further insight into the practice. Some of the instances of blame are innocuous; in one apology, for a fight at a wedding, the Caucasian Knot reports:

“The participants in the incident, Turpal-Ali Sakhabov and Magomed Yasaev, explained the incident as a misunderstanding on the air of the republican TV channel. “This has not happened before. They were just in a hurry. I apologize to everyone,” Turpal-Ali Sakhabov said. Magomed Yasayev also said that his actions were caused by “excessive haste”” (Caucasian Knot, 18/09/2018).

Despite the pair still being the feature of a TVGrozny report, as is standard, the blaming of themselves seems to defuse the shame/overall situation somewhat, compared to other situations. It also feels more natural than other apologies, most notably the earlier example. It only offsets the humiliation a little; another example can be in the apology of a woman for reporting on the kidnapping of a child, who gave the following explanation as to why she committed this “crime”:

““I was really emotional at that moment, maybe that's why it made me warn my parents like that. I didn't want anything else,”” (Caucasian Knot, 06/08/2018).

On the flipside, you have the blame being placed on somewhat-mysterious enemies. It is rare that specific members of the opposition or diaspora are blamed – as can be seen in figures 6.2.3 and 6.2.4, those responsible for the “deception” are simply “on the internet” before turning into “dirty” members of the diaspora. In effect, the blame is being placed on the aspects of Chechen society that Kadyrov cannot adequately control.

### ***Apologising to Kadyrov outside of Chechnya***

While the spread of the practice will be analysed later, there are also instances of people apologising to Kadyrov from other parts of the Russian Federation. While a large proportion of these take place in the wider North Caucasus – Ingushetia being the main source, though this will be analysed properly in the following case-study examination of that region, with the other large sources of apologies being Krasnodar and Stavropol Krai – there are several from Moscow and St. Petersburg. There is even an apology from a Chechen in Kaliningrad, though this is one of the times where there actually *was* an offence to answer for – the man washed his shoes in a spring considered by the local Orthodox community as sacred (Caucasian Knot, 14/09/2020). The others deal with insults to Kadyrov, with some dealing with insults to the Islamic faith. Why are these people being forced to apologise to Kadyrov? There are two reasons. Firstly, and most importantly, internal authoritarian learning exchange can be seen in this. Kadyrov is, after all, not just the dictator of Chechnya – he is a part of the Russian patrimonial network, and a key policy success of the Putin regime. By punishing those that insult him, other regional networks work together with Chechnya and get a chance to “practice” the method, simultaneously strengthening the cohesiveness of this part of the patrimonial network and providing a method for learning. Secondly, this also speaks to Kadyrov’s growing power over the rest of the Russian Federation. He is one of the most powerful people in the Russian Federation, with a noted obsession with settling “grudges” – it is unsurprising that he can get people from across the Russian Federation to apologise. Even the instance with the Chechen native apologising for contaminating a sacred spring has his mark present; this sends the wrong message to the rest of Russia. Kadyrov is keen to show that Chechnya is now a civilised place; this, and an apology by a Chechen for loudly shouting a Kadyrovite slogan on the Moscow Metro (*Akhmat – Sila!*, translated to “Akhmat is [our] Strength!”) (Caucasian Knot, 11/10/2018) may end up contradicting that carefully constructed image.

## 6.4 Different Categories of Apologies

With the practice defined, and the numbers known, we can now move on to an analysis of the different categories of apologies discovered by this study. Individual analysis of the different categories of apologies is important; while the overall trends demonstrated in the last section show the development of the practice, there are, as demonstrated by figure 6.3.2, many different types of apology. Therefore, for a more comprehensive picture to be developed, analysing the different categories individually shows the development of the practice and its different uses. As will be seen, while control over moral standards is the most numerous of the categories, there is still a strong element of political repression and control evident. This is most prominent with the condemnations; rather than social control, these are more geared towards shaming opponents of the regime that the regime cannot physically get to. In the case of the forced apologies alone, however, the political side of the situation shows itself in criticism and insulting of Kadyrov above all else.

### 6.4.1 Morally Unacceptable Behaviour & Related Apologies

By far the most numerous single category of apologies, revealed by the original empirical data collected by this study, is Morally Unacceptable Behaviour; it is also the most all-encompassing. There are many different forms of morally unacceptable behaviour, ranging from apologies made for, among other things, road rage (Caucasian Knot, 10/12/2019), drinking wine (Caucasian Knot, 02/04/2020), for behaviour deemed improper at weddings, seemingly a *cause-celebre* for Kadyrov due to the prevalence of this as a reason for apologising (Caucasian Knot, 13/09/2018; Caucasian Knot, 28/09/2019; Caucasian Knot, 18/11/2019) and for criticising doctors (Caucasian Knot, 26/11/2018). There are also several closely related categories of apologies, including dishonouring Chechen women and insulting the Chechen nation. These are included in this section due to their proximity to being morally unacceptable behaviour; however, since the instances of these are more internally consistent, they are their own categories outside of morally unacceptable behaviour.

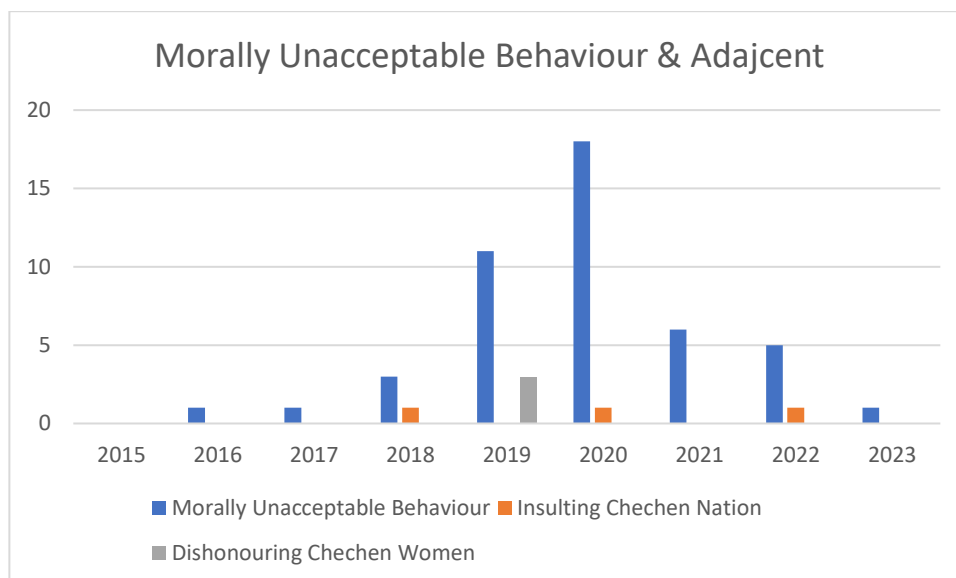


Figure 6.4.1 – graph tracing Morally Unacceptable Behaviour through years researched

These are perhaps the most important apologies out of all the categories – they are the most numerous and highlight the obsession with control over the moral standards of the Chechen republic that the Kadyrov regime seeks to exercise.

This is the category that has made the news in previous years; for example, the Guardian in 2021 reported on the apology of Khalimat Taramova, who was apologising for reporting on her suffering domestic abuse. (Johnson, 2021). The reactions this practice elicits are a mixture of shock, outrage and, in some cases, bewilderment and humour. Yet this can hide the reality of the practice being a highly effective method of social control and enforcement of Kadyrov’s preferred moral standards. For an example of what this means, it is helpful to examine the apologies relating to behaviour at weddings, a noted example of Kadyrov’s obsession. There are different reasons for the apologies throughout these; the shooting of guns and dangerous driving are part of the celebrations, continuations of older traditions. There are others which are violations of tradition and customs, such as one apology for a fight at a wedding and others for inappropriate remarks – though the remarks in question are jokes between the bride and the groom, and other statements by fathers and friends not wanting to “give up” their family members. This paints a confusing picture – some traditions

are to be upheld to a fault, while others are worthy of public shaming. Why? There are several possibilities.

Firstly, and to my mind, the most important possibility - it is perhaps that the more “violent” traditions are a little too close to the actual violence that has permeated the North Caucasus and Chechnya specifically. Allowing people to use firearms and the dangerous driving – which in one case involves ramming a tractor into a Mercedes – gives off the wrong impression of Chechnya to the Russian government, rivals within the wider Russian patrimonial network (particularly the *Siloviki*) and the Chechen people themselves. The reasoning why can be shortened to a rhetorical question; how can Kadyrov truly claim to have brought stability and calm to Chechnya if such public disorder is tolerated? By cracking down on these traditions, and more specifically making an example of them to the wider Chechen population, the progress of Kadyrov’s work is shown to be greater than it may well be – it demonstrates societal reform and change rather than simply political change. Another possibility is that these are traditions which do not match up to the rest of Russia. For much the same reasons as before, the logic here would be that it is not enough to simply demonstrate the return of peace to Chechnya, but the return of *Russia* to Chechnya in the form of societal values and norms. By publicly cracking down on these unacceptable norms, Chechens are dissuaded from following them, resulting in a more “Russian” tradition emerging. This would be, for a large chunk of Russian society, something of an oxymoron given the overwhelming racism towards natives of the Caucasus (Kostyuchenko, 2024). Nevertheless, given Kadyrov’s relation to Putin, the duo’s goals in Chechnya and Kadyrov’s intensely Russian-Nationalistic rhetoric, it makes sense for this to be something Kadyrov would like to see in Chechen society. On the flipside, another possibility may be labelled as Islamification. This may not seem like the most obvious possibility on the surface, however these norms are specifically *Chechen* and North-Caucasian as opposed to Islamic. While Kadyrov has often postured as a proponent of Chechen culture, there are several reasons why he may want to control society in Chechnya with an eye to furthering Islamic influence at

the expense of Chechen cultural norms. Firstly, his legitimacy is based around the fact that his father was a spiritual leader both for the Chechen nation and for a Sufi brotherhood; secondly, he has gained further legitimacy from a combination of both Sufi and Salafist practices; finally, these boost his credentials with other Islamic nations and organisations, cementing his role as Russia's link with the outside world. Finally, it could also be a simple show of power, meant to show that every aspect of Chechen life is within his reach.

These possibilities return repeatedly with apologies for unacceptable behaviour. From drug use to drinking wine, from neglecting the elderly to criticising doctors, from reporting on a broken fence to reporting on an honour killing – the possibilities appear. For the purposes of demonstrating this, weddings are one example – however, there is a better example, in the only instance of morally unacceptable behaviour with enough occurrences to warrant its own distinct category.

#### 6.4.1.1 Witchcraft and “Providing Occult Services”

Initially, the existence of a modern-day witch hunt in Chechnya may seem ridiculous to some. However, this has been a long-standing obsession of Ramzan Kadyrov's. In 2008, the Centre of Islamic Medicine was opened a short while into Kadyrov's tenure, and in 2013 there was a campaign against “sorcerers” resulting in dozens of arrests, though this did not receive much reporting and was not found independently during data collection (Caucasian Knot, 21/11/2019). After this, the campaign ceased for several years; no other instances of “witchcraft” were found between 2013 and 2019. The case of apologies for witchcraft is, compared to the rest of the morally unacceptable behaviour apologies, very consistent, providing a good example to analyse for an overall picture. The accusations are the same; the practitioner, or practitioners, are visited by Adam Elzhurkaev of the Centre for Islamic Medicine, forced to apologise, admit their wrongdoings and ask their clients never to contact them again. In some cases, people are forced to apologise for visiting “magicians”. This

simple formula is repeated for almost every single forced apology for witchcraft; it is also what makes these worth investigating in greater detail.

Firstly, we must examine what this witchcraft actually *is*. This sounds a lot more intricate and difficult than it is; what is referred to by the Chechen authorities, and even the Caucasian Knot, as witchcraft are in fact folk Islamic practices, derived from the local forms of Islam and the pre-Islamic faiths. This is obvious from the description of such practices:

- “Chakaeva confessed that she "fed jinns." For this, as she said, it was necessary to put some food on the table, and leave the room; "on the next day everything turned out to be eaten." Adam Elzhurkaev, a theologian and the chief physician of the Islamic Medicine Centre in Grozny, has stated that the woman is a "shaitan," the "Kavkaz.Realii" wrote on September 22. The video claims that another detainee, Tagir Mutaev, has a "long-term contract with jinns." The man has repented and promised "not to do this" any longer. The third detainee, Mai Zilbukharova, said that she had advised her client to wash the "evil eye" off herself with the water, in which the chicken stabbed by her was boiled up. Mr Elzhurkaev has accused the detainees of "having sold their body and soul to the devil."” (Caucasian Knot, 23/09/2019)
- “Another witch, Zina Dolueva, a resident of the Visaitovsky District of Grozny, has been detained in Chechnya... "The woman believed that she could make people happy," the description to the post says... Then, the video shows footage from a Christian cemetery, into which photos were buried for the love spell ritual. At the end of the video, it was said that Zina Dolueva failed to recollect this ritual, but admitted that it could be [performed], and promised to abandon this practice.” (Caucasian Knot, 18/02/2021)
- “The typical set used by most magicians was seized from Ibragimova – locks, keys, soil from cemeteries, papers with obscure inscriptions, and photographs of people with names and requests” (Caucasian Knot, 13/09/2019)

The first of these quotes contains a description of a ritual that seems to fit very neatly with a description of a pre-Islamic Vainakh sacrifice ritual involving immolated roosters and hens, with the chicken itself being a key object of worship, reverence and sacrifice (Jaimoukha, 2005; 113). Another obvious indication is the frequent mention of Jinns, fortune telling and sacrificial inscriptions (Jaimoukha, 2005; p.150-151). These are very old, longstanding practices; Vainakh society traditionally had different classes of magic-users, specifically Witches, “Old Sorceresses” and Warlocks, as well as a general acceptance of the existence of magic (Jaimoukha, 2005; 151).

What can these apologies tell us? There are two major takeaways: firstly, the belief in magic is still somewhat strong in Chechen society. This is evident from the width of evidence; it is not just the practitioners but the clients themselves who are forced to apologise, and a common feature for the former is the imploring of their clients to cease contacting them. The fact that they are “merely” forced to apologise rather than face arrest and prosecution is also revealing; it shows the development of the practices of repression in Chechnya, with the contrast to the initial wave of persecution in 2013, which map to more “traditional” methods of coercion, but it also may speak to the respect of the institution. The Kadyrov regime is trying to stamp out this practice; it is a lot more effective to do this through public shaming and promotion of “true” Islamic medicine, through humiliating the practitioners and their clients in the most public way possible, it is a more effective societal deterrent. This brings us to why Kadyrov is attempting to snuff out the practice. The reasoning is quite simple; it does not fit in with the established “official” Islam in Chechnya. Kadyrov, as discussed in the previous chapter, has an image in mind for Chechen Islam; namely, co-opting some of the more socially conservative elements found in Wahhabism whilst keeping a superficially Sufi outlook. This allows Kadyrov to appeal to both those camps in Chechnya, whilst demonstrating commonality with more “mainstream” tendencies in Global Islam for his own – and Putin’s – benefit. These folk practices do not line up with this view. While they use Islamic terminology, and are informed by Islamic conceptions of the supernatural, their main

derivation is from pre-Islamic Vainakh beliefs. Jaimoukha notes that the Jinn as the Chechens understand is not the same being as found in, say, Arabic folklore; they are more accurately spirits known as *Taram*, in some cases a guardian angel, in others a spirit of the ancestors, either way protecting people from harm and chastising their wrong-doing (Jaimoukha, 2005; 150). Divination, despite calling on jinns, is likewise done in the native conception of the practice. The Evil Eye is present in its pan-Islamic form, but is warded off in very Chechen ways (Jaimoukha, 2005; 150).

As the rest of the Islamic World engages in a large-scale debate about the acceptability of these practices, Kadyrov looks to Wahhabism and its lack of acceptance and sees another aspect of Chechen society he can exert control over. It may sound extreme to say that Kadyrov is looking to control the supernatural, but placed in the context of his quest to control Chechen society and “refine” its image to the rest of the world, it is not surprising. Furthermore, these findings are also of importance given the general lack of scholarly literature on this topic in the English language, thus providing a rare look into these practices as a whole, albeit a depressing one.

#### 6.4.3.3 Support for Apologies and the aim of the practice

There are, in many instances of reportage on the apologies, social media responses from Chechens to the apologies. One interesting subgroup of these responses, that is best explored alongside the phenomenon of apologies for morally unacceptable behaviour are the few instances when people agree with the punishment.

Firstly, it is important to see the standard response. The following responses have been chosen due to their broadly representative nature of the standard responses to various apologies. For example, the Caucasian Knot notes these responses from a story about two men apologising for seeking the services of a witch:

“‘I'm shocked, well, why show all this to the whole world,' hadisha\_a777 wrote, in particular. 'Why expose them and humiliate them like that. The guy went for it out of

desperation. What a time has come," complained iirina4616. "Why expose him like this, he is ignorant, it is clear that he did not understand," \_bella\_food\_ said." (Caucasian Knot, 19/12/2020).

The range here highlights a broad spectrum of responses. All are negative in regards to the humiliation, but some responses highlight at the very least a support for rooting out such practices. Note the latter two responses, saying that the perpetrator was ignorant or desperate – a condemnation of the practice, not the practitioner. Two other apologies from another noted trend, violation of acceptable wedding practices, also contain interesting responses. In one case, the Caucasian Knot obtained a comment from a resident of Grozny:

"One thing is to fairly punish him according to the law; but another thing is to film a person and then show him to the whole republic. Why should they shame the culprit, his family and relatives? This is wrong," Aslan, a resident of Grozny, [commented]" (Caucasian Knot, 18/11/2019).

In another, the case of a Kabardian apologising for violating wedding traditions caused social media outrage. The Caucasian Knot reported:

"So what can be the demand from a Kabardian? So they have their own traditions!" - comments warrior.uruk.hei. "If he is a Kabardian, then his sister is a Kabardian. So, it turns out that they have nothing to do with the Chechens at all. Please note that they did not try to seem Chechens, because it is not clear who they are in the video, it is clear that they are just of Caucasian appearance," alisaev.rf noted. "If he is a Kabardian, what are the claims against him?" the can\_i\_have001 asks." (Caucasian Knot, 03/10/2019).

Other responses to this case in particular echo the previous responses:

"Everyone has the right to make a mistake, and no one is immune, do not judge," yusupov\_magomed said. "People, stop mocking people. It's terrible,"

abubakkar\_abdulla\_baisangur asked. "Yes, the man made a mistake, which of us is a saint here? Do you have at least one? The blame lies with those who distributed this video, which caused all this turmoil," gnusmas said... The very fact of repentance for behavior at weddings, which does not violate the law, but simply goes against some customs, causes bewilderment among many users. "Full Akhmat," keppo3 ironically commented on the situation. "It's just stupidity," kema\_magomevod concluded. "So disgrace yourself even more," Artur\_kuvaev wrote. "Our employees (law enforcement agencies) have nothing to do but look for such people,"" (Caucasian Knot, 03/10/2019).

This large pool of respondents are unanimous in their condemnation of the practice. In the case of the wedding, a cause-celebre of Kadyrov and something he uses to appear to be fighting for Chechen values, they were all on the victim's side. The variety of reasons across these examples is particularly enlightening, from tacit agreement with the regime on the *principle* but not the *practice*, to excusing the perpetrator for not knowing better, to using it to point out their criticisms of the regime. "I hope Ramzan Akhmatovich enjoys it", a single, ironic comment left on the YouTube upload of the apology over the wedding reads, sums up the general feeling.

But what of the opposite? One case study highlights the best of this rare instance. Recall that some of the wedding traditions mentioned involved dangerous driving; one such case involved a tractor ramming a Mercedes, leading to the apology of four participants. The response to this apology, in stark contrast to those above, was widely in favour of this happening:

"Most of the commentators on the pages of Cherkhigov and the traffic police condemned the violators. "In normal times, it seems that all the guys are good, [and] as soon as [there is a] wedding, something happens to them, as if they go crazy! This is unacceptable behavior! Friends, draw conclusions: standing with your heads down

is not very pleasant," gatsaev\_95\_66 wrote today on the page of Idris Cherkhigov. "Heads were lowered, as if they were going to be executed," said user vlasenko8597... "Found and punished, excellent," wrote a reader, autaev1981. "It was more than predictable," tomi\_straik added" (Caucasian Knot, 07/04/2021).

This is the apology that lent to this category its name – [morally] unacceptable behaviour – and the quote which forms the title of this chapter, a question one officer asks the four men during the apology. The language here is wildly different; rather than condemnation of the practice but agreement with the principle, agreement for both is present. In fact, it goes beyond agreement and reaches mild celebration – it is “excellent” that they were caught. In contrast to this happening because the security forces have too much time on their hands, here they are painted as defenders of the public, doing their jobs correctly.

There is even a warning from gatsaev\_95\_66 that if people act in a similar way at weddings, they will end up like these four. This warning, this one line of a comment on the internet highlights the purpose of the entire practice: deterrence of morally unacceptable behaviour, compliance with Chechen law and customs, and enforcement of Kadyrov’s principles. High-intensity coercion is a drain on resources for any regime; the security forces must be paid, they must be present and they must be ready to respond to a threat to the regime at any given moment. The Kadyrov regime, at some point, seems to have concluded that this is not a viable method for their survival. Perhaps there were issues with funding, perhaps resources were being drawn too thin, perhaps, with the declaration that the war was over, it became harder to justify such a large security presence. While I believe these, ultimately we will never know unless an insider to the regime tells the wider world about the inner-workings of this regime – not a likely scenario. However, forced apologies do the trick for the regime – they are more public than high-intensity coercion while keeping a lower overall profile; they set a clear precedent of what is acceptable and what will get people punished; they are effective at preventing repeat offences, drawing on years of a solidified code of honour; they, frankly, save resources for the regime; and, given the relatively small population of Chechnya and the

lack of anonymity in the apologies, they mean that there is a higher chance of word-of-mouth spreading of what exactly the regime considers unacceptable.

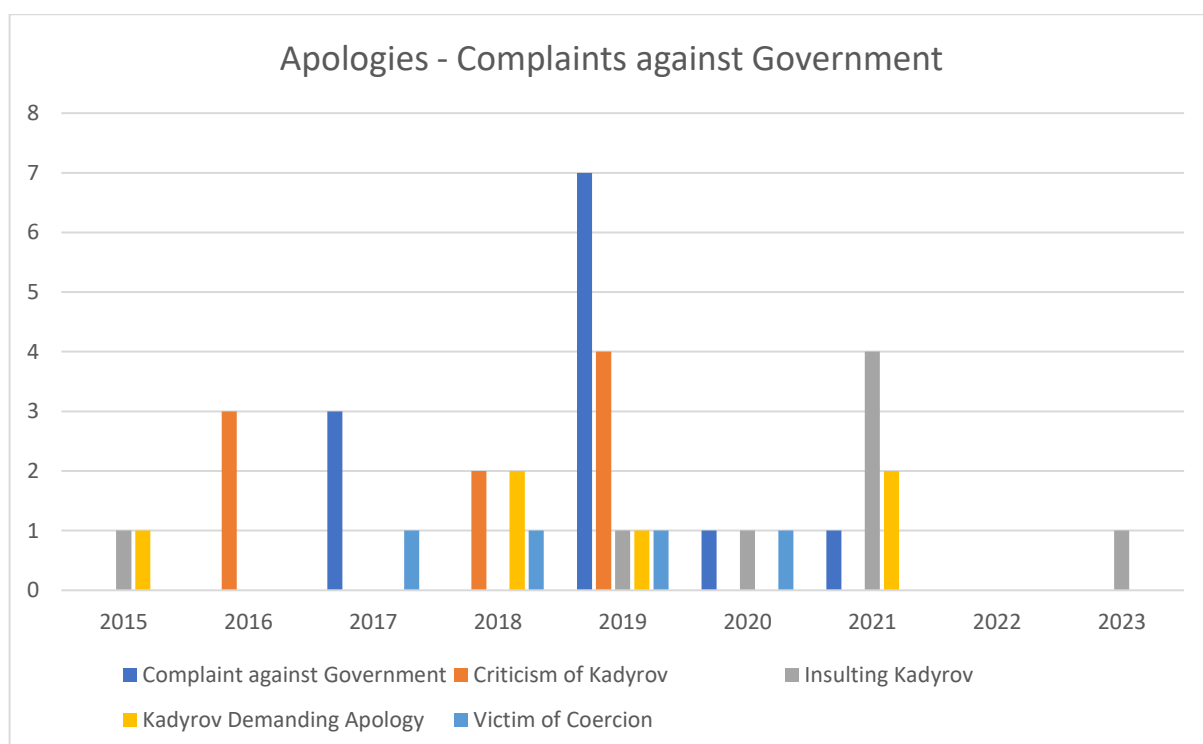
Finally, this is why I believe the practice of forced apologies starts to slow down after 2020. It is not that there is no-one left to force to apologise, but that the message of what happens to people who are against the regime spread, and the threat of public humiliation became clear. High-intensity coercion breeds resentment, resentment breeds opposition, opposition requires high-intensity coercion. The cycle repeats, and in some cases of authoritarian governments across the world, leads to the downfall of the regime. The recent fall of Ba'athist Syria demonstrates one such case study. Kadyrov and his regime want their regime to survive, as all authoritarians do. In doing so, they found an effective method. This is why the practice moved from apologies of those the regime could get its hands to condemnation of those it could not, and even that practice slowed.

I believe that the apologies slowed because, fundamentally, they work. In 2022 and 2023, while the invasion was raging and there was a wave of apologies from the occupied territories of Ukraine and the Russian Federation proper, apologies in Chechnya continue to drop. In 2022, the Caucasian Knot only reported on 5 apologies – four can be categorised as morally unacceptable behaviour, with one fitting into the next section's category of insulting the Chechen nation. In 2023, the apologies continue, with morally unacceptable behaviour continuing to be the dominant reason for apologising, joined by another apology for witchcraft and an apology by a Chechen soldier for surrendering in Ukraine. The fact that the apologies are still relied on to punish morally unacceptable behaviour is the biggest piece of evidence, to my mind, of why they slowed down. As more and more people apologised over the peak of the apologies in 2019-2020, the expectations of the Kadyrov regime became clearer. Adding to this, in June 2023, one of Kadyrov's advisors, his relative Khamzat, stated that the regime will be (or, indeed, already was) monitoring social media for deviations from Chechen traditions (Caucasian Knot, 19/06/2023). Given that social media, particularly telegram and Instagram, became the site of choice for the "instrumentalised" forms of the

forced apology, it is not hard to make the connection. As the Kadyrov regime openly brags about spying on its citizens in the name of the strange version of Chechen culture that the regime has decided to codify, and with the knowledge that deviations will result in ritual political humiliation, it seems very likely to me that ordinary Chechens have either learned what the regime expects from them or to know when to keep their mouths shut on certain topics. The climate of political closed-ness in the wider Russian Federation at the time this slow-down occurred, a climate that contained the spread of forced apologies outside of Chechnya, could also have feasibly contributed to this. It is hard to say for certain, with research into this topic already being tricky as outlined earlier, but this to me seems the most logical explanation.

#### 6.4.2 Criticism of the Government and Kadyrov

The above section detailed the most prolific form of apology and gave a reasoning for why these even occur, laying a foundation for the study of this phenomenon. Now, we can turn to other reasons for apologizing to Kadyrov – the best place to start is with direct criticism of the government, criticism of Kadyrov and general complaints about the government.



(Figure 6.4.2.1: development of apologies for criticising the regime & adjacent)

Tracing this process is trickier than the others. As figure 6.4.2.1 demonstrates, this is perhaps the least linear of the graphs when it comes to following the development of these apologies over the established timeframe. Even the main part of the pattern – the spike in 2019 and 2020 – isn't the same as the others, and the spike in 2021 goes against the trend. Nevertheless, some interesting patterns do emerge: Firstly, apart from the spike in 2019, the amount of apologies is rather consistent over the time period – while the categories change, the amount of apologies for these categories do not. This is perhaps the most consistent of the categories examined. This consistency points to the importance of this category – different forms of morally unacceptable behaviour catch Kadyrov's eye at different moments, though criticism of his regime is a consistent cause for apologies. Furthermore, this adds to the conclusion reached in the previous section – that, ultimately, these apologies have worked in undermining opposition to the regime. Secondly, the drop off in 2020 is consistent with the spike of apologies for morally unacceptable behaviour in that same year. Correlation does not mean causation, though the possibility of the regime changing focus/committing to a focus may explain this. Finally, the drop off after 2020 is consistent with the other graphs – though the lack of apologies for criticism of government after the invasion Ukraine starts is interesting, with only one in the first two years of the invasion. This may coincide with the overall growth of authoritarianism in Russia caused by the effects of the invasion. However, in this case, it may point towards the growing totalitarianism in Chechnya, which was, as demonstrated, considerably more authoritarian than the rest of Russia to begin with.

The final overall conclusion of the data by itself is, simply put, a reinforcement of the earlier conclusion as to the point of the forced apologies, namely a focus on moral/behavioural standards. Two charts demonstrate this: figure 6.4.2.2 shows all different categories of apologies on a single pie chart; 6.4.2.3 shows them grouped under three categories.



Figure 6.4.2.2: all reasons for apologies, plotted on a pie chart.

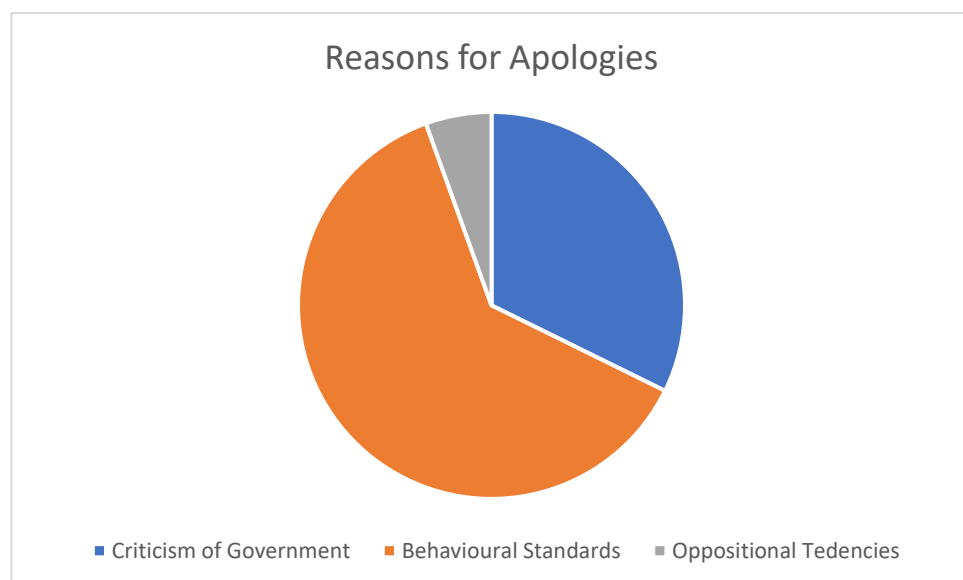


Figure 6.4.2.3: All reasons for apologies, grouped together into larger categories, plotted on a pie chart.

I have included both to better illustrate the point. The blue in each chart refers to two polar opposite categories, Morally Unacceptable Behaviour and Criticism of Government,

respectively. Proportionally, the space shared by the blue on each chart remains unchanged – that is to say, Morally Unacceptable Behaviour alone accounts for the same proportion of apologies as the combined Criticisms of Government categories. In percentages, this is roughly 29%, with Behavioural Standards accounting for 57% and Oppositional Tendencies filling out the remainder. In short, this is something of an oxymoronic situation, in that understanding why and when criticism of the government warrants an apology helps us to understand and further contextualise the regime’s obsession with apologies for behavioural standards.

#### 6.4.2.1 Complaints about the Government

The best place to start is with the more general category: complaints about the government. This category is rather wide ranging, covering apologies over poor gas works to the actions of Kadyrov’s underlings. It does not appear to matter how serious or minor the issue is, in this category; an apology will be sought after if it is possible to do so. It is also worth noting that the case of Ramazan Djalaladinov, covered in the previous chapter on Chechnya, falls into this category. Despite this range, there are several throughlines worth analysing.

The first throughline is that a “lack of understanding” or “lack of information” is the reason given for the “rash” actions and statements that result in apologies. For example, one story from 2017 deals with a complaint made to the city of Grozny following a fire that left 95 people homeless. As the report from the Caucasian Knot states,

“The report says that the mayor of Grozny, the Minister of Health of Chechnya and other officials met with Beksultanova, who gave her explanations regarding the provision of assistance to fire victims. The TV story shows footage of a young man injured in a fire being sent by a special flight of the Ministry of Emergency Situations to Nizhny Novgorod, after which Beksultanova declares: “I did not know anything, did not have any information, and decided that nothing was being done. Today I am convinced that a lot of work is being done. Thanks to everyone who took part in this -

Ramzan, his mother Aimani. May the Almighty reward them.” (Caucasian Knot, 20/05/2017).

This is an archetypal apology, both overall and specifically for this context. There is the blame – placed on herself and her actions – followed by the apology and, crucially for these examples, the correction, ending with the praise of Kadyrov and his mother. This last part is interesting, since such explicit praise is not always present. The reasoning here may be situational, or, as the practice spread, the need to directly address Kadyrov disappeared over time. This is, after all, an early apology. A further example from this time is also useful, highlighting the importance of the prestige of the government over familial relations; it is long, but still of use:

“On October 16, a video was published on YouTube showing two men knocking down doors and trying to enter the house. A young girl who was filming what was happening on her phone explained that her uncles, law enforcement officers, threatened to kill her sister, assuming that she planned to leave for Syria. According to the video, the owner of the house, Salam Tazurkayev, also suggested that his daughter's life was in danger. According to Tazurkayev, his brother's daughter was previously killed... Salam Tazurkayev said on the air of the republican TV channel that he called his brothers employees of the law enforcement agency in the hope "that people will intervene" in the domestic conflict. "I was so angry that I didn't understand anything. Hoping for support, I named [a unit of the power structure]. I am very remorseful. I beg your pardon," the man said” (Caucasian Knot, 18/10/2017).

Interestingly, the report which contained the apology also interviewed one of the uncles in question. Unfortunately, this section is also rather long, but very intriguing nonetheless:

The younger brother of Salam Tazurkayev told viewers that he learned about his niece's plans to get married and go abroad and wanted to prevent this. He also stressed that he has not been serving in law enforcement agencies for two months,

from which he resigned for health reasons. "I heard from people that my brother's daughter is going to marry abroad. When I worked, it was strict with this, because there will be demand for it. That's why I went there, to my elder brother. They said that they were marrying their daughter abroad, to an unknown person, I said not to do this, that there would be a demand from all of us... I wanted to take away her passport, my older brother opposed this, and there was a conflict between us," said Salam Tazurkayev's younger brother. He explained that he decided to take away the girl's passport because some people leaving Chechnya end up in Syria. "I came out because I was worried that she might go to Syria," the man said." (Caucasian Knot, 18/10/2017)

The importance of these quotes is to be found in examining them together. Firstly, let us look at this second quote. The uncle paints the picture of a family dispute, and even points out the fears surrounding what will happen to both the daughter and the rest of the family should she go to Syria and marry, specifically that there would be a "demand" made. The fact that they are in the law enforcement is incidental, only mentioned in reference to his leaving that profession for health reasons two months before the report. Tazurkayev merely mentioned the unit to paint a certain picture and get public support – this is a family dispute and he wanted support from his community, somewhat understandable. Yet he did not apologise to his brothers, he did not apologise to his daughter, and his brothers did not apologise to him – Tazurkayev was made to apologise to the government, implicitly to the law enforcement agency involved, and, implicitly, to the Chechen people. By merely naming a law enforcement agency, this went from being a family dispute to an offence – a perfect example of what the regime is trying to prevent and the ethics it is attempting to instil.

In summary, apologies for complaints about the government are an interesting category for analysis. In particular, they show the continuity of behavioural and "ethical" standards from the previous examinations of morally unacceptable behaviour and more "concrete" political concerns such as defence of coercive agents of the Kadyrov regime. There appears to be a

desire from the Kadyrov regime to make it morally unacceptable to criticise the government, in the same way that certain practices previously explored are now morally unacceptable. Furthermore, by making even familial disputes part of this, it further instils a societal fear which, as I have previously argued, is the overall point and why the rate of apologies so drastically drops.

#### 6.4.2.2 Criticism of Kadyrov

The next category of note are those apologies for criticisms of Kadyrov himself. The difference between this and the previous category is simple; while the previous “offences” were more general complaints about the government, these are directly critiquing Kadyrov himself. These occupy a wide range of “offences” despite the apology being directed to Kadyrov; in one instance, an opposition preacher returns from the diaspora to apologise to Kadyrov and denounce his former beliefs – his relatives were also visited by religious officials, and promised to prevent “further similar offenses” (Caucasian Knot, 12/08/2016). This is also important as an early apology, in the stage of apologies where Ramzan Kadyrov was physically present for the apologies. Once again, a later apology provides an archetype of the apologies. Though long, it helps us better to understand this category of apologies by looking at the extract in full:

“at a meeting in the Chechen government held on November 4, Ramzan Kadyrov voiced a demand to identify authors of negative posts about the Chechen republic and social network users commenting on them. In his speech, Ramzan Kadyrov attacked those who "violated the agreement between people, being engaged in gossip and contentions." The leader of Chechnya suggested stopping such people "by killing, imprisoning, and intimidating them,"... On November 18, a video, combined from records of the apologies voiced by two local residents, was posted on the "pro\_Chechnya" public account in Instagram. One of the videos was made in a selfie format. It shows a young man addressing Ramzan Kadyrov: "Dear Ramzan

Akhmatovich, I apologize for writing all sorts of nasty things while intoxicated. I apologize to all the people of the Chechen Republic.”” (Caucasian Knot, 19/11/2019).

This is an interesting case of the apology being done through social media, as well as an example of Kadyrov losing his temper in one of these incidents. The threats of violence and death are a rarity – this is not the only instance, but it is an unusually explicit threat, despite it only being an allegation. In a strange way, if this allegation is true, Kadyrov is highlighting another point made in this chapter, namely that it is a better method of coercion than the ones he mentions. No one has to die, no one needs to disappear, so long as they apologise for the supposed offence, which still acts as a method of “damage” due to the societal implications outlined. Furthermore, it highlights the necessity of maintaining good press for the republic, this time represented by the person of Kadyrov. What, then, about the insult to Kadyrov? Is there a psychological reason? Perhaps. The reaction from Kadyrov is certainly strong, much stronger than other comments made. Combine this with the actual story here; the two men who were made to apologise wrote negative comments about Ramzan on Instagram. The comments were then distorted into slander and resulted in a search for the authors and death threats. This is what makes this category different from the previous category – rather than defending the honour of his government, Ramzan appears to want personal gratification from the offenders’ repentance.

This category also contains an instance of apologies to Kadyrov from outside of Chechnya, with someone from Dagestan apologising:

“The "Caucasian Knot" has reported that on August 21, in a video appeal to Ramzan Kadyrov, Gadjimurad Isabekov challenged him to a duel because of the statements about Imam Shamil. Ramzan Kadyrov did not answer the challenge. The "brave men" who insult Ramzan Kadyrov face the risk of "crawling at his feet," threatens Djambulata Umarov, Minister for National Policy of Chechnya. "Regarding the challenge to Ramzan ... In case you, Ramzan Akhmatovich, are hurt at least a little,

then, Ramzan, I apologize to you," Gadjimurad Isabekov said in his new video. The man also said that he was ready to give his life for Ramzan Kadyrov" (Caucasian Knot, 30/08/2019).

Several factors about the practice of forced apologies can be gleaned from this passage. The way that Isabekov appeals to Kadyrov is intriguing, as if he is almost grovelling and appealing to the narcissistic element of Kadyrov's personality. The lack of direct response from Ramzan, but from a member of his regime, shows the "de-personalisation" of the apologies away from the persona of Ramzan Kadyrov and the further normalisation and delegation of the practice. It does have his influence in the issue – after all, the challenge to a duel only came about due to Ramzan's previously professed displeasure with Imam Shamil. This is a common issue that causes disputes between Kadyrov and Dagestanis due to the reverence Shamil is shown in Dagestan – Kadyrov favours Kunta-Hadji Kishiev, as previously discussed. His personal offence at this challenge, while not vocalised, is clearly present; if it were not, there would be no reason for an apology. Finally, there is the last sentence – the apology reinforces, or even creates, loyalty. All in all, a successful apology for Kadyrov. Another point of interest for this apology, one of the more important, is the delegation. This is exceedingly important, even if said in passing, since this is an example of the lower rings of the authoritarian system gathering the necessary information for an apology. We will examine this in the next section further, looking at the spread of forced apologies.

#### 6.4.2.3 Victims of Coercion

This is perhaps the saddest of the categories; luckily, it is the smallest in terms of numbers. There are 4 instances of people apologising for either being victims of coercion or reporting the acts of high-intensity coercion in Chechnya. One of these instances deals with ISIS, one deals with a series of beatings and two deal with the kidnapping of minors. We shall start with the first of this latter category. The passage of greatest interest is as follows:

"A woman from Chechnya, who wrote in WhatsApp about an attempted kidnapping of a child in a street, explained her actions by "emotions." The authorities treated a

report on the kidnapping as rumours, while local residents took the authorities' statement with disbelief... The Chechen Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) has reported that in recent years, there had been no attempts to kidnap children. "I was full of emotions at that moment, and maybe that made me warn my parents in such a way," the author of the WhatsApp message reported on the air of the "Grozny" TV Channel on August 5. "There are no kidnappings in Chechnya. This is a quiet place," stated Idris Tuntaev, the deputy chief for the department of internal affairs in the Grozny District. The police officer called on citizens not to disseminate "unsubstantiated rumours" in messengers"" (Caucasian Knot, 06/08/2018).

There are some caveats that must be made with this incident. Firstly, it is entirely possible that this is not an instance of coercion; the perpetrators are never named. Why, then, would the authorities wish for the witness to retract her statement? It may be as simple as wanting to maintain good press and the all important image of the safe, stable Chechnya; bear in mind the quote from the official, that Chechnya is a "quiet place" with no kidnappings. At the same time, it is a known fact that the Kadyrov regime has held and threatened the family members of militants in order to force them to surrender. Regardless, this highlights the core issue at the heart of the forced apologies – the toll and the price of this strange method of coercion. I would challenge anyone reading this to say they would do anything different than this witness to a minor being kidnapped – yet, in the eyes of the regime and its enforcers, this is a secondary issue when compared to the drive for maintaining an illusory image of a safe Chechnya – and, as discussed earlier in this chapter, this woman now has to deal with the high levels of stress, shame and guilt brought on by this.

Another instance deals with the dissemination of information about beatings given out by law enforcement to Covid quarantine violators:

"According to his story, the villagers who had recorded their audio messages could not be eyewitnesses to the events. "None of what they said is true, because one of

the women who made this recording lives in Naur, the other lives in the outskirts of Samashki. They simply could not possess this information. They have disgraced first of all their husbands, brothers and fathers," the man has stated. The video clip also demonstrates the apology of the women, who claim that they had recorded the audio messages about the beatings of villagers by law enforcers, but had not seen the incident itself. "I myself didn't see anything; I just believed the records that were sent via the WhatsApp. But from now on, I won't say anything like that [...] Excuse me," says one of the women" (Caucasian Knot, 26/05/2020).

This highlights more or less the same as the first example, yet more focus can be drawn on two distinct elements shared by both. Firstly, the retraction of being a witness, much like in the previous article, is a prominent feature of the report. In this one, admittedly, it is much more prominent; the sentence "they simply could not possess this information" has an Orwellian tone to it, the denial of the facts simply because they appear to live somewhere else. At most, the furthest away from the events that one of the victims lives, Naur, is a drive of 1 hour and 20 minutes away (at least, according to google maps); the other actually lives in Samashki, but in the wrong part, according to the official. Samashki is a town, with a population of about 12,000 – it is not unfeasible that this woman saw what was going on. Yet, that is not good enough for the officials. Secondly, there is the idea that by daring to report this, the victims have shamed and disgraced their families – though it is very interesting that, for the women, they have not disgraced themselves, but their male relatives, highlighting another moral concern of the Kadyrov regime, that of maintaining the patriarchy. Finally, there is the point that, as in other apologies, the punishment far outstrips the scale of the supposed crime.

### 6.5 Public Condemnations and Summary

It is depressing to re-iterate these points, especially for such a but it is important to trace the reasoning of the Kadyrov regime. The reason for apologising changes; how the apology is made and how it is reported stays quite similar. This applies not only to this second overall

category, but to almost all the apologies we have covered thus far. The formula seems to have worked – the decline of the apologies cannot be based purely around the rise of the condemnation, as these only deal with opposition figures that the regime cannot reach. As alluded to earlier, the most compelling reason for the decline, but not the *disappearance*, of the apologies is that they have worked.

Public Condemnations must be discussed first. As shown in earlier graphs, from 2019 onwards, condemnations arise in Chechnya; by 2021, they have overtaken the forced apology in terms of sheer numbers. This is interesting, but the “height” of the category is due to a campaign, wherein various opposition figures, such as Akhmat Zakayev of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria and the blogger Tumso Abdurrakhmanov, are denounced and condemned by their relatives. In 2021, the condemnations are accompanied by arrests of the relatives of bloggers and opposition figures. This is an attempt to bring the apology, and the shame, to an audience that Kadyrov has trouble reaching. Unlike the apologies, however, I do not believe these to be successful. Opposition from the diaspora has not stopped – due to the war in Ukraine, it has increased and is now armed, with some foreign fighter detachments in Ukraine explicitly naming liberation of Chechnya as one of their war goals. These are showy, but all that the regime is doing by having condemnations is reinforcing what is “right” in Chechnya – in short, this is a weird combination of the two main categories. Regardless, it must be noted, especially when we are to discuss the decline of the forced apologies as a whole.

There are two main assumptions to explain the decline. There is what we will refer to as “development” and “success”. The development assumption is, in short, that the Kadyrov regime has moved on from forced apologies for reasons that are hard to ascertain. Perhaps it is due to the developments in Ukraine, and the fixation exhibited in 2021-2022 with condemnations and shame directed towards opposition figures in the diaspora that he cannot successfully reach. This, however, is not satisfactory – as we have seen not long ago, if given the chance, Kadyrov will always accept a grovelling apology from such figures. This

brings us to the “success” assumption, which I believe to be more satisfactory. Kadyrov has, through apologies, set out a standard of how he expects the Chechen people to treat his government and the moral standards that form a part of this. The apologies have contributed to the creation of an inwards looking Chechen society – something that Sokirianskaia (2024, p.226) notes as having, practically, destroyed the Chechen teip system as it traditionally is meant to operate. This inwards-looking society makes the public appearance of someone – a friend, a relative, a loved one, a mother, a father, a son, a daughter, an acquaintance or a complete stranger – grovelling for forgiveness from them, their entire people and their leader even more noticeable and even less anonymous.

Furthermore, given the move away from Kadyrov being more involved in the apologies that has been noted from the initial period in 2015/16 to his personal absence during the peak of apologies, there is evidence of those involved in his regime learning, from members of his inner circle to regional officials. The most obvious part of this is to be found in the aforementioned article from 2023, detailing how Khamzat Kadyrov, Ramzan’s nephew and advisor, mentioned that at least part of the regime was monitoring the social media of Chechens to see if their views conformed with what the Kadyrov regime had decided was tradition (Caucasian Knot, 19/06/2023). Additionally, there is one final aspect to discuss; the instrumentalization of the process of apologies. Recall the first apology chronologically; Kadyrov is there in the room, accepting the apology in person. Later, he takes a much more distant role, with apologies being directed to him (and by extension the Chechen nation), via police officers and other lackeys of his regime. However, many apologies begin to be posted to social media, particularly Instagram in the years before its ban, by the apologiser. The formula is still the same; the victim outlines the “offence” and apologises to Kadyrov, Chechnya and the Chechen people. This is not a full change – apologies in the presence of authority figures do still occur – but it is nonetheless significant. It gives a potential reason for the decline of apologies, as explained in the earlier segment, but also shows the extent to which the population of Chechnya have learned what the regime expects from them – both in

behavioural standards, and in what to do once they are found to have committed an “offence”.

## 6.6 Authoritarian Learning and the Spread of Forced Apologies

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine has resulted in a great many changes to the Russian Federation. The country has become much more insular, the economy has suffered and many Russians have died. Yet one aspect that can go overlooked, perhaps due to its brazenness and the difficulty of accurate reporting on this subject, is the acquisition of new territory and a new population to police. In many ways, in fact, the Russian state finds itself in a similar position to that which the Kadyrov regime found itself in in the 2010s – and much like Kadyrov, the government has begun to rely on the Forced Apology to cease dissent. It is in no way alone: there are reports of Forced Apologies in Belarus, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. This section will go over the spread of the practice to these different states in the order presented in the last sentence, before offering a theoretical explanation as to how this practice has spread. However, a short summary of this is necessary before looking at the case studies:

- Forced apologies have spread throughout the Russian Federation; as such, they have entered an informal network of regional and federal government officials (Hale, 2015) as a method of authoritarian coercion.
- Through methods laid out by Hall (2023), forced apologies then “jumped” from Russia to other states in the region via local connections to this informal network or via observation of these tactics and their effectiveness; the first state to adopt this was either Azerbaijan or Belarus, though timings are slightly unclear. In this way, the spread of the method of forced apologies correlates to assertions made by Hall.
- They mostly follow the pattern as seen in Chechnya, though most states use it as a system to police anti-government sentiment; Russia is most similar in using the apologies to police morally unacceptable behaviour.

The use of forced apologies in Russia is, of the states listed above, the most diverse. One of the best sources on the practice is a paper produced by the NGO OVD-Info, titled *Apology Videos and More: Post-Full-Scale Invasion Analysis of Extrajudicial Pressure Tactics* published in July 2023. The report notes that the Russian government made use of the forced apology in the COVID-19 Pandemic in order to quell criticism of the government's response, as well as apologies made in 2021 from participations in the winter protests in support of Alexei Navalny (OVD-Info, 2023, p.4). The report then notes that between February 2022 and July 2023, there were 90 instances of forced apologies in the Russian Federation; of these, 66 came from Crimea (OVD-Info, 2023, p.4). The reasoning for this wave is almost always political:

“One can be considered a traitor for posting on social media, playing Ukrainian songs in public, expressing an anti-war position out loud in public places, for a sticker on a car, and even yellow and blue paint on buildings or clothing. Even a refugee from Mariupol, Valentina Prikhodchenko, who left for Sevastopol, was forced to apologise on the video: she had a small Ukrainian flag in her apartment, it was noticed by a passerby from the street” (OVD-Info, 2023, p.5).

The case of the Crimean apologies is interesting, as many are spearheaded by a man named Alexander Talipov, known on Telegram as “Crimean SMERSH”. Talipov finds supposed “traitors” to the Russian government and, effectively, doxes them, usually leading to an apology; he encourages others in Crimea to do the same (OVD-Info, 2023, p.6). This, and the apology caused by a passerby looking into a window, represents a level of “outsourcing” of apologies that does not really exist in Chechnya. This may be due to the proximity of the war; it makes sense to outsource such investigative work to local collaborators, allowing local mechanisms of coercion to continue to operate as usual while only administering the apology. Further reported apologies come from the areas of Ukraine that Russia has occupied; Mediazona reported that May 17-18, 2022, a resident of Kherson was forced to apologise for defaming the Russian military and urged her husband to do the same (Kapi,

20/05/2022). Russia has also used the apology as a weapon to control morals in a way that is very similar to Chechnya. The most well known example is the fallout of the “Almost Naked” party, a gathering of influencers in Moscow where the dress code was to dress in revealing clothing. Some of these people were well known celebrities with Kremlin connections; after the reveal of the party, the apologies came (Krupskiy, 2024). Some of the attendees went even further than mere apologies to the Russian people, with some visiting the Luhansk and Donetsk People’s Republics, and one even writing a letter to Patriarch Kiril of Moscow begging for forgiveness (Krupskiy, 2024).

Earlier apologies from Russia are recorded, the majority of which arise from Ingushetia and are directed towards Kadyrov; these will be discussed in the next chapter.

### **Belarus**

Belarus is a very interesting case study; this is, after all, a country famously described as “Europe’s last dictatorship” (Wilson, 2021) and, even with Russia’s more explicit authoritarian turn, it is still the more blatantly authoritarian state. Apologies here are first recorded in 2020 with the practice really taking off in 2022 (Sidorskaya, 2023: <https://mediaiq.info/pokayannye-sjuzhety-kak-novyj-format-provlastnoj-zhurnalistiki-chast-1>). Given the usual audacity of “Europe’s last dictatorship”, the following quote from an official asking dissenting athletes (though, in truth, aimed at the general populace) to apologise should not be surprising:

““So, be responsible people: you did something bad in public – apologize publicly. Publish a post of repentance on your pages, collect all the hate you deserve, gather up the courage to respond to the dirtiest curses – and we will read it. Or go to a TV channel, give an interview, disavow the words you said then on camera – and apologize for every word. And we will see. Or go to a newspaper and publish everything that needs to be said to Belarusians so that they believe you. And forgive you.”” (Sidorskaya, 2023).

Belarus' government further focuses its apologies on governmental and moral concerns. Given the protest movement of 2020, there is a larger focus on oppositional tendencies as "offences" for apologies. Such offences include, similarly to Russia, displaying the wrong flag, in this case the white-red-white flag of Belarus (Brovkina, 2021). However, other such offences are moral – in particular, the LGBT+ community are often victims (Brovkina, 2021). In another move very reminiscent of Chechnya, these apologies have begun to be broadcast nationally. There is also evidence via a Telegram leak of the specific department responsible for administering apologies, the Public Relations Department of the Ministry of the Interior, however the article claiming this is no longer accessible. If this is the case, then it shows the specific part of the authoritarian network that is responsible for this knowledge promulgating in Belarus.

### ***Azerbaijan***

Azerbaijan follows the pattern of Belarus closely when it comes to apologies. There are reports from 2020, with 2022 marking an upswing in apologies. The range of reasonings, however, are more in line with Chechnya and the Central Asian states. While some are very blatantly political – Gayibov notes some apologies for disrespecting national symbols – others are to do with drug use and reckless driving (Gayibov, 2023). Other apologies emerge from the blocking Baku's main road as part of a protest<sup>16</sup> and a much more traditional apology, in the tradition of Chechen apologies, for a criticising a police PR stunt (JAMNews, 01/07/2020).

There is, interestingly, a ground-up incentive for apologies in Azerbaijani communities outside of Azerbaijan. In Georgia, it was reported that a geography teacher was forced by his community to apologise for condemning bridal kidnapping:

“One of my students was kidnapped. Today, for the first time, she was supposed to attend a lecture at the university. She was abducted from the bus stop...”, Sadikh

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<sup>16</sup> Originally, this was referenced by Turan News from Azerbaijan; however, since their closure, they have taken down their website and the page in question was not archived.

writes. Then he mentions aksakals or local elders, who are believed to be guardians of traditions: “After the abduction, the aksakals will say – make peace and live together,” Sadikh wrote in a post that has already been erased” (JAM News, 16/10/2019).

The article notes that he was forced to apologise by members of his community – allegedly, there are some of his own relatives among those in the video, and the phrase “you have disgraced our entire nation” is used (JAM News, 16/10/2019). Additionally, there are the activities of the group VBON (For the good of the common people, *Vo Blago Obschego Naroda*) in Russia; the group has forced people, including ethnic Armenians, to apologise for slandering the Azerbaijani state, as well as operating in Baku (Caucasian Knot, 30/10/2019; 31/10/2019). This is particularly interesting as it represents the only plausible grassroots operation of forced apologies outside of Chechnya; while plausible deniability is key to the entire practice, these are the rare cases where it does seem to be outside the remit of the state. Further, this is also done in support for what the groups have deemed morally unacceptable behaviour. The grassroots approach may well explain why these are also outliers in the pattern of the spread of the practice, falling outside of the pattern of initial use in the Covid-19 pandemic before more widespread use in 2022 onwards.

### **Central Asia**

The Central Asian states have experienced Forced Apologies in different stages. All states have – at some point – made use of the forced apology, in varying ways for various uses. The pattern is much the same; they begin in early 2020 and continue to develop with a peak in 2022. In the 2020 incidents, there are apologies over Covid violations but over what can be termed as morally unacceptable behaviour (Eurasianet, 25/06/2020). Kyrgyzstan is an interesting case study; 2020 is the year of the deposition of president Sooronbay Jeenbekov, following protests over election fraud – this was followed by the development of an

increasingly authoritarian turn in Kyrgyzstan under the leadership of Sadyr Japarov. The following apology, from before the revolution, is therefore interesting:

“Lockdown and the isolation that it brought with it has strained many people’s patience and enfeebled their judgement. Such was the case of one young woman in the Jalal-Abad region, who took to social media on April 11 to call fellow Kyrgyz citizens a bunch of “stinkers” and vowed to leave the country when the crisis passed. The next day, she was having to grovel from the police station. “At the moment, I am in the police station and I will have to answer to the law,” she says. “I want to tell everybody that you should never insult the Kyrgyz people.”” (Eurasianet, 25/06/2020).

This is worth being compared to another incident, where a Miss Universe contestant, Altynai Botoyarova, was forced to apologise for using her platform to speak out against gender based violence (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Other Central Asian States use the apologies to quell hotbed issues; Tajikistan has forced Pamiri activists to apologise (Human Rights Watch, 2023); Turkmenistan’s government has forced critics, both at home and abroad, to apologise (Civicus Monitor, 2021); Kazakhstan has forced people to apologise for “ambiguous statement[s] about the Kazakh language” (CABAR-Asia, 2023). The apologies have become an issue of discussion in Kazakhstan, with condemnation of the practice being more common here (CABAR-Asia, 2023).

### ***Spread of Forced Apologies: Takeaways and Theories***

What are we to make of the above? I offer below 3 main takeaways as to the use/appeal of forced apologies as a coercive tactic, as well as an explanation as to how they spread. It is important to note that there is no way to *know* without explicitly asking the people who make up the authoritarian networks, which is impossible. Therefore, these are simply informed explanations based on the research provided.

- **Forced Apologies offer coercive state apparatus a less-manpower intensive method.** This applies mostly to the Russian occupied areas of Ukraine as well as

post-insurgency Chechnya. While Kadyrov's security concerns may be lesser than the start of the decade researched, his need for force to maintain control remains paramount – a possible explanation for his lack of commitment to deploying his paramilitary in force to Ukraine (Yeo and Souleimanov, 2023). In a similar vein, using forced apologies – and using civilian collaborators to find the offenders – reduces the manpower needed to secure the occupied region and allows for a more efficient military usage of said manpower in this regard.

- Secondary to this, **forced apologies are appealing to states with sensitive regions and issues**. Notice how, when talking about the use of apologies in conflict zones, Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh is absent. There is no need to force people to apologise since, put frankly, there is now no one in the region who would have caused the Aliyev regime grievances. Compare this with occupied Ukraine, the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast and its Pamiri inhabitants, issues surrounding language in Kazakhstan and the gender-based violence in Kyrgyzstan. These are areas and issues that create fiery discourse and image issues for the states wherein they are found. Why else are apologies used in sensitive areas? Simple:
  - **Forced Apologies offer the state plausible deniability**. The apologies would not work without the taking responsibility inherent in the term. The state can say that people are doing this of their own free will – this is an element noted by activists from Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan (Gayibov, 2023; CABAR-Asia, 2023). As such, they act as a form of window-dressing, creating the image of a repentant citizenry. Furthermore, in the aforementioned sensitive areas, more explicit coercion may bring about unrest and conflict.
  - **Forced Apologies work**. This is perhaps the most appealing and simplest aspect of the practice when examining the spread. They originated in Chechnya, they declined because they *worked* in reinforcing moral/behavioural standards and are contributing

to the closing in of Chechen society. They have a good track record, from the eyes of authoritarian leadership.

As to the how they spread, I believe that the findings reinforce Hall's findings of the authoritarian international; i.e., authoritarian networks have utilised connections to facilitate the spread of ideas of coercion. This may not even have had to have been through talking, but even through observation, noting what tactics work – this would explain why some apparently genuine NGOs have used the tactic, in the case of VBON, with the articles from the Caucasian Knot even making the connection. Perhaps, since VBON supports the Azerbaijani state and is known to operate in Baku, they may have been the connection between the networks, or at least the “patient zero” of the Azerbaijani case.

### 6.7 Summary

This chapter has examined the evolution of one of the most worryingly successful coercive tactics in use in the former Soviet space. It has demonstrated that there are groundings of the practice in Chechen traditional cultural norms, specifically as a way of stripping away pride and honour from an “honour-culture” by attacking two of the three “pillars of Vainakh virtue” (Jaimoukha, 2005). It has shown that the main usage for the Chechen government of this practice was to police morals and show how they expect the Chechen people to act. It has given examples of apologies and noted the patterns between categories. It has demonstrated the effectiveness as evidenced by the decline of the practice in Chechnya, while simultaneously the practice was exported through authoritarian networks to various other regimes in the region.

I hope that the explanations provided concerning their theoretical grounding, their usage, their appeal to authoritarian leaders and their subsequent spread have been convincing. Nonetheless, there are further avenues for research. Firstly, in-depth research into the practice in the countries which it has spread to will be immensely valuable. The Chechen case is very advantageous in that there is an excellent level of reportage on the subject in both English and Russian, making these stories more accessible for a wider audience; in

contrast, for example, Azerbaijan has a lot of reports on the subject in Azerbaijani. A researcher who speaks the language would do well to make their own dataset focusing on the case study there. Secondly, and more worryingly, researchers should keep their eyes open for the further spread of this practice. This is a tactic made for the information age, and since information is now so easily available to spread, I have no doubt that the practice is not done spreading to different countries. Further, it would be very interesting to do research on volunteers making people apologise for violating a cause close to them – this turns the subject from a political studies phenomenon into something more akin to sociology and anthropology. Finally, research explicitly into the effects on people of the forced apologies would be important, though, I imagine, extremely difficult to do. Ultimately, the forced apologies are one of the main ways that traditional cultural norms interact with politics and authoritarianism in Chechnya. In the manner in which they are practiced, there is a clear link between conceptions of honour – both Chechen traditions of honour and wider conceptualisations of honour – and the act. Furthermore, they are used to twist other norms, even the mere behaviour of the people of Chechnya, to Kadyrov's liking. The practice is consistent with the borderline obsession Kadyrov has with policing Chechen culture and shows the lengths the regime will go to in order to further this goal.

## 7. Ingushetia

### 7.1 Introduction

Ingushetia is Russia's smallest republic; nestled between Chechnya to the east and North Ossetia, the home of Vladikavkaz, a cultural capital of the North Caucasus, to the west, one can forget it is even there. Yet Ingushetia has occupied a place at the centre of North Caucasian political developments since the fall of the Soviet Union, culminating in the 2018-2019 Ingush Protests, a rare moment of success for a protest movement in the North Caucasus. As seen previously, Chechnya under Kadyrov has made use of traditional cultural norms as a manner of exercising authoritarian rule while at the same time enforcing a more "closed" Chechen society through their abuse (while the regime allows themselves to maintain certain norms). In Ingushetia, however, for most of the time period 2012-2021, the opposite is true – norms are the field of society, with the government only making occasional use of them. This is exceedingly important in terms of comparison – this is something that two successive Ingush governments failed to do in the manner of Kadyrov. While there were arrests as part of a clampdown on teips following the protest movements, this does not seem to have quelled them – this says nothing of the Sufi brotherhoods that exist in parallel. These forms of the norms do not exist in Chechnya; Sokirianskaia (2024) argues that the teips, at least, are still not as strong as they once were, which may well be true, but in terms of comparison their survival as a political force is a miracle.

In terms of norms and their appearance in the news cycles, and their roles within the political sphere and their role towards political engagement, Ingushetia represents the opposite of Chechnya. Teips and religious movements were not weakened and serving the regime, but exist in a dynamic political setting of their own. Religious movements – in a very clear cut Salafi-Sufi divide – exist outside the control of the regime, even when the regime is trying to use them to gain legitimacy. They also fight and squabble amongst themselves, with a degree of unity existing in the context of the protests. Teips serve as a force of societal organisation

that, granted, are not as strong as the Islamic movements but still are held in high regard, with the Council of Elders, the *Mekhk Kkhel*, acting as a part of civil society and as it is “traditionally” meant to. Finally, the role of adat within society is much more pronounced in the news, especially in the context of the blood feud. While there are some attempts by former head of the republic, Yunus-Bek Yevkurov to reconcile feuders, blood feuds most often appear as causes for violence, much more so than was reported in Chechnya. Further issues revolve around bride kidnappings and their role within society, land usage, tensions with Ingushetia’s neighbours and, to a lesser extent, the role of sportspeople in Ingush society.

What does this all mean politically? As will be demonstrated, Ingushetia, as opposed to Chechnya, is effectively stuck in a spiral. The political context is exceedingly more difficult for an authoritarian ruler – or a cog in the authoritarian machine of Russia – to effectively rule, something which the norms exacerbate. Chechnya is ruled like a fiefdom, and control over the normative aspects of Chechen political life is possible to the extent that Kadyrov wishes and, depressingly, is politically useful for him.

This chapter will present the results and analysis of the findings from Ingushetia. We will start first by looking at the non-normative methods of governance found in the research, such as coercion but, most importantly, Yevkurov and his successor, Makhmat-Ali Kalimatov’s leadership styles, which have been paid attention to due to other authors noting Yevkurov’s propensity to get involved in many goings-on in the republic (Kazenin, 2019). The chapter will then proceed norm by norm, looking at religion, teips and adat. These sections will demonstrate the overall findings, that the norms are more present in Ingush civil society than in Chechnya, that norms are not used or abused to the extent that they are in Chechnya, and that all norms are subject to oppression rather than co-option by the Ingush government.

## 7.2 Ingushetia as a Case Study

Ingushetia has much in common with Chechnya; much of the history of the republic until 1991 is very similar to Chechnya, with the key differences being language and the fact that

the Ingush nation is made up of separate teips and tukkhums (see chapter 3 and appendix 2). However, historical and political differences have led to a divergence between the two – this, in turn, means that the two naturally lend themselves to being comparisons with each other. This section will go over these differences, starting with the political differences between the two as they currently stand before briefly providing historical background.

### 7.2.1 The Political & Security Situation

On paper, there is only one political difference between Ingushetia and Chechnya, that being the manner in which the Head is chosen. Chechnya retains an electoral model, in which all eligible citizens vote for the Head, while Ingushetia, as in every other Republic in Russia, has an indirect election for the Head, where Ingush MPs vote for the candidate. Informally, the Kremlin's candidate likewise always wins elections. There are many more differences between the two in actuality – and these form the central argument of this section of this thesis. Put simply, the political situation in Ingushetia is unsustainable, with leaders lacking the resources to truly entrench themselves and provide reasonable security in Ingushetia in the manner which the Kremlin has achieved with Kadyrov. Ingushetia, during the research period, was still in the throngs of a deeply entrenched insurgency. In Chechnya, Putin achieved a measure of peace and security through an arrangement with the Kadyrovs, propping them up, ruling through them and allowing/legitimising their personal militia. Ingushetia, on the other hand, is not allowed this same treatment. The recent heads of Ingushetia - Murat Zyazikov, Yunus-Bek Yevkurov and Mahmud-Ali Kalimatov have not been able to field or maintain their own personal militias – instead, on a practical basis, the security of their regime is reliant on Russian soldiers and Ingush policemen. Even the Ingush units they have access to are not fully theirs to control, with units of military police from Ingushetia twice sent to Syria, depriving Yevkurov of security and manpower for his regime (Caucasian Knot, 13/02/2017). From a security standpoint, therefore, Ingushetia's rulers have issues properly enforcing their rule, though, when considering the time period of the research, we must remember that the Insurgency was much stronger in Ingushetia than in

Chechnya and the results may be skewed. Nevertheless, in 2012 especially and 2012-2016 in a broader sense, the main news topic was counter-insurgency; however, the lack of security, as will be examined shortly, also leads to a much greater presence of blood feuds in the republic, adding somewhat to the destabilization.

Other differences are more visible. Perhaps the most visible and revealing are the differences between the residences of the two Heads. Firstly, the residence of Kadyrov is more like a fortress/palace:

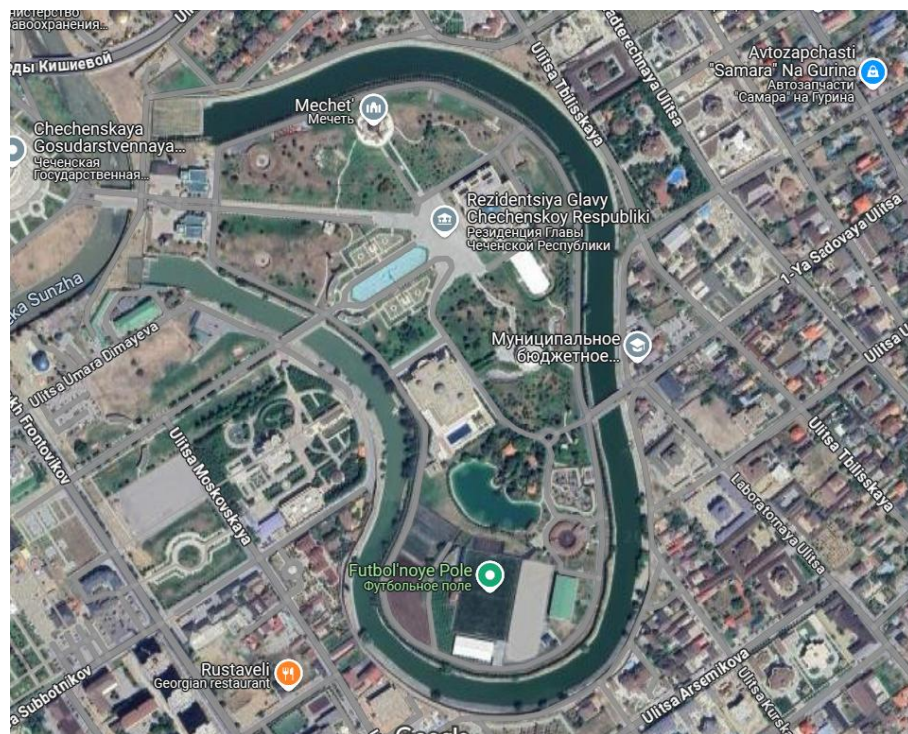


Figure 7.2.1: Residence of the Head of Chechnya

Compare this to the residence of the Head of Ingushetia:



Figure 7.2.2: Residence of the Head of Ingushetia

The difference is apparent. Ramzan Kadyrov’s residence in Grozny is a palatial fortress, with a defensive moat surrounding opulence; there is a mosque in the likeness of the Kaaba, a football pitch, private garden and other complexes within. It is near the organs of legitimacy in Chechnya, namely the remodelled centre of Grozny, with its universities and the Akhmat Kadyrov Mosque, itself built near the former site of the Presidential Palace before its destruction in the Chechen Wars. It speaks to a great level of power, wealth, security and legitimacy. Contrast this with the Ingush Head’s residence in Magas; it is a comparatively modest palace, nearby the state’s institutions and Magas’ town centre, adorned with a symbolic representation of Ingushetia in the form of a Vainakh tower. What does this tell us about their different situations? Firstly, the obvious – there is much more wealth available to Kadyrov, as well as a certain identity that the Ingush leaders cannot hope to achieve. Bearing in mind the Akhmat fund, the amount of money needed to support the *Kadyrovtsy* and the various building projects in Chechnya, the amount of spending is almost ridiculous. Contrast this with Ingushetia: the only thing ascertainable about this building is that it was constructed by a Turkish firm called Entes, ordered by the General Directorate of

Construction of Magas City<sup>17</sup>. This appears to have been linked to the Ministry of Construction of Ingushetia<sup>18</sup>, though, by 2025, this is not something mentioned on their official website listing official republican subsidiaries<sup>19</sup>. Given Russia’s federal structure, however, we can assume that the funds for this project came from the Federal government, especially since the same contract appears to have included the ministerial buildings as well. Finally, as far as funding is concerned, it is worth noting that Kadyrov’s Palace was allocated 51.2 million rubles from the Federal government for a refurbishment in 2018 (Moscow Times, 05/12/2018); in contrast, Ingushetia’s budget deficit in 2020 amounted to 67 million rubles, owing the Kremlin 3.3 billion and earning 2.7 billion in revenue (Novaya Gazeta, 06/11/2020). Simply put, Kadyrov can use and abuse federal funding as he likes – Yevkurov and Kalimatov were, at the time, battling a debt/revenue crisis as well as an insurgency. Finally, consider the levels of power projected by Kadyrov from his palace – there are symbols of his wealth but also of his right to rule as an Islamic leader, in the form of a private mosque, and the symbol of his father across from his moat. The mosque is interesting, in the shape of the Kaaba (the structure at the centre of the Grand Mosque of Mecca, towards which all Muslims pray). This is a borderline blasphemous piece of architecture, but it serves as a physical representation of a commitment to neither form of Islam present in the republic, being an image of perhaps *the* unifying feature of all doctrines of the Islamic faith. In contrast, there is no mosque in the central plaza of Magas, but there *is* a Vainakh tower. Considering the conflict between the Head of the Republic and the different religious authorities in the republic – something we will explore later – this is perhaps unsurprising, but it does deprive the republic of a physical “link” to the believers of Russia’s most religious republic.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.entec.com/ingushetia-presidential-residence-parliament-house-ministries-building-p31.html>

<sup>18</sup> <https://minstroiri.ru/> - it is worth noting that the website, as of 30/04/2025, is plastered with patriotic imagery and advertisements for military contracts in between reports on their work.

<sup>19</sup> <https://minstroiri.ru/%d0%bf%d0%be%d0%b4%d0%b2%d0%b5%d0%b4%d0%be%d0%bc%d1%81%d1%82%d0%b2%d0%b5%d0%bd%d0%bd%d1%8b%d0%b5-%d0%be%d1%80%d0%b3%d0%b0%d0%bd%d0%b8%d0%b7%d0%b0%d1%86%d0%b8%d0%b8-2/>

Kadyrov is able to leverage a unique position with the Kremlin to his personal enrichment and his political gain; in contrast, Ingush leaders are not given the same level of autonomy. This same autonomy has allowed Kadyrov to keep the peace, in a brutal manner – Ingushetia is stuck in a vicious cycle because of this. It cannot supply itself, it cannot pay off its debts, it must request more funding from the Russian Federation and it must utilise Russian security, which, to a certain extent, fuels the insurgency, forcing Ingushetia to spend more money it doesn't have. All of this happens in a very small area of land, where the vast majority of the population live within a half hour's drive of each other. A stable situation this does not make. As I will argue, it is perhaps unsurprising that because of all this, informal social bodies such as Sufi wirts and especially teips survive and thrive – as do associated cultural practices, which in some cases lead to more instability and to unwanted attention from the rest of Russia.

#### 7.2.2 Historical Survey

The Ingush were deported alongside the Chechens, and were subjected to the same hardships as the Chechens were in the Checheno-Ingush ASSR. Their histories diverge with the fall of the USSR and the independence of Chechnya. Ingushetia ultimately decided to remain part of the Russian Federation, with the leadership resolving that remaining would assist their cause in the main conflict of the 1990s – the Prigorodny Raion conflict. This has its roots in the deportation – the district was handed to the North Ossetian ASSR following the Checheno-Ingush ASSR's dismemberment following the deportation. After the lifting of the deportation in 1957, Ingush returned to the district, which remained part of North Ossetia. As the USSR fell, there were local calls for the eastern part of the district to be returned to Ingushetia, which were resisted by the North Ossetian government and local Ossetians. The result was an ethnic cleansing, with hundreds of Ingush dying at the hands of Ossetian militias and thousands displaced. This has been a key part of identity-building in Ingushetia; Boris Yeltsin's Kremlin had sided with Ossetia after what was seen by many

Ingush as signs of implicit support, giving rise to the notion of a nation betrayed (Sokirianskaia, 2024, p.156).

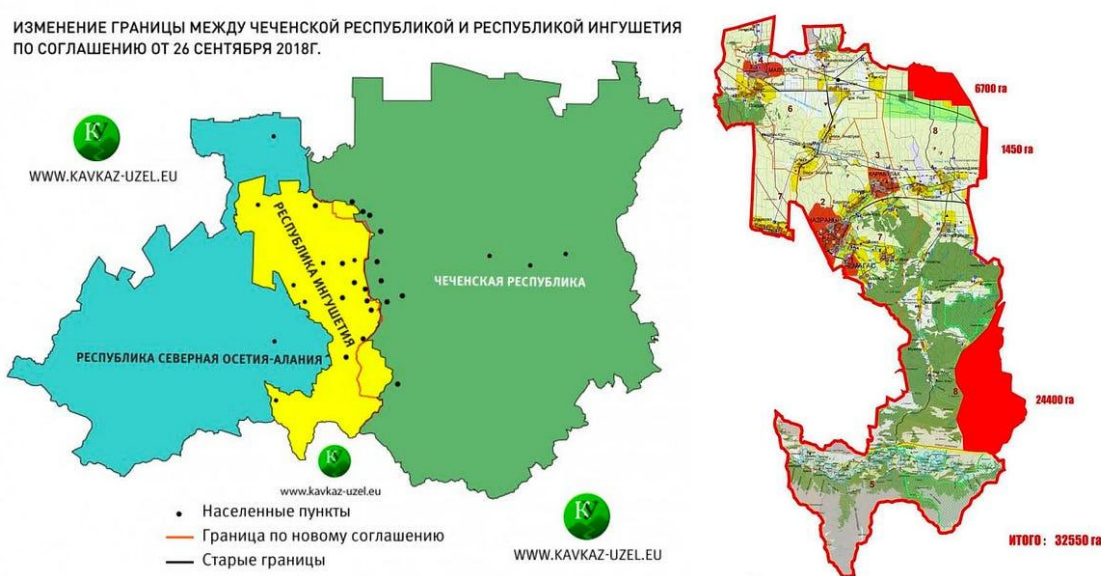
Ingushetia's situation upon the fall of the USSR was difficult, almost hard to fathom when we think of the modern republic. Sokirinskaia puts it best:

“Ingushetia is a rural, agrarian republic... in 1991, Ingushetia inherited less than 10 per cent of the [ASSR's] production capacity... it had little industry, and an underdeveloped social infrastructure and public transport. There were no institutions of higher education, no airport, no hotels, stadium or railway stations – not even a cinema. Few villages in Ingushetia had running water, natural gas or telephone lines. In 1994, some 90% of the republic's budget was funded by Moscow” (Sokirianskaia, 2024, p.157).

Due to the Federation-wide plague of organised crime, security and law enforcement was a key objective and the republic rose high in the lists of law enforcement efficiency (Sokirianskaia, 2024, p.167). The first Head (then President) of Ingushetia, Ruslan Aushev suffered from drops in popularity and political dispute and, while tolerated by Yeltsin, resigned in 2001 as Putin began his remaking of the North Caucasus – his successor, FSB general Murat Zyazikov, was even worse, an eccentric character who lied about his successes and whose government “became famous for its unprecedented corruption, violence and general incompetence” (Sokirianskaia, 2024, p.180). In Zyazikov's time, his incompetence, and the changing nature of the conflict in the North Caucasus, led to Ingushetia going from having a small militant problem to becoming an active warzone. After his resignation in 2008, Yunus-Bek Yevkurov was appointed to the role by Dmitry Medvedev. Yevkurov was formerly a general of GRU; his appointment was celebrated in the streets. Despite Ingushetia being an active warzone, he achieved successes from his appointment in October 2008 to the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 2009 – on this day, he was nearly killed in an assassination attempt and entered into a coma, from which he recovered and, allegedly, changed,

“distanс[ing] himself from the people” (Sokirianskaia, 2024, p.187). Afterwards, he continued to attempt to end the insurgency, allowing greater federal involvement and securitising Ingushetia. This was not without issue – we will discuss many of these throughout the chapter – but, more or less, stable after a while. This all changed in 2018.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 2018, it was announced that Ingushetia and Chechnya had agreed to a landswap agreement – Ingushetia would give 9% of its total area, about 340 square kilometres, in return for pittance from Chechnya; the exact land swapped is displayed below:



For a small republic, this is a lot of land – the largest portion of land swapped, in the south, was not populated but was important for local teips, due to the presence of graves. Meanwhile, as we discussed in Chapter 6, the land that Chechnya gave away, though small, was valued for farmland. The agreement had been made behind closed doors, with the only prior warning being a rumour circulated the night before. The agreement sparked almost immediate protests, with large crowds of mostly young people manifesting in Magas from the 26<sup>th</sup> onwards. Teip and religious leaders eventually became involved – we will discuss their involvement in their respective sections – as did most of the Ingush parliament, cabinet and law enforcement (Sokirianskaia, 2024, p.203). There were court challenges that went to the federal centre, which were shot down, with the courts siding with Chechnya. Protests cooled

down but continued, picking up again in March 2019, with crackdowns on the opposition leaders particularly increasing after this second wave. Ultimately, the land was not to be returned; however, Yevkurov had apparently lost the trust of the Kremlin on this issue, resigning his post in June 2019, eventually being reassigned to the ministry of defence. A new Head, Makhmud-Ali Kalimatov, was appointed. The coercion against the leaders of the protest continued, ongoing when the research period ends in 2021.

### 7.3 Leadership and Coercion

Before going into the norms present in the research, it is important, as in the Chechnya chapter, to go over the important categories that are not to do with norms. In this case, there are two (technically three); coercion and leadership.

Recall that in Chechnya, coercion was the most numerous category between 2012-2018; from 2019-2021, forced apologies and condemnations took over as the most numerous. In Ingushetia, coercion is never displaced as the most numerous category – with the sole exception of 2018, where the border issues takes over. The majority of the coercion is high-intensity, with counter-terrorist operations, arrests, detentions and so on constituting these. NGOs and activists in the 2018-2019 protests are targeted – with detentions of these activists carrying on well into 2020. Many incidents involve the Russian army, others Ingush police, and take place across the Republic, save for the broadly depopulated highlands. There are forced apologies, but they are different to Chechnya – we will discuss these later. What is important to note is that a lot of coercion in the period studied is relatively standard, if such a condition can be said to exist; they target dissidents, insurgents, journalists and activists in a way broadly similar to other examples of coercion. What is interesting are the instances in which norms are involved – most of these will be discussed in the next section dealing with teips, but there are instances, admittedly very, very few, in which other norms are central to the coercion – we will discuss one shortly, alongside a counterpart in the leadership category.

Aside from coercion, another highly important, non-normative category is that of personal leadership. This category, one may note, was not present in Chechnya. The reasoning is simple; Kadyrov's leadership and its associated elements are well documented in research and journalism; a thorough analysis could be the subject of its own project. Why, then, the focus on these two? One of the very few pieces of in-depth, informative writing on Ingushetia in English is an article by Kazenin for the Moscow Times, published in 2019; broadly, it looks at a "new political logic for the North Caucasus" (Kazenin, 2019). When I first began my research into the region for my Master's thesis, in 2020, one part caught my eye:

"Following his appointment, Yevkurov launched himself into trying to resolve every conflict personally. Under his active patronage, a commission began work on helping those who had decided to quit armed groups to adapt back into society. If they had no blood on their hands and had expressed remorse, they were helped to return to civilian life. Yevkurov also personally looked into many complaints by local residents about the actions of security service operatives and officials at various levels. Contrasted with the hands-off approach of the region's former leadership, this could not fail to win Yevkurov supporters in Ingushetia... [however,] his personal involvement in resolving even the most local of conflicts meant that after eleven years of his leadership, there were a lot of people who were unhappy with various decisions taken by Yevkurov" (Kazenin, 2019).

Information on such conflicts is sparse; in any case, the initial conflicts fall outside the research period. However, the last sentence intrigued me – and it was one I could test. I resolved to record every instance of Yevkurov and Kalimatov's personal interventions that appeared on the Caucasian Knot as "Leadership". The following graph demonstrates the results:



While there are not as many instances as one might expect, the results are instantly telling; Kalimatov is much less involved than Yevkurov. In total, 80 stories were found to involve Yevkurov in some way, while only 3 appeared for Kalimatov. Even outside of Caucasian Knot, there is very little on Kalimatov's actual leadership, save for him firing the government in 2020. Yevkurov, on the other hand, does get involved in many, many issues. In 2017 – the middle of the pack of the years studied, with 9 stories associated, the category includes the following:

1. 15<sup>th</sup> of January: Yevkurov instructs law enforcement in Ingushetia to conduct raids aimed at finding and detaining illegal immigrants.
2. 17<sup>th</sup> of February: Yevkurov sets up a council of the widows of militants.
3. 9<sup>th</sup> of March: Yevkurov explains that the search of an Imam's house was simply a check of his passport.
4. 10<sup>th</sup> of March: Yevkurov announces that six policemen who killed a 50-year-old during the latter's interrogation have been arrested.
5. 6<sup>th</sup> of May: Yevkurov announces the successful return of five militants to a "peaceful life"
  - a. In the same meeting, he states that he does not agree with the criminalisation of bride abduction.

6. 11<sup>th</sup> of August: Yevkurov announces that he supports censoring the film *Matilda* and others like it
7. 24<sup>th</sup> of August: Yevkurov announces that a house in Psedakh was the last base of Ingush militants there (ironically, there is an attack by militants less than two months later, followed by a suicide bombing a few weeks after that).
  - a. He then demands to find the accomplices of those killed in a counter-terrorist operation there the previous day.

This may not be as many instances as Kazenin reports, but there is certainly an interesting range here. Firstly, there is a lot of justification of coercive acts and instructions for these agencies on what he wants done. This is not that unusual, and the reasoning is somewhat self-explanatory – this is a government leader trying to be open with his people about what he is ordering his coercive bodies to do. There is also an element of trying to calm potential nerve points on this issue, namely the “passport check” of Imam Tsechoev and the arrest of the six policemen. Secondly, there are instances of acting within the patrimonial network, in line with the rest of Russia – as can be seen with *Matilda* and searching for illegal immigrants. Further, there are instances of counter-insurgency actions, like announcing the return of fighters to civilian life and setting up a council for widows, aimed at restoring a level of normalcy in the Republic.

Finally, however, there is an instance in this year of Yevkurov weighing in on a normative issue; bride kidnapping. This is an issue that is very prevalent in the research, examined in its own section later on; for now, all that is important to know is that it is exactly what it sounds like. The story came after members of the Ingush National Assembly spoke out in favour of a three year prison sentence for the crime. The *Caucasian Knot* reported that

“When commenting on the initiative of the Ingush National Assembly, Yunus-Bek Evkurov has noted that the law already provides for criminal liability for abduction, regardless of whether a bride is abducted, or a businessman is kidnapped. “When a

man wants to marry in such a way, we should not make him a criminal, since we may face troubles of that," said Yunus-Bek Evkurov as quoted by the "TASS" on May 6." (Caucasian Knot, 07/05/2017).

There is not much more elaboration from Yevkurov on this – however, previously there had been an instance of a man arrested for bridal kidnapping in 2014 (Caucasian Knot, 04/04/2014). While this issue will be expanded upon in 8.6, the picture that is painted is a confusing one; on one hand, there is a clear element of coercion against the practice, as seen by the level of response by the Ingush DPS and the actions of the National Assembly. However, Yevkurov seems to support the practice. There are several potential reasons for this; firstly, it could be for the reason that he gives, that abduction is already a criminal activity. However, this does not necessarily match with the rest of his statement – specifically that they should not make a man who wants to marry in this way a criminal, because of potential troubles. Granted, this may be for the legal issue alluded to, but this speaks to a leader trying to avoid offending more traditional-minded people under his rule. The majority of the rest of the incidents with Yevkurov intervening in norm-related issues are mostly to do with his feud with the religious authorities within the republic. Incidents such as his closing of the muftiate (24/03/2016), accusations that Yevkurov is attempting to control the sermons of Imams (Caucasian Knot, 16/02/2018), his de-facto excommunication – refer to the later section on religion and politics – and his attempts to fix this (Caucasian Knot, 31/05/2018; 01/06/2018) and his belief that the protests of 2018 have an undertone of this conflict (06/10/2018). It is difficult to purely focus on leadership alone in this category. This alone demonstrates the complex nature of his governance, and re-affirms Kazenin's assertion – Yevkurov gets involved in many different situations and not only offends some of the different parties by weighing explicitly against them, but also gets dragged into the quagmire of the politics involved in these.

What of patrimonialism? It appears much, much less frequently than in Chechnya, with very few stories present in the timeframe. Many of these are to do with Yevkurov and Kalimatov's

positions in the wider Russian patrimonial network, but there are some of note outside of this. Firstly, in 2018, following his re-election to the position of Head, Yevkurov dismissed four vice-premiers (Caucasian Knot, 11/09/2018) – this is nothing too out of the ordinary, appearing to be a slimming down of the roles of government. Put in the context of the debt crisis that would emerge as a story in the next few years, it is possible that Yevkurov took the decision to slim his patrimonial network in order to stem the flow of critical funds. It also could just be an administrative decision that was taken for appearance’s sake – the article does draw attention to the fact that the Government puts stock on the people taking over the roles as being more qualified. This would appeal to the people while also cutting costs. However, the most interesting story involving Yevkurov’s patrimonialism comes 14 days later – the Head of the Sunzha district resigned quite unexpectedly, shortly before the previously discussed land swap. The Caucasian Knot shows us the text of his resignation:

“Dear residents of the Sunzhensky municipal district! I would like to inform you that I have decided to voluntarily resign from the post of head of the Sunzhensky municipal district of the Republic of Ingushetia. In order to avoid unfounded arguments about the reasons for my resignation, I inform you that this decision was made by me in the final form and is not subject to discussion!” (Caucasian Knot, 25/09/2018).

The article states that a local NGO, Choice of Ingushetia, made the connection between the resignation and the then-rumoured land swap but could not confirm that such a deal was in the works. 24 hours later, the deal was finalised; protests had broken out in Sunzha the day before, coinciding with Khashagulgov’s resignation (Caucasian Knot, 25/09/2018). This story is rather significant for the overall picture of the protests, and of Yevkurov’s control over his patrimonial network in the last year of his term in office. He faced rather significant opposition from different bodies to his proposed land swap, from parties in the National Assembly of Ingushetia (most significantly Yabloko) and, here, from officials underneath him. Khashagulgov does not go into why he resigned, and it does not come up again – given that Sunzha saw the greatest loss of territory, it could be either a protest or “making way” for the

new administration. I lean towards the former. The amount of territory is significant, it was before the territory was handed over – again, around 24 hours before – and triggered protests in the town of Sunzha. This is not a good look for Yevkurov, which I believe to have been the point. Further, he would not have been forced – it is a possibility, but it would be bad optics for Yevkurov. I believe he was made aware of the swap on the 25<sup>th</sup> and resigned before the swap took place.

In stark contrast to this frayed patrimonialism, Kalimatov is much more low-profile. Kalimatov's only dabbles into patrimonialism of note concern his keeping the government of Yevkurov upon his appointment (Caucasian Knot, 27/06/2019) and, later, suddenly firing his government (RFE/RL, 27/01/2020). The reasons for this second story are not really known, and the main change of note is the appointment of an ethnic Russian as Premier. Given the difference between these two incidents, it is worth a brief examination. In the first instance, the following is reported by the Caucasian Knot, wherein they state that he:

declared that he had no intentions to make "serious personnel changes in the government of the republic in the near future." "We should first examine the situation and see how responsibly employees treat the performance of their own duties. There will be no sharp personnel changes," (Caucasian Knot, 27/06/2019).

This is a small but meaningful act, signalling continuity for the elites and members of the Ingush patrimonial network whilst making a promise to “examine the situation” to appease the opposition. This is aided by the fact that, as noted earlier, the direction the protests took focused on the resignation of Yevkurov. The second incident, in January 2020, is odd. The RFE/RL report on the issue is very small, only referring to it as happening “for reasons unknown” and noting that an ethnic Russian was appointed to be the Premier (RFE/RL, 27/01/2020). Other sources are more giving and tell a more complete picture – the most complete one, oddly enough, comes from the Ingush Government itself. Konstantin Surikov, the Premier before the change-up, resigned due to “family circumstances” – following this,

Kalimatov decided to re-shuffle the entire Ingush government, keeping Surikov around in a reduced capacity (*Pravitelstvo Respubliki Ingushetiya*, 27/01/2020)<sup>20</sup>. When it comes to Surikov's replacement, Slastenin, it has the following to say:

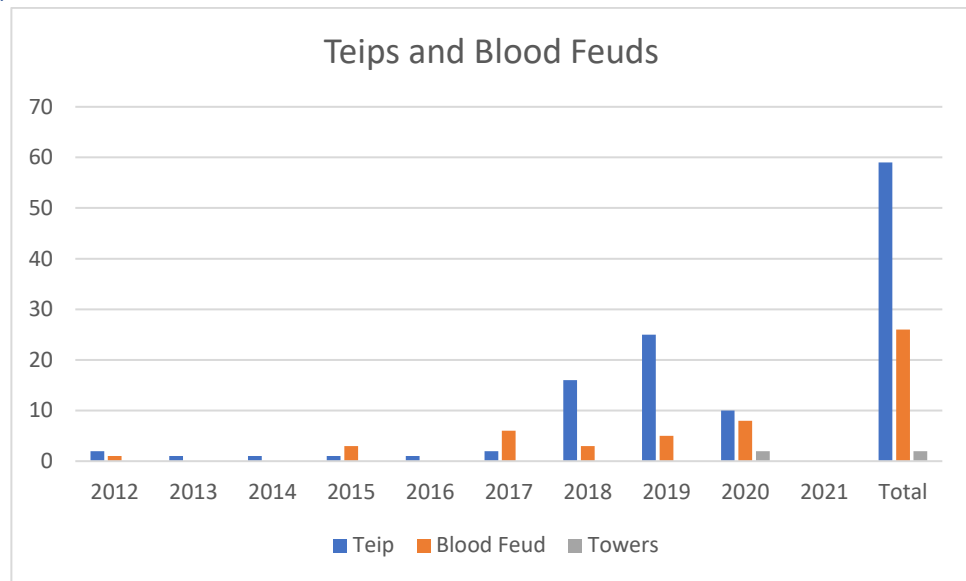
"The new head of the Cabinet of Ministers, Vladimir Slastenin, is a graduate of the Kuibyshev Polytechnic Institute... has experience working in the banking system in management positions, held the positions of head of the finance department in the Samara administration, and first deputy head of Samara. "I have personally known Vladimir Vladimirovich for 30 years, during which he has come a long way. I think his colossal experience will be applicable to the republic in implementing the plans we have outlined," said Makhmud-Ali Kalimatov" (*Pravitelstvo Respubliki Ingushetiya*, 27/01/2020).

This gives us a much clearer picture of what occurred. For some reason, Surikov resigned – it could be that he was fired/demoted, but he still is kept around. Kalimatov appoints someone he knows and apparently trusts, a friend for over 30 years, to replace him – almost textbook patrimonial politics. While Slastenin might be an outsider to Ingushetia, bear in mind that Kalimatov is, too – Kazenin argues that this is why he was appointed in the first place (Kazenin, 2019). By keeping Surikov around, it shows to the rest of the patrimonial network that while Kalimatov is here to make changes, he will not make too radical a change and will keep the old guard around. Apart from this, in the research period Kalimatov's rule has a marked decrease in the times the Head gets involved in politics. This is likely deliberate, and may well be the reason Kalimatov was appointed.

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<sup>20</sup> <https://pravitelstvoru.ru/news/detail.php?ID=35771>

## 7.4 Teips and Blood Feuds



(Figure 8.4.1 – results for Teips and Blood Feuds)

Perhaps the most dramatic difference between Chechnya and Ingushetia is to be found in Teips and Blood Feuds. In Chechnya, these norms are more in the realm of the regime, with exceedingly few instances of the norm popping up in relation to the people of the republic. However, in Ingushetia, not only are these norms much more prevalent, but they are almost always found in relation to the people. For teips, this is rather varied – in the earlier years, teips as they are traditionally imagined are present, with the *Mekkh Kkhel*, or council of elders, being especially prominent, though, throughout the research, it acts as an opposition bloc. However, 2018-2019 sees a large spike in the norm as the teips and their elders take an organisational role in the protests – and, as such, are targeted by the coercive apparatus of the republic. In Chechnya, blood feuds were mainly used by the regime, being “declared” upon their enemies – in Ingushetia, throughout the entirety of the period covered by the research, it exists purely in the context of violent revenge conducted by different members of society. Such a marked difference from Chechnya makes these an excellent starting point for examination of norms throughout Ingushetia.

### 7.4.1 Teips

Teips are much more politically and socially relevant in Ingushetia than Chechnya. Teip leadership was instrumental in organising the protests (despite convincing arguments on

religious figures/elements being instrumental in keeping the protests going), they are prime targets for repression during and after the protests, and they actually stand up for their members, as is intended. The actual, informal organisation of the teip plays a political role in Ingushetia, culminating in their role in the protests but actually predating the research period.

The Mekhk Kkhel is perhaps the best place to start. Mekhk Kkhel is the term for the council of elders, and is both the “actual” council of elders and an NGO active in the early years of the research, between 2012-2015. In this time, they organise protests such as a hunger strike in 2012 (Caucasian Knot, 29/12/2012) and a petition against changes to the election of regional governors in 2013 (Caucasian Knot, 07/02/2013). The last significant piece of news comes in the form of coercive actions taken against them, with their co-chair, Sarazhdin Sultygov, arrested in 2014 (Caucasian Knot, 12/04/2014). In 2016, the council of teips gets involved in the feud between Yevkurov and the Mufti, Isa Khamkhoev (please see the next section, more specifically 7.5.3). The council asks Khamkhoev to resign, following statements by Kadyrov against two Salafi preachers in Ingushetia:

“On February 2, a meeting of the Council of Ingush Teips, represented by elders of the Ingush clans, took place in Ingushetia. Participants of the meeting have voiced a tough response to the actions of the Ingush religious figures, who on that day took part at the gathering of followers of Sufi concept in Grozny. The statements voiced at the gathering by the Chechen leader and members of the Chechen Muftiyat [sic] were treated as interference in the internal affairs of Ingushetia and threats against the Ingush theologians... following the discussion, the elders have signed a resolution, in which they have stated, inter alia, that they "will not allow anyone to drive a wedge between the Chechen and Ingush peoples" and that "imams should be elected by people of villages and towns." "For the sake of consolidating and maintaining peace and tranquillity of the people of Ingushetia, we ask Ingush Mufti Isa Khamkhoev to resign,"" (Caucasian Knot, 05/02/2016).

Later, in 2017 and 2018, the council of teips also passed resolutions and staged protests in favour of restoring direct elections for the Head of republics in Russia, a system dismantled in 2013. In the former story, they state that:

“Deprivation of citizens and entire ethnic groups of the right to elect and be elected, by whoever committed, is a direct violation of the Constitution of the Russian Federation,” declares the statement published on the website of the Council of Ingush People Teips. According to Council members, as a result of the cancellation of direct elections, “the leaders of the republics have absolutely ceased to take into account the opinion of the people they lead” (Caucasian Knot, 19/10/2017).

These incidents all have a similar throughline – democratic involvement of the Ingush people in the differing institutions which, the teips perceive, govern Ingush life, as is done in their institution. Firstly, while getting involved in the dispute between the mufti and the head, the council of teips calls for the election of religious leaders by their faithful. In the context of the dispute, this is a minor point – the focus is on the elite conflict between Khamkhoev and Yevkurov – yet this is still an important point. The conflict between the mufti and the head is based around the changing nature of Islam, between Sufism and Salafism – a much more complex version of the conflict across the North Caucasus. By suggesting the election of the imams, the council of teips is suggesting what at first seems to be a middle-ground. However, across the republic, this would ensure the election of Salafists and Sufis in different areas, with influential Salafist preachers having toeholds across the republic and Sufi brotherhoods, in particular the Batakhadzintsy, having strong areas of support, as well as the ability to exert coercive influence on parts of the population. Meanwhile, with the calls for the direct election of the republic’s head, the council is taking a slightly more oppositional route.

Why take the neutral ground the first time? Yevkurov’s position from 2016 to 2018 is in decline, and it is not a coincidence that the final, and most meaningful, call for this is mere

months before the protests over the borders. It is important to note that the calls for the direct election of the Head are, perhaps, more politically important on the grander scale, but support for local imams is also a key issue for people in Ingushetia, such as when Imam Chumakov, a Salafist, was begged to retain his position after he announced his resignation after several assassination attempts against him. Further, their action in calling for direct elections of imams may not be as neutral as it seems – they are, after all, calling on Khamkhoev to resign. This is significant – Khamkhoev is associated with the Sufis of the republic, while Yevkurov has made broad overtures to the Salafis, as a method of building greater local support. As part of the wider religious realignment in the North Caucasus, Salafism is growing in support – while there are certainly areas where Sufi brotherhoods can be relatively sure, as pointed out earlier, this would almost certainly ensure wide Salafist gains across the republic, were it to be implemented. Their main contention against Khamkhoev is not because of their love of Salafism, but because of his connections to Kadyrov. While the calls for direct elections of Heads are important, their main importance comes from establishing the teips as an opposition force. Before these actions, the teips were on the same page as Yevkurov. However, as Yevkurov's position began to waver, the teips chose alignment with the people. The teips may not have been successful in these early actions in Ingushetia, but the groundworks of their later role is laid out in them – the council is, before the protests, firmly on the side of democratic rule in Ingushetia, or at the very least popular consultation in the style of the teip system.

That brings us to the protests, and the teips role within them. The role that the council plays in the unrest from its beginning to the resignation of Yevkurov and beyond is, like many things found in this research, both somewhat simple and somewhat complex. In short, the council of teips was most active in organising bouts of the initial protests in late 2018 – by the March 2019 protest, however, their tune had changed, and they distanced themselves from the demonstration blocking the main highway in the Caucasus (28/03/2019). This was followed by a repression of the council of teips, somewhat overturned by the overall

softening of repressive measures immediately following Kalimatov's appointment. The effectiveness of the council's actions is mixed – they did get people onto the streets to protest, but crucially they did not keep them there, with, as argued later, religion being a key factor in keeping the protests going. As well as this, their actions in organising opposition, while crucial, come after the protests initially begin. Further, the actions outside the protests that they organised were not overly effective, with the Ingush government and religious authorities ignoring them.

The initial period of late 2018 unsurprisingly sees the greatest activity from the council of teips. This is broadly similar to the rest of the elements of the protests. While their leadership has a more muted role initially, members of the council, in particular Akhmed Berakhoev, are noted as key organisers of protests. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of October, the representatives of the World Congress of the Ingush People, closely affiliated with the Council of Teips, with joint membership between the two common, declared they would resolve to get the lands back, believing that a strong resolution would force the authorities to listen (Caucasian Knot, 19/10/2018); in fact, organisers of the sanctioned rally announced that they would take a break from the protest in order for the congress to be organised (Caucasian Knot, 17/10/2018). There is then some collaboration between the opposition and the government, something of a last hurrah for Yevkurov's preferred style of leadership – he instructs the Mayor of Nazran to assist the Congress by giving them a facility to use (Caucasian Knot, 29/10/2019). The members are elected by teip members (Caucasian Knot, 28/10/2019) – and then, on the 31<sup>st</sup>, the Congress shoots itself in the foot, declaring that the intended result and resolution has been achieved, in conjunction with a Supreme Court ruling that the deal was illegal, and that protesters should go home (Caucasian Knot, 31/10/2019). This, predictably, splits the opposition. The organisation that went into this is not inconsiderable – it is a good 11 days between the temporary cessation of the protests and the election of the members, after all. Yet, with this one decision, all the work leads to nothing – after all, the decision is based on the supreme court ruling, which Yevkurov had already said he was going to ignore

at this point. The Council then tries to organise a Sharia Court in December, summoning MPs and religious leaders, who mostly ignore it.

There is much to be said about the Council's failed politicking – it demonstrates that the teip leaders did seem to think that they had the support to be a serious oppositional body, especially when considering they had mobilised people to one of their causes earlier in the same year, yet once they had the support and the ability to do something with it, they hesitated. Once they tried to pick up the pace once again, in December, the damage had been done and they were not taken as seriously. Nevertheless, they *were* able to mobilise people, and the fact that they *did* split the opposition – however unintentionally – does highlight that a good part of the population does take their word seriously, or at the very least, did until the debacle. While their attempt at bringing MPs and religious figures to a Sharia court is a failure, 10 out of the 30 summoned *did* show up, showing that the organisation has at the very least some weight behind it.

The second phase of the crisis, in 2019, can allow us to simultaneously answer a question that arises from the above: why did the Council of Teips do this? The first hints of an answer come from the further distancing of the Council from unsanctioned protest actions in March (28/03/2019), which led to the blocking of the main highway in the North Caucasus, while participating in the main rally in Magas. It is noted that the Council were among the bodies that were able to persuade the mostly young attendees of this other protest to attend the sanctioned one. This may raise some eyebrows as to the side the Council of Teips was taking in the protest movement – i.e., that it may be controlled opposition, meant to provide a more “acceptable” outlet of anger. However, this is not the case – controlled opposition movements in the Russian Federation are not arrested, and are, for all intents and purposes, usually extensions of the ruling authoritarian network. Leaders of the Council of Teips, on the other hand, were routinely arrested and charged with criminal activities, the most important of these being Akhmed Berakhoev, Chairman Malsag Uzhakhov and co-Chairman Murad Daskiev; later, the Russian federal government steps in and suspended the work of the

Council (Caucasian Knot, 03/04/2019; 19/04/2019; 17/05/2019; 30/05/2019). Akhmed Pogorov, co-chair of the World Congress of the Ingush People, was likewise put on a federal wanted list (Caucasian Knot, 06/05/2019).

Regardless of the effectiveness of their actions, the council of teips and its associated groups are subjected to widespread coercion, which neuters the council as a political body. When the council pops up in the research again, it is only in updates on the coercive efforts against them. Given the lack of success for the council – and, arguably, their hampering of the cause – it is odd that the authorities focus so much of their efforts on repressing the council. I contend that they are the focus of such coercion due to both their prominence and their detachment from religious affairs. While, granted, they had gotten involved in matters of religion, they are wholly separate from the feuding religious groups, making them (slightly) less controversial for the government to persecute. Despite the overarching role of Islam in the protests, religious figures are spared from the prosecution. Meanwhile, the council of teips were organisers of protest action, promoted further action and acted as spokesmen for the protesters as a whole – this led to prominence, making them easy targets for repression. Does this suggest popular support for the council? Arguably, but again, while the teips organised protests, and people came to these because of that, the religious elements compelled them to stay – further actions by the council were almost humiliating. As political actors, then, teips have a limited role.

There is a small yet intriguing exception to this – in 2020, teip leaders announced, in an open letter to Russian president Vladimir Putin, that they would be boycotting the vote on the constitutional amendment (Caucasian Knot, 21/03/2020). One of the elders, Osman Ozdoev of the Ozdoev teip state that this has come about after consultation with teip members, before adding:

“The issues raised, in one way or another, during discussions concerned, for the most part, the sore problems that have plagued all Ingushes for decades, including

the law on repressed nations, shelved long ago; the alienation of our lands in favour of neighbours; and keeping our activists in custody. And the arrest of our girl, Zarifa Sautieva, is a slap in the face inflicted by federal authorities on our people," Mr Ozdoev has stated." (Caucasian Knot, 21/03/2020).

This incident shows much of the traditional functions of the teip transplanted into a modern setting. The most interesting part of this has to do with the language surrounding Zarifa Sautieva, an Ingush activist who was arrested in events surrounding the protests and lost her job as a result. The circumstances will be examined later, but for the moment the key part is how the teip elder treats the arrest of Sautieva – as an insult, a “slap in the face” against the teip. This blends federal, large-scale politics with the traditional protective role of the teip in a way not really seen elsewhere. It is hard to tell if this worked due to vote-rigging, but it is a highly symbolic gesture nonetheless. It is also unique in the extent of the syncretism between the traditional form of the teip and the teip as a political actor – rather than relying on the collective call of the council of elders, here the teip responds, or at the very least takes into account, a slight against its membership.

The last two years, 2020 and 2021, have teips feature in the interesting way of being related to what their role in Ingush traditional society is “meant” to look like. Unfortunately, this also means that they are prominent in cases of blood feud, particularly cases where the feuds come to blows. However, there is one very interesting case where the teips act as a sort of moderator of another norm – that of wedding corteges. As previously discussed, wedding corteges among Vainakh can be raucous affairs, with cars replacing horses in the celebrations that unfold around the ceremony. However, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September 2020, clan elders and local religious officials (working together once again, it should be noted) decide that, in the name of public safety surrounding the covid-19 pandemic, corteges should be limited to 4 cars, and that the entire cortege must stop if another joins, with a fine of 50,000 roubles – about £470 (Caucasian Knot, 22/09/2020). This highlights the shift back to the more “traditional” role the teips play in Ingush political life, rather than focusing on “larger scale”

politics. It still deals with a political issue, but shows the traditional authorities taking the initiative, as opposed to either federal or regional governments. The other instances of the teip's role in the last part of the research involve the teip "looking after their own". The most prominent instance involves a blood feud examined at the end of the next section, following an attack in Chechnya, committed by two Ingush, resulting in a blood feud declared against their teips. The teips first request evidence of the attackers truly being their members (Caucasian Knot, 30/12/20), apologise after being presented with evidence (Caucasian Knot, 31/12/20), followed by, after provocations from Chechen leadership and the Chechen teips involved, postponing any reconciliation (Caucasian Knot, 03/01/21). This series of events highlights the reality of the modern teip – seeking evidence and even apologising when presented with the damning video, yet, after provocations and the declaration of a blood feud against them, sticking it out and postponing the reconciliatory process to try and protect their members. This, in fact, leads to the next section; for one of the most common cases of teips emerging in the research was in their involvement in blood feuds.

#### 7.4.2 Blood Feuds

Blood Feuds are a much more varied norm in Ingushetia; outside of declarations of blood enmity by the Kadyrov regime, there were very few instances of note outside of this in Chechnya. In Ingushetia, there are instances of actual violence, many of which result in death, as well as reconciliation and cross-border feuds. Even without examining individual cases, this extreme diversity is incredibly interesting and is a central component of the argument that a lack of control over the norms is a key part of why the Ingush leadership is stuck in the cycle of instability.

It is best to start with the more "basic" blood feuds – those that result in death. A standard blood feud killing, reported in 2017, is as follows:

“Tonight, an unidentified man has [fired on]<sup>21</sup> a car parked at the road shoulder and disappeared. According to eyewitnesses, there was one person in the car... On the way to the hospital, the victim... named Shankhoev, has died, said the source, noting that the attacker was not alone. The casualty had been convicted; and the attack on him could be caused by the blood feud of relatives of the woman, who was killed by bandits back in 2001, the source told the “Interfax”” (Caucasian Knot, 27/07/2017).

Others are more tangential, but still have the signs of blood feud:

“Two residents of Malgobek were hospitalized with gunshot wounds as a result of [a shooting] at a vehicle service station... Both victims are relatives of Magomed Bekbuzarov, who was killed in an attack on a checkpoint of the road-and-patrol service (known as DPS), a source from the law enforcement agencies reports... One of the wounded men is a younger brother of Magomed Bekbuzarov, and the second victim is their relative," said the source. The source has added that "the attempt could have been committed out of blood feud.”” (Caucasian Knot, 22/05/2017).

In the first year of research, the murder of the leader of the Council of Teips, Umar Gadarborshev, is linked to “clannish conflict” (Caucasian Knot, 10/04/2012); in 2020/2021, a blood feud erupts between Chechen and Ingush teips over a murder in Grozny (Caucasian Knot, 01/01/2021). This is to say nothing of the many incidents like the first mentioned – just a “simple” murder done for the sake of revenge. This paints a picture of instability, but while it does contribute to the instability, it is a product of the instability, not the cause. Consider what the blood feud is actually meant to be, as opposed to the corrupted version presented by Kadyrov – it is a last resort, meant to dissuade violence by offering an almost disproportionate retribution, as pointed out by Jaimoukha, who also notes that while vendettas could rage, the norm was “peaceful co-existence” in the past (Jaimoukha, 2005, 136). The former point by Jaimoukha should not be surprising, vendettas such as these can

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<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that in the original reports the word “shelling” is used.

spiral out of control, wherever in the world they may be, be that in the North Caucasus, Albania or the American/Sicilian Mafia – but what has caused this spiral in Ingushetia? Simply put, it is an after-effect of the insurgency, and the hard-handedness of the Russian/Ingush law enforcement and counterinsurgency. The second of the given examples is demonstrative – three law enforcement personnel, all related, attacked in a short amount of time, with one dying as a result. It *could* be coincidence, but it seems much more likely this was planned, and while this may mean the attackers chose targets who are all related as a message, blood feud is a strong possibility. Again, Jaimoukha provides a valuable piece of insight – during the wars of the 1990s in Chechnya, killings by Russians swelled the ranks of the Ichkerians, as fighting in a (sort of) blood feud with the Russians was seen as the only just way to gain vengeance (Jaimoukha, 2005, p.137). This provides a link between such actions against law enforcement and the codified practice. Adding to this is the fact that there is not a time limit to any part of the practice<sup>22</sup>. This leaves both plenty of time for feudists to plan their vengeance, whilst also allowing for more spontaneous, sudden acts of vengeance.

What of reconciliation? There are instances that are recorded by the Caucasian Knot, and at first they seem desperately few, but the headlines may belie the actual figures. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of January 2015, for example, the Caucasian Knot notes the reconciliation of two blood enemies:

“On January 3, the ceremony of reconciliation of Mukharbek and Abo Iliev, residents of the villages of Ali-Yurt and Guli, who were in the state of blood feud for 13 years, took place at the central mosque of Nazran, and it was attended by [Yevkurov, Khamkhoev], and imams from all over the republic... The former blood enemies have admitted that their decision on reconciliation was affected by members of the Commission for Reconciliation, imams of mosques, and public figures” (Caucasian Knot, 06/01/2015).

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<sup>22</sup> Compare this to the *Kanun* of the Albanian Tribes, where the only limit was a grace period where the killer was spared vengeance for a blood revenge killing for up to thirty days.

This is worthy of examination by itself, and we will revisit this shortly. First, however, is the fact that the article does not list any reconciliations for the previous year – but it *does* link to an interview the Caucasian Knot conducted with Yevkurov in 2011, a year before the research period:

“[Grigory Shvedov]: You have done a lot of work to reconcile blood relatives: 47 families, you said, were reconciled in April 2009. Two years have passed since then.

[Yevkurov]: I'm afraid to lie about the figures, about 150 families have reconciled over the entire time. We don't do much advertising on this, it's a godly thing, we don't earn political points on it. Again, I will say - it was before me.

[Shvedov]: The degree of intensity was different.

[Yevkurov]: Participation of the head and the mufti.

G.S.: By the old or by the new?

Y.-B.E.: In the near future, I am planning four high-profile cases of blood feud. The participation of the head and the mufti gives a positive result. In general, of course, it would be necessary to try to remove such a concept as blood feud - according to the law, it does not exist. And what citizens continue to do according to tradition, according to customs, is difficult to prove to people that from tomorrow the sun shines differently” (Caucasian Knot, 25/05/2011)<sup>23</sup>

Further, in 2017, during a report about the reconciliation of seven blood feuds, the Caucasian Knot reports that “over the past few years,” about 130 cases of blood feud had been reconciled; an impressive number, diminished somewhat by the figure immediately before stating that 200 cases of blood feud had been “revealed”, and the 130 that have been reconciled are of these 200 (Caucasian Knot, 10/08/2017). Despite being a major success for the republic, this still leaves 70~ blood feuds still unresolved, and while it is perhaps a little

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<sup>23</sup> [Кавказский Узел | Юнус-Бек Евкуров: "В Ингушетии нужна не столько амнистия, сколько реабилитация"](#)

much to think of a 100% success rate, these are still 70 potential cases of violence which, as we have seen, do have a possibility of coming to pass.

All of this is very telling. The main takeaway is the scale of the reconciliations – by this count, around 280 blood feuds were reconciled between 2010-2017, with possibly more in between. This is not insignificant, and while in the interview Yevkurov seems not to want this winning him any “political points”, it is hard to see this as not playing to his advantage. There is an almost ritualistic sense to the reconciliations, playing out almost the exact same way each time they occur; there are always multiple reconciliations at a time, they involve at least one religious official, up to and including the Mufti of the republic, arguably the highest religious authority in the republic, and a political or “secular” representative, up to and including the Head of the republic – some teip leaders may also be present. This is a departure from the traditional method of resolution, entirely dependent on the teip members of the involved parties. The involvement of the religious figures is interesting, as it is not something that is recorded as being part of the traditional methods of reconciliation. While there is an undeniable political element to the reconciliations, the involvement of the religious figures indicates an intriguing mix of two different norms, whilst further showing the importance of the religious leaders who preside over mass reconciliations. Another point can be found in the first quote – wherein it is noted that some of those reconciled seemed to do so due to the presence of the aforementioned figures. There is little elaboration on this point, so it is possible that this refers to either pressure or, perhaps reassurance. The latter could be through security and legitimation – after all, Yevkurov, at the start of his term and particularly after his attempted assassination, did enjoy some level of respect and popularity in the republic, and the presence of religious figures in Russia’s most Islamic republic would surely also add to the security and legitimacy. A potential counterpoint to this latter point are the religious conflicts in the republic, but given that, even despite their feud, Yevkurov and Mufti Khamkhoev are present in the 2017 reconciliation, this may not factor into it. On the other

hand is the former point – perhaps all the above is not reassuring, but pressuring, drawn from the fact that all bodies of legitimacy and security are present and telling them to reconcile.

There is also the matter of how Yevkurov treats blood feuds – that the concept should be removed and that it doesn't legally exist. It is almost to be expected, that a ruler of a region should want to remove potentially destabilising customs such as this, but the language around it being removed, and that it shouldn't even really exist, is rather telling – it is almost like Kadyrov, or at the very least, Kadyrov's agenda that we explored in the previous two chapters, wherein parts of Vainakh culture are deemed "unacceptable". This may well be for the same reasons, too – Yevkurov is part of the Russian patrimonial network, and wants to make Ingushetia a stable part of the Russian Federation, explaining why he calls to the law in such a way. Further, this is an interesting contrast to how Kadyrov treats the concept – especially considering his use of the concept to attack his enemies. This contrast has multiple explanations: firstly is the relative weakness of Yevkurov's position in contrast to Kadyrov, but, more importantly, is the difference in strategy, namely that Yevkurov is also primarily concerned with disarming potential enemies. He cannot deploy threats like this without throwing away his carefully crafted strategy of balancing differing interests, of special concern given that, unlike Kadyrov, Yevkurov must deal with active security threats. Secondly, Kadyrov primarily uses this threat in relation to those who he cannot physically reach, both in the diaspora and in other parts of the Russian Federation; Yevkurov's enemies are much closer, and more crucially, can act against this threat in a manner other than Telegram posts.

This latter point brings us to the final two examples worthy of examination. The first is an instance where a cross-border blood feud breaks out after an act of terror in Grozny, committed by two Ingush – Magomed Daudov, speaker of the Chechen Parliament, threatens a blood feud with the teips after this (Caucasian Knot, 31/12/2020), and, subsequently, so do the Chechen teips involved (Caucasian Knot, 01/01/2021; 02/01/2021). This dominates the news for the first half of January, ending with a demand from the two lesser members of the

Chechen Troika, Daudov and Delimkhanov, demanding that the Ingush teips stop criticising Kadyrov (10/01/2021) and, finally, a forced apology to Kadyrov from the father of the killed militants (13/01/2021). The silence from Kalimatov during all this is almost deafening. Even the use of teips when referring to the Chechens involved is not exactly correct – one of the articles makes note that it is the relatives of the killed man, not the teip (Caucasian Knot, 01/01/2021); the other report, from the relatives of the wounded man, is from a teip, the Ersno, declaring the blood feud with support of the Benoi teip – Kadyrov’s teip (Caucasian Knot, 02/01/2021). This incident highlights so much about the difference between the republics and their treatment of norms it is almost perfect. This incident will be examined in more detail in the next chapter, as it is a great starting point for comparisons between the republics. The second incident is the murder of Ibragim Eldjarkiev in Moscow. Eldjarkiev was the head of a counter-extremism centre in Ingushetia, murdered on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 2019. While blood feud was ruled out as a possible cause, the murder does have the hallmarks of a revenge killing (Caucasian Knot, 04/11/2019). The only caveat, however, is that it is intrinsically linked to this next section – the killers were, allegedly, either part of or paid by the Batakhadzintsy Sufi *wird* (Caucasian Knot, 05/11/2019; 08/11/2019).

#### 7.4.3 Vainakh Towers in Ingushetia – a quick aside

Before moving on to the next section examining religion in Ingushetia, there is one final category linked to the teip that is worth exploring – the Vainakh towers in Ingushetia. Vainakh towers have a place of high reverence in Ingushetia. They are used as a draw for tourism, with a slogan patented in 2022 reading *Ingushetiya – Rodina Bashen*; Ingushetia, the Homeland of Towers (Tagimov, 2023<sup>24</sup>). They are used as symbols of the nation and, in a sense, legitimisation of the government and the republic. In this role, there are three that stand out in particular: the Coat of Arms of the Republic, the “Nine Towers”, and the Tower of Concord in Magas.

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<sup>24</sup> <https://gazetaingush.ru/news/komitet-po-turizmu-regiona-poluchil-patent-na-ispolzovanie-slogana-ingushetiya-rodina-bashen>



Figure 8.4.3.1: Emblem of the Republic of Ingushetia (Wikimedia Commons)



Figure 8.4.3.2: Nine Towers memorial, Nazran (Masha Linnik/Wikimedia Commons, 2020)



Figure 8.4.3.3: Tower of Concord, Magas (Wikimedia Commons, 2024).

The Tower of Concord is the tallest structure in Ingushetia and one of the tallest in the North Caucasus; its dominance of the skyline of Magas is quite staggering. It is almost as though the idealised tower from the emblem has been transplanted into real life. It houses an ethnographic museum, a restaurant, a (seemingly fantastical) “throne room” for the Mekkh Kkhel (of course, never used by the actual Mekkh Kkhel during this research). The tower on the emblem and the tower in Magas, therefore, act as the symbolic heart of Ingushetia – at least, the Ingushetia that the republic wants to project to the world. While the tower was financed by a philanthropist, it was constructed in 2012-2013, showing, perhaps, an image of the Ingushetia that Yevkurov specifically wanted to project. At the height of the insurgency, the government was able to build a 100-metre-tall tower in a year; even the name is symbolic, referring to peace within Ingushetia. In a similar vein, the Nine Towers take the tower and make them a visualisation of the grief of the Ingush nation following the deportations.

All of this reverence towards towers makes the only appearance of the towers in the research a little perplexing: there was a single story over two articles over the defacing of a tower. In January 2020, it was discovered that two men were destroying towers in the tower complex of Beini and, apparently, transporting their arched gateways to Chechnya (Caucasian Knot, 05/01/2020). The Council of Teips were those to make this accusation. The scandal triggered disputes and arguments on the internet, with experts interviewed by the Caucasian Knot quick to state that, in real life, relations between the two peoples were still amiable. Later, in November, it is reported that three people have been convicted over the year, one man sentenced to forced labour for his role in the crime; it further states that a crypt has collapsed due to vandalism (Caucasian Knot, 17/11/2020). This story is strange; it is a tantalising glimpse into a world which we cannot fully see through reporting. No prices or profits are listed in the articles, though there surely must have been a high cash incentive – not because of the attachment to the towers, but because of the practicality of moving these large pieces of stone. It is also interesting because of the ethnic tensions that are referred to. It is difficult to imagine that, as the experts say, there is little enmity between Ingush and Chechens at this point in time; after all, from the perspective of many Ingush, their land had been stolen from them in a move that even the Chechen diaspora was mildly supportive of. As we will see in the next section, resentment at Kadyrov's influence in the Sufi brotherhoods in Ingushetia is but one of many ways that the Ingush resent Chechen influence in the republic. It is hard to imagine that ethnic relations were at an all-time high shortly after the protests. The towers are a symbol of Ingushetia, widely acclaimed and used as legitimation for both the republic and the people; it is very, very difficult to see people not being very, very angry about such desecration, especially when the spoils are carted off to Chechnya. It is, in a sense, a microcosm of the protests and the border deal – something that is symbolic, yet unused, by Ingushetia is stolen by Chechnya for their benefit. Towers may not pop up in the research often – but their role as a visual link for all Ingush warrants their mention.

## 7.5 Religion and Wirds

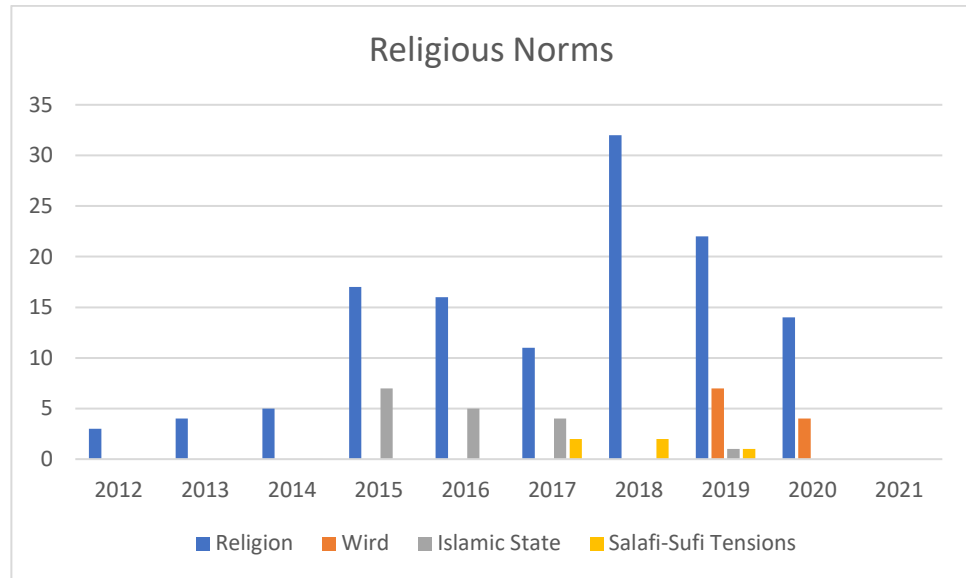


Figure 8.5.1: Religious norms in Ingushetia, 2012-2021

Religion and its appearance in the research is another stark difference between Ingushetia and Chechnya. In Chechnya, religion was consistently the second largest category year after year – in Ingushetia, the highest it achieves is third. Adding to this is the way religion manifests in Ingushetia: in Chechnya, religion is used extensively as legitimation, to the benefit of the regime, while in Ingushetia, it is mostly a source of discord, if not outright opposition. As has been seen in teips, blood feuds and leadership, religion’s appearances are much more varied, which is both adding to and because of the instability of the republic. Furthermore, religion has a much more violent role in Ingushetia – while there is a lack of religion in the earlier years, 2012 specifically, it is in the background, as instances of terror were extremely high in these years. Adding to the terror from the first years, the Islamic State again rears its head, violent actions from a powerful Sufi brotherhood, the Batakhadzintsy wird, a campaign of assassination attempts against a popular Salafi preacher as well as a long, bitter dispute between Yunus-Bek Yevkurov and Isa Khamkhoev, the Mufti of Ingushetia.

### 7.5.1 Salafism in Ingush Society

Perhaps the best place to start is with the role that Salafism plays in Ingush society during this research period. Salafism's manifestation in the politics of this period is perhaps best seen through the long-running woes of the preacher Khamzat Chumakov, for much of the research period the Imam of the Nasyr-Kort Mosque. This mosque is in the western half of the town of Ekazhevo, itself part of the larger built-up area around Nazran (it is directly East of Nazran and directly North of Magas); however, perhaps the most important facet of its geography is that it is right next to Surkhaki, the base of the Batakhadzintsy Wird. Chumakov is a Salafist, with a large following in the republic, and has been vocally against corruption in Ingushetia. This has, somewhat predictably, not made him any friends – not in the by-design corrupt governmental structure in Ingushetia, not in the Batakhadzintsy Wird, who not only have theological issues with him but have long-standing claims of ties to the Kadyrov regime in Chechnya (Klyszcz, 2020). Over the years, Chumakov has been the victim of at least three assassination attempts; the first attempt, in 2010, led to his leg being amputated; the second involved a car bomb; the third was thwarted by the FSB (RFE/RL, 18/10/2017). As well as this, there have been scuffles outside the mosque after he announced he would not lead a Friday prayer, which nearly escalated into an extremely dangerous situation that was, thankfully, avoided, despite shots being fired (Caucasian Knot, 05/06/2015; 07/06/2015). The Batakhadzintsy have been blamed for at least one of the attempts on his life (Fuller, 2017<sup>25</sup>), which would fit with an overall modus-operandi for the wird, which does not seem to be shy in taking out political opponents. On top of this, he has a somewhat strained relationship with Yevkurov, who has supported Salafi institutions in Ingushetia whilst occasionally threatening Chumakov, via threatening to close his Mosque (Caucasian Knot, 08/07/2015) and detaining his relatives (Caucasian Knot, 05/03/2017) and supporters (Caucasian Knot, 26/07/2013). Chumakov eventually, to his believers' disappointment, announced he would

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.rferl.org/a/caucasus-report-ingush-preacher-assassination-attempt-chumakov/28801987.html>

be leaving his post (Caucasian Knot, 26/03/2018); this was rescinded, though he took a much less prominent role in the day-to-day functions of the mosque.

Chumakov's turbulent journey through the 2010s is a microcosm of Salafism in Ingushetia – while there is a level of official endorsement and support, it is nonetheless targeted by both the republic and by other forms of Islam present in the republic. What of the believers themselves? In Nasyr-Kort alone, Chumakov was able to hold a sermon to 5,000 people in 2013 (Caucasian Knot, 27/07/2013), amid coercion against his followers following the detention of one of his bodyguards. In a later conflict in 2015, the religious adviser to Yevkurov gives voice to some dissatisfaction with Chumakov:

“During recent several years, Khamzat Chumakov delivers sermons at the only mosque of Nasyr-Kort," ... some of local residents had to visit other localities for Friday prayers. "They explain their position by saying that Khamzat Chumakov delivers sermons in a wrong way. According to them, he insults tariqahs, ustaz, and virds, supported by a majority of mosque-goers of the republic,"... "Last Friday, Khamzat Chumakov has announced in categorical manner that no noon prayers will be delivered at the mosque of Nasyr-Kort. And a lot of mosque-goers got indignant,"... After that, residents of Nasyr-Kort contacted the Mufti of Ingushetia. "The Mufti never appointed Khamzat Chumakov the Imam of the mosque of Nasyr-Kort, and villagers never elected him. They have their legitimate Imam Ruslan Chakhkiev. And they want him to deliver Friday prayers, they want to listen to his sermons,"” (Caucasian Knot, 07/06/2015).

This smells of a half-truth, of a political point rooted in a level of sincerity. There are some points which make it sound like Chumakov is the villain here, that he decided not to hold his Friday prayers purposefully and to cause as much as strain on local believers as possible. However, there are a few points not noted in this statement from Torshkoev. Firstly, theologians in the republic have stated that Chumakov's actions are justified in the Shafi'i

school of Islam predominant in Ingushetia, noting that cancellation of Friday Prayer is a common occurrence in Egypt (Caucasian Knot, 06/06/2015). Second is the calls to the Muftiate, a little rich given Yevkurov's ongoing feud with the Muftiate at the time, as well as the support for Salafism Yevkurov had given. This makes the report about the insult to tariqahs a little strange – make no mistake, the reason for the conflict given does appear to be the case, but this statement reads more as a political move rather than a voicing of the concerns of actual believers. This is also supported by a later statement given by a believer from the same article:

“Idris Yevloev, a community member, believes that "the position of Khamzat Chumakov's opponents is uncompromising and can lead to bloodshed." "They took advantage of the moment to expel him from the mosque, and they do not care that such their actions will lead to situations when blood can be shed"” (Caucasian Knot, 06/06/2015).

Again, this is a little extreme, but the standoff that was caused by this incident – there were concerns over the following week whether there would be more violence, which, thankfully, did not come to pass – as well as the previous assassination attempts may provide a reason for such thought. This entire incident shows that Salafism is a popular movement in Ingushetia, whose leaders can get very loyal support, though the support it does enjoy is not ubiquitous, with a good portion of the populace against the movement and the government ambivalent on the movement. This is due to the elephant in the room when it comes to Salafism – its role in the insurgency and in inspiring people to become fighters with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (IS).

The insurgency is a persistent thorn in the side of Ingush leadership, with terror attacks and counterinsurgency operations lasting throughout the research period. In some cases, the link between the attackers and the Caucasian Emirate (*Imarat Kavkaz*, hitherto IK) is not stated by the article – while I feel certain that IK was involved in these attacks, if it is not stated I

have not categorised it as something related to religion. There is not too much else to say about the role of Salafism in the insurgency that has not already been said; Salafism's role in this is well known and well documented. Still, it is important that Salafism, which, as we have discussed already, faces varying degrees of governmental and to an extent societal opposition is able to mobilise an insurgency that lasts for over 10 years (despite the insurgency being officially declared over). This is something that is gaining importance once again as violence returns to the republic since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2022. What is perhaps more interesting for this thesis to examine is the role that the link to the insurgency plays in Salafism in Ingushetia. Reacting to the news that the Interreligious Council of Russia was planning to classify Salafism and Wahhabism as extremist beliefs, Ingush religious leaders state the following:

“The introduction of the principle to persecute believers for their beliefs and not for specific illegal actions will have a devastating effect on the Muslim community of Russia,” states the appeal posted on the website of the Russian SAM on April 2. On April 10, on his Facebook page, Khamzat Chumakov, Imam of the Nasyr-Kort mosque, posted the statement of the theologians of Ingushetia regarding the resolution of the [Interreligious Council of Russia]. Responsibility for extremism and terrorism is already provided by the legislation of Russia, and “an attempt to introduce the principle to persecute believers for their beliefs or failure to adhere to certain traditional religious and legal schools can lead to serious deplorable results,” the Ingush theologians believe” (Caucasian Knot, 12/04/2018).

The Salafis clearly believe that they are being persecuted; this is an understandable thing to think given what we have discussed before. This tracks with the actions of IK – almost all the attacks are against the security forces in Ingushetia in this period. This does not suggest a want of radicalisation and submission, as the attacks and methods of IS are intended to create, but a want of liberation against a supposed oppressor. In this sense, the oppressor is Russia, and the Ingush government their stooges – they warrant attacking. There is also the

sense that they must have learned from the failings of Basayev and his methods. When discussing the insurgency and Salafism, though, it is almost tempting to combine the two during analysis – this is not the case, but it *does* show what the religious leaders in the quote above feel is happening. The vast majority of Salafis in Ingushetia do not get involved in the insurgency, this feeling of being persecuted for choosing a different sect of Islam does support earlier research into Salafi communities in Dagestan (Kaliszweska, 2023) and Salafi mosques are targeted. The feeling of persecution expressed here, then, could be said to be feasibly warranted – especially when considering the rhetoric in the earlier quote from the adviser to Yevkurov. Further, this is almost secondary to what the actual issue here is – there is, clearly, an acceptable version of Islam that the Russian state wants to tolerate. This is related to what was discussed in the Chechnya case study and relates to the Azerbaijani “traditional Islam”. However, this form of Islam seems to be less clearly defined than Kadyrov’s own official Islam - this will be discussed in the next chapter on the role of Federal politics in Ingushetia and Chechnya.

What of the Islamic State? IS offered Muslims in Ingushetia the chance of social justice and its message was extremely well received in the North Caucasus, with many fighters from the region joining and leading Russia to become one of the most-represented states in terms of supply of fighters to the organisation. For Ingushetia in particular, Youngman and Moore state that by 2017, Ingush officials listed a figure of 200 people going to Syria; in the months preceding January, Yevkurov offered a figure of 97 in December 2016, rising from his own report of 87 in October and 30 in October 2015 (Youngman and Moore, 2017). Further, parts – but not all – of IK professed their allegiance to the so-called Caliph, Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi. IK itself was in an interesting state in Ingushetia, both during the research period and as a whole – Youngman takes note of the mostly silent, absent leadership, as well as a markedly ‘weaker’ ideological framework (Youngman, 2025, p.155). It should therefore come as little surprise that many stories relating to IS deal with people going to join them and the Ingush authorities attempts to stop the flow of fighters. Relatively early in the crisis, Yevkurov

proposed several methods of coercion to stop recruitment; firstly, stripping the citizenship away from any fighters (Caucasian Knot, 07/10/2015); he later moves to more practical measures, such as setting up a network to prevent online recruitment. On this, he stated

““We need to take preventive measures to combat the recruitment and outflow of our young people into the ranks of terrorist groupings... I believe we should create a working team to identify those persons, who provoke and mislead our young people in social networks. Their number includes a considerable part of recruiters, who earn a lot of money, deceiving young people,”” (Caucasian Knot, 07/10/2015).

It speaks a lot to his mindset that his first call is a broad one, in which he does not specify Ingush fighters but more broadly “Russian citizens” who have gone to fight, and while in the above quote he speaks grandiosely about stopping recruitment and the deception of the youth, the article later notes that it is unclear if this team was ever set up. What was set up, however, were several Islamic State groupings in the country, both made up of the parts of IK that swore allegiance to the Caliph and homegrown cells. Many of these are broken apart and the participants arrested, though others, usually lone persons, are reported to have made it to Syria. When ages are given for the fighters, they are always young, with a 24-year-old (Caucasian Knot, 08/09/2017) and 33-year-old (Caucasian Knot, 19/10/2016); in the former story, it is noted that an estimated 200 Ingush have gone to Syria to fight for the Islamic State. Following a counter-terrorist operation in 2016, five people were arrested and had a similar age range – 31-21 years old – and were linked to a grouping made by one of those killed in the operation just outside of Nazran (Caucasian Knot, 17/06/2016). Further, there were threats from IS not just against the government, but to other religious leaders in the republic. Specifically, Khazmat Chumakov was called out by supporters of IS – especially interesting as it appears those in the video were not actual IS fighters, something the article points out is also speculated by internet users, the masked gunmen’s only issue being what

they call Chumakov's "anti-IS propaganda" (Caucasian Knot, 27/12/2015(1))<sup>26</sup>. This, again, broadly coincides with previous research, with the exception that, unlike those others in the research who seem to support both Salafism and the Russian state, those who support IS are violently opposed. The dichotomy is best demonstrated by two quotes from two previously cited articles: firstly, from the article about the threat to Chumakov;

"In the video, two men with covered faces accuse the Imam of encouraging young people not to join the IS and recognizing the legitimacy of the Russian authorities... A representative of the Nasyr-Kort mosque said that liquidation of Chumakov "may be desirable for certain persons in the republic." He said that they are preparing an appeal "on behalf of the community to law enforcement bodies asking to conduct an inquiry into the above fact." (Caucasian Knot, 27/12/2015).

This highlights both the opinions of the moderate Salafis and more extreme, IS-aligned Salafis almost perfectly; Chumakov and his supporters want to work with the Ingush authorities and the Russian state, especially for protection. For other Salafis, this is a cardinal sin. Another quote goes as such:

"In Ingushetia, members of a secret grouping, associated with the international terrorist organization "Islamic State" ... says the information centre of the Russian National Antiterrorist Committee (NAC). "The grouping consisted of four residents of Ingushetia and was created to commit crimes against members of bodies of power, law enforcers and supporters of traditional Islam"" (Caucasian Knot, 21/05/2016).

Once again, there is clearly a desire to create a "traditional Islam" in Russia, and perhaps Ingushetia specifically. Again, this will be discussed later, but there is a form of Islam that may well be the object of reference here: the influential Sufi brotherhoods in Ingushetia.

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<sup>26</sup> With three assassination attempts, some annoyed parishioners willing to start fights over his approach to services, fractious relationships with the government, Sufis and even his fellow Salafis, is it any wonder Chumakov took a step back?

### 7.5.2 Sufism and the Batakhadzintsy Wird

In Chechnya, Sufism is another feather in Kadyrov's cap of legitimacy; while he is the most prominent, and arguably most powerful, member of his wird, Sufism only pops up as a method of creating legitimacy for Kadyrov in the eyes of the people, as a reason for festivities and little else. In Ingushetia, on the other hand, a Sufi wird, mostly unconnected to the government, is extraordinarily influential and, in a similar manner to the Council of Teips, a separate column of power to the Ingush government. This wird, the Batakhadzintsy, exudes a different kind of power to the Council, though; they are able to act against their enemies, with at least one of the assassination attempts against Chumakov and a killing in Moscow linked to them. They enjoy popularity while also evoking fear from others. There really are no comparable organisations in Chechnya; an ironic fact, considering that they have links to the Kadyrov regime. Where Kadyrov has been able to subject the pillars of Sufism in Chechnya to his whims and wishes, in Ingushetia, as is the case of many of these norms, the relative lack of authority from the Republic's leadership has resulted in these institutions acting in unusual, more "traditional" ways.

The Batakhadzintsy are a Sufi wird of the Qadiri tariqat closely linked to the Kunta-Hadji wird. While the Kunta-Hadjis are present both in Chechnya and Ingushetia, the Batakhadzintsy are based in Ingushetia. Their links to the Kunta-Hadjis, whom Akmat Kadyrov was the leader of, provide the source for their close relationship with Ramzan Kadyrov, and the accusations that they are an arm of the Kadyrov regime in Ingushetia. They are not the only Sufi wird active in the republic, with the Naqshbandi wird of Sheikh Deni Arsanov being relatively active and, by all accounts, rather politically integrated (Sokirianskaia, 2024, p.85) – though, to the best of my knowledge, never explicitly appearing in the articles analysed for research. There are also members of the Kunta-Hadji wird in Ingushetia, and their namesake has festivals in his honour in Ingushetia as in Chechnya. While these are large, there are none like the Batakhadzintsy in terms of political/social relevance and influence. The wird acts like a teip, with blood feuds and a close-knit, endogamous membership (Sokirianskaia, 2024, p.84), but

with a hierarchical leadership rather than the more horizontal structure of a teip. Sufi orders at their core consist of the master-student dynamic, and the leaders of this wurd are the descendants of Batal-Khadji himself – the Belkharoev family. The Belkharoevs, and the wurd, are based in the town of Surkhakhi, to the East of Nazran, and have a large complex surrounding their main mosque. Surrounding the Zerat in the centre of the complex are the graves of the Belkharoev family, with some seemingly arranged as a walk towards the shrine. The size of the complex speaks to the wealth and power of the family and the wurd they lead. Getting numbers of their followers is difficult. It is known that when one of their elders, Sultan Belkharoev, died in 2017, 3,000 people attended his funeral, including delegates from the Ingush government, the North Ossetian muftiate and the Chechen muftiate (Caucasian Knot, 09/10/2017). Unlike Chumakov's mosque in Nasyr-Kurt, there are no records of believer numbers at the mosque in Surkhakhi.

What is much more apparent through the research, including the cited article above, is the extent of their influence in Ingushetia. There are some more relatively mundane aspects to this – Sokirianskaia notes that the Batakhadzintsy can secure employment for their members (Sokirianskaia, 2024, p.88). Whilst this does speak to a level of respect, other actions that demonstrate their latent importance are those like the closing down of roads in Nazran in order to accommodate a visit by Adam Delimkhanov – part of Kadyrov's Troika in Chechnya (Caucasian Knot, 04/01/2020). This is amid a time where Sokirianskaia states that there was a major clamp down on the brotherhood's activities coming from the federal government, showing that amidst the scandal of the death of Eldzhakariev, a high-ranking member of the Ingush Centre for Countering Extremism, and the subsequent fallout, the wurd could still mobilise a large action. The description of this event is also enlightening:

“Oskanov Street in Nazran, where members of the Batal Khadji [wurd] live compactly, was blocked on January 2. The traffic was restored only after police intervention, a resident of Nazran, Magomed Ozdoev, has reported. "I remember that it was like that at the funeral of Ibragim Belkharoev. It was somehow explainable; the situation was

clear, after all, so many people came to the funeral. But I don't understand when, due to the convenience of one family, they create problems for the whole city,"... The street was blocked because of the arrival of Adam Delimkhanov, an MP of the Russian State Duma from Chechnya, who came to mark the anniversary of the death of Ibragim Belkharoev" (Caucasian Knot, 04/01/2020).

Adam Delimkhanov is a key part of the Chechen troika, but his role – as a Duma MP – gives this event an even greater importance. While he is Kadyrov's voice in the Duma, he still is a member of the Duma for United Russia with all that that entails; while there is backlash in the federal government over the killing of Eldzhakariev, a member of the ruling party of said government visiting does send a certain message. Then there is the event he is visiting for, the murder of Ibragim Belkharoev, who the brotherhood believes was killed by members of the organisation that Eldzhakariev headed, which caused their blood feud with Eldzhakariev (more on that shortly); again, this adds a certain level of authority and reassurance to a Duma MP's visit amid a scandal relating to the man whom he is there to mourn. The small piece of information that Oskanov street is mostly a community of Batakhadzintzy followers speaks, again, to their social cohesion. Finally, Oskanov street is a large road in the centre of Nazran, and their blockade of it disrupted traffic throughout the city and required "police intervention" to stop. No arrests were made, no warnings issued – it seems as though the re-opening being a police intervention refers more to a negotiation or perhaps making use of contacts within the police and the wurd, relying on the earlier mentioned social mobility being a member of the wurd provides.

This takes us to the bridge between these more mundane actions and the blood feuds, which are the other associated acts of violence related to the wurd. The first, and most minor, is an act of hostility against the wurd, which may be an act done by militants or by the government. As the report states,

“According to the source, the above version was put forward on the basis of reports from local residents and a video with several armed men walking on the outskirts of the Surkhakhi village at night. The source also reported about an incident, in which, according to the law enforcement bodies, the militants might be involved. "Unidentified people opened fire on lanterns and video surveillance cameras from assault weapons, and they used a chain saw to damage a tree revered by the community of Batal-Khadji followers,"... Instagram users wrote critical remarks concerning the report about the search for militants in Ingushetia. "Militants have long died out like dinosaurs, but the Chekists' idea is still alive, and they continue their searches," user ovshnclab wrote a comment under the today's post in the public account vesti\_ingushetii on Instagram” (Caucasian Knot, 15/05/2020).

It is hard to tell whether this was an act of terror, i.e. from local militants opposed to the wurd, or by the government, though it would make sense for it to be either given the grievances both have with the wurd. However, it does seem like it is an act of terror – the revered tree, a place of pilgrimage and prayer common in Sufism but frowned upon by Salafism, could well be a fair target for anti-Sufi militants. However, the comment is critical and frowns upon the idea that there even are militants, which means the possibility that this was an act by security services against a place of importance for the wurd does make sense and cannot be discounted. Thus ends the more minor incident; what is more interesting for us in this instance is a story of a shootout *between* members of the wurd in Surkhakhi:

“The decision of some Batakhadjins to leave the clan has led to a conflict in the Nazran District of Ingushetia; several people were hospitalized after the shootout, sources have reported. Residents of the village of Surkhakhi decided to leave the clan, a source said without specifying the number of such persons. "This caused outrage of other members; the quarrel grew into a conflict with the use of firearms," he said... Several persons suffered in the shootout, said a law enforcement source.” (Caucasian Knot, 30/05/2020).

This is an important incident; at the height of the campaign against them, members of the wurd begin a shootout over some trying to leave. There aren't any further details, thankfully no deaths are reported but there are hospitalisations. This incident highlights how seriously the wider membership takes the close-knittedness of the wurd. It seems very unlikely that the leadership would not know about this at the time of the shootout, but we do not know enough details about this to say anything conclusive. There is likewise nothing about the motives for leaving. It is frustrating that an incident which can tell us so much about internal dynamics of this highly influential group is lost to details. All we can really take away is that the wider membership of the wurd seem opposed to people attempting to leave it for pastures new, whatever those may be; I would guess that there may be traces of the loss of members to Salafist organisations in this fear, but ultimately it is impossible to gauge.

This brings us to the blood feud with Eldzhakariev and the Centre for Counter Extremism. The first piece of this puzzle is the death of Ibragim Belkharoev, a member of the wurd, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2018. Ibragim was an unusual member of the Belkharoev family; he had no formal religious education and was not a "Sheikh"<sup>27</sup> (Caucasian Knot, 31/12/2018). However, there are two pieces which help us understand why someone may want him dead. Firstly, this was not the first attempt on his life, with one unsuccessful attempt in 2016 (Caucasian Knot, 31/12/2018), and secondly, he was widely seen as having the closest links with Ramzan Kadyrov in the republic (02/01/2019). There are some comments reported by the Caucasian Knot that help illustrate this better:

"Now, Kadyrov is left without his representative in Ingushetia," Apcen Akiev, a user, wrote in the page of the community The Magas Times on the Facebook. "I was thinking all the time, where I had seen this face. It was he, who went to Kadyrov and brought him here," Khanifa Ozdoeva wrote about Ibragim Belkharoev. "I think this [the murder of Belkharoev] is not a good sign. It's very bad when bloody clashes start at

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<sup>27</sup> The use of this term by the Caucasian Knot is unusual, since, as noted in chapter 4, the religious hierarchy of the Sufi brotherhoods of the Qadiri Tariqa use titles of Murid, with Sheikh typically meaning the founder of the wurd or tariqa; perhaps it is in reference to the leadership of the wurd.

the very top," the user nicknamed Mareta Malsagova wrote" (Caucasian Knot, 02/01/2019).

This shows the esteem Ibragim was held in, which is clearly not very high, especially since this occurred in the middle of the protests. The wurd claimed that this was organised by Ibrahim Eldzhakariev, the leader of the Centre of Counter Extremism, part of the Ingush government (Sokirianskaia, 2024, p.84). Due to the wurd acting almost like a teip in these instances, this murder gave them the right of blood feud with Eldzhakariev and the CCE. In January 2019, an attempt on his life was made, though this is difficult to link to the Batakhadzintsy; however, his murder in Moscow on November the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019, was almost immediately linked to the brotherhood (Caucasian Knot, 04/11/2019). This was a major scandal at the time and is the event that heralds the beginning of the clamping down on the brotherhood (though, as stated, apart from the arrest of the killers it doesn't seem like much really happens to the wurd that is of real consequence, save for unwanted attention). It shows the true reach of the wurd – being able to carry out a hit in Moscow – adds to the rumours of their criminal activity, shows that they are able to back up their claims of blood feud with force, and that they are not unwilling to go against either government of Ingushetia (as, by this point, Kalimatov was in charge). The Salafi militants stick mostly to the North Caucasus, with only those who join the Islamic State having a truly global reach; the Batakhadzintsy can strike throughout Russia without being a militant group. This is such a stark difference to any of the Sufi wurd in Chechnya that it really needs no further explanation.

There is one further, though unverified, claim about the blood feud to examine. The Caucasian Knot reports this from a blogger who lives abroad who is a self-professed enemy of the Batakhadzintsy:

“On November 4, Shamil Bulguchev, a native of Ingushetia, who lives abroad and criticizes the Belkharoev family, posted a video on YouTube under the title "Appeal to the Leader of the Republic of Ingushetia". The video shows the man who reports he

has earlier appealed to Makhmud-Ali Kalimatov... with a request to investigate cases of attacks on his relatives, but the leader... did not respond. According to Shamil Bulguchev, on November 3, a house of his elder brother was set on fire. Shamil Bulguchev accuses his opponents of arson and appeals to Makhmud-Ali Kalimatov with a request to "stop" them. Shamil Bulguchev claims that on November 3, one of the Belkharoev family members phoned him and threatened to set his house on fire. Shamil Bulguchev notes that he has earlier mentioned the name of the man as involved in the murder of Ibragim Eldjarkiev. According to Shamil Bulguchev, a person close to the leaders of the Batal-Khadji's wurd paid 60 million roubles for the assassination of the top-ranking law enforcer" (Caucasian Knot, 05/11/2019).

This is an interesting claim; recall in Chapter 6, on Chechnya, that a favourite tactic of Kadyrov's when it came to punishment was the burning down of relatives' houses. The link between these arsons and the murder is unverifiable but tantalising. It is not impossible that the brotherhood, which acts almost like a state within a state and that has links to the Kadyrov regime, has learned from Chechnya. There are informal links, which as we have looked into in the last chapter are important in the way that authoritarian leaders learn from each other; Delimkhanov saw the brotherhoods after the murder of Ibragim Belkharoev; the house burnings in Chechnya made the news. The links are all there. It is only tentative, but it does seem that not only do the Batakhadzintsy have the reach and the resources to enact violence against their enemies in line with Ingush conceptions of the blood feud, they have learned and copied methods used by a neighbouring authoritarian regime. Given that Ingush leaders must work with them, and have yet to find a way to rid themselves of them, it is a distinct possibility.

When Sufism outside the Batakhadzintsy is mentioned, it is a mixed picture. In 2020, it was reported that some practitioners had caught COVID-19 during religious services, leading to the deaths of four, all described as village elders being over 60 years old and adherents of Sufism (Caucasian Knot, 18/04/2020). Any instances of corruption linked to wurd, as

Sokirianskaia states, is not reported on, which is to be expected. Therefore, like Salafism, the role of Sufism in Ingushetia is mixed, though it does provide the strongest inter-Ingush political organisation in the form of the Batakhadzhintsy. The last major part of Sufism's role in Ingushetia is worthy of its own section – the conflict between Yevkurov and the Muftiate, and the relations between the political and religious leaderships in general.

### 7.5.3 Yevkurov, Kalimatov and the Muftiate

To say that the relations between the Ingush muftiate and the republic's leadership are mixed in this period would be a great understatement. Yevkurov and the Sufi leadership of the muftiate spent the former's tenure in a series of spats that, despite Yevkurov's best efforts, were never fully resolved. The muftiate itself faces issues and condemnations in this time – we have already noted one, where the Council of Teips calls on the mufti to resign – and there is also the work of the Council of Alims, local religious leaders, to consider. All in all, this is the perfect section to end our discussion of Islam in Ingushetia on, as it encompasses both strands of Islam discussed and their place within the republic and its religious leadership.

At first glance, the position of Yevkurov seems sensible, even a little proactive. He calls for dialogue between the different strands of Islam not just in Ingushetia but throughout the North Caucasus, hosting an event for such dialogue in 2016 (Caucasian Knot, 02/07/2016). He meets with Kadyrov following a spat between Kadyrov and the Salafis of Ingushetia, seemingly to iron out the issue and meeting with, at the very least, an image of success:

“Following the meeting held on February 21 in the city of Magas, Ramzan Kadyrov has stated that Chechnya and Ingushetia face the problems common for the region and "intend to move together towards solutions." He has emphasized that the leaders of the republics are going to resist attempts to sow discord between the regions and to "meet frequently.”” (Caucasian Knot, 22/02/2016).

Yet while this paints a picture of friendly meetings and cooperation on Yevkurov's part, it is a sham and, to a great extent, an attempt to fix a problem of his own making – he may not have

caused the tension between the Salafists, the Sufis and the Muftiate, but he certainly did not help the situation. This dates to before the research period began, with Yevkurov's acceptance of the Salafist mosques – while Yevkurov was incapacitated after his assassination attempt in 2009, the Mufti, Isa Khamkhoev, campaigned to have him replaced as Head of the republic (Aliyev, 2018). During the research period, the relationship only gets worse, despite some “peace” offerings:

- December 2015: Yevkurov criticises the response of the Muftiate and the Spiritual Administration of Muslims in the Nasyr-Kort incident, during which Khamkhoev asked Chumakov to resign for the SAM-appointed Imam; Khamkhoev then chides Yevkurov for working with the Salafis (Caucasian Knot, 27/12/2015 (2); Caucasian Knot, 28/12/2015).
- Early March 2016: Yevkurov supports a motion (which ultimately failed) in the Council of Alims calling for Khamkhoev's resignation following the latter's condemnation of Salafism (Caucasian Knot, 18/03/2016).
- Late March 2016: before this council, Yevkurov announces the dissolution of the Muftiate (or, more properly, his attempt at this).
- July 2016: Yevkurov announces his desire to bring religious institutions under greater control of the republican government (Caucasian Knot, 23/07/2016).
- March 2017: The Muftiate, at this point still contesting their dissolution, appoints an Imam to the mosque of Verkhnie Alchuki, to the chagrin of the villagers (Caucasian Knot, 13/03/2017).
- September 2017: Supreme Court rules that the Muftiate's dissolution cannot go ahead, as a “peace deal” negotiated by the Russian Ministry of Justice temporarily brings peace (Caucasian Knot, 18/09/2017).
- February 2018: Khamkhoev threatens Yevkurov with a sharia court over the latter's attempts to control sermons given out in the republic (Caucasian Knot, 16/02/2018).

- May 2018: Khamkhoev excommunicates Yevkurov for allegedly oppressing the SAM (Caucasian Knot, 27/05/2018). Several days later, Yevkurov invites the Mufti to iftar (breaking of the fast of Ramadan) to heal this most recent division (Caucasian Knot, 01/06/2018). It is later reported that Khamkhoev may be using this excommunication to force a replacement of the Head in the upcoming election (Caucasian Knot, 03/06/2018).

These incidents highlight the fractious relationship between the two but they can tell us more about the dynamic than just that. Firstly, there are more traces of Yevkurov's leadership style here, perhaps even hints of it changing briefly. Yevkurov wants to do the job that he was, ultimately, appointed to do; he wants to bring peace to Ingushetia in the name of Russian stability. It is interesting, therefore, that many of his actions here are either reactions to actions the Mufti has taken or to actions against the Mufti from others. His condemnation of Khamkhoev's actions during the Nasyr-Kort incident; his call for Khamkhoev to resign only comes after the Council of Teips and some of the Council of Alims make their own declarations; his dissolution of the Muftiate is a follow-on to this, perhaps fearing the motion may not succeed. Consider the second key aspect in his leadership – his desire to be liked and respected as the Head. Despite his excommunication, calling for Khamkhoev to join him in *iftar*; his desire for religious dialogue. When he does not act in reaction, it is to further his control of Ingushetia and, more broadly, his goal of integrating the Salafis. In contrast, Khamkhoev's actions are more belligerent and unbending. Appointing a new Imam, favourable to him; threatening Yevkurov with a Sharia court (of which his brother is the Qadi (Caucasian Knot, 17/09/2019)), asking for the resignation of Salafist imams. Additionally, when the protests break out, Khamkhoev sides with the demonstrators after seeing another opportunity to oust Yevkurov, though this also, to an extent, isolates him from the wider community of Muftis in the North Caucasus. For his part, Yevkurov stated that

“Imams call on people to go to a rally against changing the Ingush-Chechen border and put pressure on MPs. Religious implications of the situation prevent the

authorities from understanding what to do, he has added... "About 25 Imams call in mosques their believers to join the protest rally," he said." (Caucasian Knot, 04/10/2018).

Given that one of the most regular events during the protests were Namaz prayers, including cross-denominational prayers, he may not be wrong for seeing these undertones. Overall, Yevkurov's religious policy is best described as a failure; an attempt to expand his peace-bringing through the integration of the Salafist community of Ingushetia, failing not because of these Salafis, but because of the opinions of the prestigious Sufi leadership – and his own poor politicking.

What of Kalimatov? Once again, he appears to have learned from his predecessor. The effects of Yevkurov's policies were to empower and embolden all forms of opposition and political organisations in the republic, the religious authorities included. However, what Kalimatov seems to have learned is not to take such a public profile by engaging in the debates as Yevkurov did. From his appointment in 2019 to the end of the research period in late 2021, Kalimatov kept the pressure on the religious authorities and, in particular, the Muftiate. In September 2019, mere months after Kalimatov's appointment, the Supreme Court of Ingushetia upheld the dissolution of the Muftiate (Caucasian Knot, 17/09/2019). The next year, a search at a former Mufti's house prompted an Ingush MP, Zakrij Mamilov, to state the following:

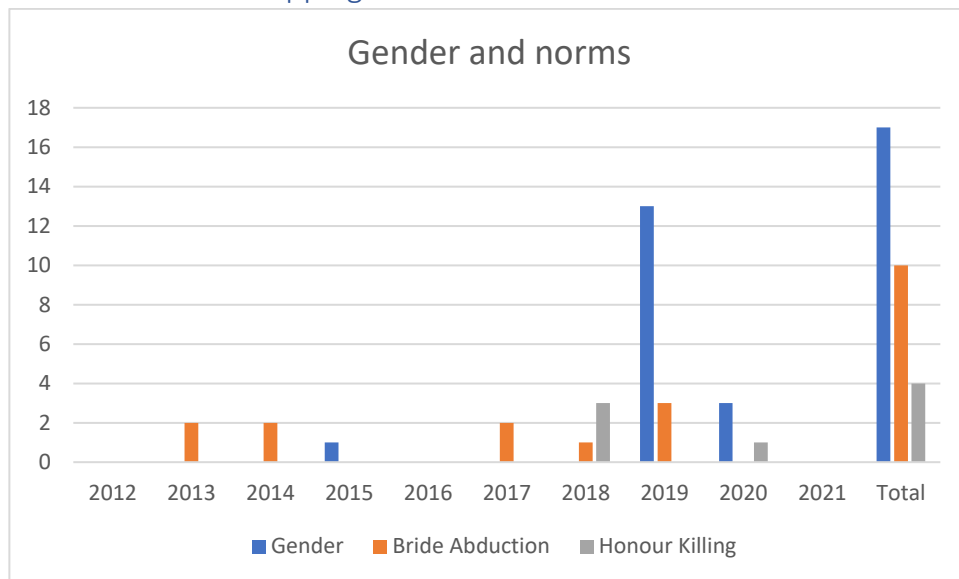
“Law enforcers and those in power still have fresh memories of the autumn events of 2018, when the Muftiate in full force supported the protesters. It's possible that the verdicts [passed to protest leaders] – and, apparently, there will be no acquittals – will trigger a new wave of people's discontent; there may be spontaneous rallies, solo pickets and demonstrations. Authorities are afraid of this; therefore, such preventive measures are being taken. Law enforcers' latest actions against the clergy are aimed at intimidate Imams and the Muftiate, and to make it clear that there are

vacant cells for them in SIZOs (pre-trial prisons) of Nalchik and Vladikavkaz,"”  
(Caucasian Knot, 20/10/2020).

A month after this, the former Imam of Karabulak, Magomed-Sali Daurbekov, was detained (Caucasian Knot, 11/11/2020); the following year, Khamkhoev was fined for actions during the border protests (Caucasian Knot, 30/04/2021), though this was cancelled later on (Caucasian Knot, 15/07/2021). The pressure is clearly being kept on the religious authorities to keep them in check – the relative lack of stories from 2021 is an indicator that this was somewhat successful – but in a much less high-profile way, another example of the authoritarian learning in Ingushetia.

To conclude, the status of religion in Ingushetia is similar to the status of teips. These bodies demonstrate a political relevance unlike that in Chechnya, with both strands being politically and socially relevant, with even the more theoretically state-aligned bodies like the muftiate acting of its own free will as an alternative political force. A much more vibrant religious scene exists, and this, like the other norms in Ingushetia, contributes to the instability of the republic. Was this caused by the instability, however, as part of the seemingly endless cycle of instability and political disputes in the republic? This is harder to say. In a practical sense, the dispute with the Mufti is a result of the instability insofar that it came about as an attempt by Yevkurov to solve the issue of the Salafists being, to put it mildly, politically discontent. Yet this would not adequately explain the actions of the Batakhadzintsys, who, in a similar manner to the blood feuds and the teips, are acting as a destabilising force despite state efforts to repress their strength. They themselves are a cause of at least some of the instability, with their alleged murder of Eldzhakariev, alleged attempted murder of Imam Chumakov and shootout with members attempting to leave. Overall, this is another huge divergence from Chechnya in terms of how these traditional cultural norms and their associated informal institutions operate. One final, major break from Chechnya remains: the prevalence of bridal kidnapping in Ingushetia, and the role of gender in the politics of the republic.

## 7.6 Gender and Bride Kidnapping



Gender related issues were quite muted in Chechnya during the research period, with the main manifestation being honour killings in the republic. In Ingushetia, however, the issues of gender pop up much more often, and while honour killings do make an appearance, there are much more prominent cases of gender-based issues in the republic, from the place of women in Ingush society to traditional cultural norms involving women being much more prominent. Of these, perhaps the most common were issues surrounding the protests – in particular the case of Zarifa Sautieva – and the issue of bride abductions in the Republic.

### 7.6.1 Bride Abductions

Bride abductions are almost certainly what you are thinking of. The practice is controversial – some of the entries into the database, which we will be examining here, are not of bride abductions themselves but of the significant debate surrounding them. It is also very understudied and underresearched; there are some articles on the issue, but one, a roundtable discussion published in the Central Asian Survey, merely notes that reports show it happens in the Caucasus, and that Chechnya has imposed harsher punishments (Werner et al, 2018). Nothing on the actual practice and its effects on society in the Caucasus is to be found in English academic research, though the topic is prevalent in Russian-language

research and news. This stretches back to the Soviet period, with the famous film “*Kidnapping, Caucasian Style!*” covering the subject. This may well be because the far more famous practice of bride kidnapping takes place in Central Asia, with Kyrgyzstan being the most researched and represented case study. The Russian literature covers some of the core aspects of the practice, noting that traditionally there was a difference in highland and lowland versions (Pliev & Babich, 2019). Additional research highlights the causes – lack of money, lack of support from the bride’s family and “lack of time for courtship”, and noting the consequences, namely broken families, horrible effects on the newly kidnapped wives, blood feud, murder and suicide (Makhmudova et al., 2019) There are further findings from the Central Asian case studies which are of use to this research; notably, that since most knowledge of such events spread through word of mouth, there are likely to be unreported instances of the practice (Werner et al, 2018), and that the rise of smartphones and the readily accessible internet they provide has helped reports be picked up early and for activism to be more easily accessible/possible (Dall’Agnola, 2025). As far as the first assumption is concerned, the instances we will examine were all reported to the police, rather than spread through information communication technologies; for the latter assumption, no instances of activism against the practice were found. As will be examined later, this may well be due to the hugely patriarchal nature of civil society in Ingushetia.

For what it’s worth, Jaimoukha does record the bride abduction as a “traditional ceremony” in his handbook, comparing it to “western elopement”; however, the entry seems to me, at least, to have the air and language of someone trying to downplay an unsavoury part of a culture:

“a proper scenario would have a suitor propose to a woman, who would signal her approval by offering him a token of her commitment... however, it was she who set the time of the elopement and wedding date... infrequently, the ‘abduction’ would take place against the will of the woman, but even then the man was obliged to ask her if she had another one in her life. If she answered in the affirmative, the hapless

man was obliged to turn into a match-maker (*zaakhal*) to bring the two lovers together. At the appointed time, the bridegroom-to-be and his merry men... would 'snatch' the woman from her parents' house" (Jaimoukha, 2005, p.126).

Almost every single recorded instance of a bride abduction in the research period is non-consensual, the oldest victim was 24 and the youngest was 12; all but two failed, with the victims returned to their families. The only consensual one involved an Ingush Deputy and still resulted in a fine.

<b>Date of Abduction</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Age of Kidnapper</b>	<b>Age of Victim</b>	<b>Successful?</b>
26/10/2013	Nazran	Unknown; two assailants	21 years old	No; three killed in shootout
04/04/2014	Malgobek	Unknown	Unknown	Assailant fined
11/10/2014	Kartsa, North Ossetia (assailant from Sunzha, Ingushetia)	17 years old	12 years old	No; complaint filed
12/04/2017	Kantyshevo, near Nazran	Unknown; five assailants	19 years old	Yes; unknown if punished
14/12/2018	Malgobek	Unknown	24 years old	No; victim returned home, assailant detained
02/05/2019	Malgobek	Unknown; deputy of the Ingush Parliament	Unknown – the only consensual abduction	Yes; marriage between the two overseen by Teip elders, Deputy fined
01/08/2019	Surkhakhi	Alleged to be a 29-year-old	18 years old	Yes
17/08/2019	Nazran	19 years old	13 years old	No; victim returned

*Table 8.6.1: List of Bridal Abduction cases*

A typical abduction, the one concerning the 24-year-old in Malgobek, goes as follows:

"On December 13, at about 13.00, the suspect, being on the territory of a private household located in the city of Malgobek, kidnapped a 24-year-old local resident, putting her in his car against her will, then illegally held the girl on the territory of the Malgobek district of the republic," ... Her brother reported the abduction of the girl to the duty unit... "The car was detained on the highway between the village of Sagopshi

and the village of Geirbek-Yurt. The police questioned the abducted girl and handed her over to her relatives," the message posted on the agency's website says... the suspect was detained and is in a temporary detention center. The young man kidnapped the girl in order to marry her" (Caucasian Knot, 14/12/2018).

8 attempts over a period of 10 years is a staggering statistic. The women involved all very young, with a wider range of ages for the men; in the first instance, there is bloodshed. All the evidence points towards a level distaste for the practice; it is frequently mentioned that, in 2013, Islamic authorities announced that a fine of 200,000 roubles would now be in place for a bride abduction, with the helpers – identified as “merry men” by Jaimoukha – paying a fine 100,000 roubles (Caucasian Knot, 9/11/2013). It is also noted that if this fails to happen, the men involved face banishment (“excommunication”) from their teip (Caucasian Knot 02/05/2019); this coincides with Sokirianskaia noting that the elders of the Ingush and Chechen teips are still seen as important judges in the teip *kkhels*, or courts, with resolution of bride abductions one of the traditional crimes they oversee. As with other norms – the wedding corteges especially – the horse is replaced with the car, adding a further level of distress. One video from 2009 shows this terrifying reality, as a car pulls up next to a group of women, before a man exits, picks one of them up and puts her in the car, before it drives away; from the moment the car appears to the moment the door is closed, less than 10 seconds pass<sup>28</sup>. Any woman, even, given some of their ages, any girl, at any moment could be kidnapped – while most are found and freed, this is a horrible reality.

Given that we have seen that Yevkurov was wanting to portray Ingushetia as a safe place in the wake of the violence of the insurgency, one would think that this practice would be met with condemnation. However, recall in the section on Yevkurov’s leadership that he, in fact, came out in support of this practice. What was not mentioned in that section was that he is not alone – Magomed Mutsulgov, a human rights activist and the chairman of the NGO “Mashr”, had this to say on the attempt to draft a bill criminalising the practice:

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<sup>28</sup> [Кража невесты в Ингушетии, Магас. 17.11.09](#)

“Of course, I stand against bride abduction... However, I believe it is wrong to sentence men for such long periods of imprisonment for this crime," wrote Magomed Mutsolgov in his post "Criminal prosecution for bride abduction is unacceptable!" He has also reminded that earlier, a man could abduct a bride in order to express respect for her older sisters in case if they were not married and also in order to avoid large pre-wedding expenses and fuss” (Caucasian Knot, 07/05/2017).

These two statements came in response to a call from the speaker of the Ingush parliament for the sentence of bride abduction to be 3 years in prison rather than a fine, making the very reasonable point that:

“Mr Evloev has noted that "often bride abductions lead to bloodshed." According to his version, the current Criminal Code "disregards the social danger of this offence” (Caucasian Knot, 18/04/2017).

The article makes the following report:

“On April 13, the head of the Security Council of Ingushetia has a meeting with Yunus-Bek Evkurov to report about the inquiry into the girl abduction in Kantyshevo. He explained that the girl belongs to the Polonkoev clan, while the abductor-the main suspect – to the clan of Evloevs. Earlier, Yunus-Bek Evkurov himself said about the need to "cool down young men’s ardour.”” (Caucasian Knot, 18/04/2017).

So, one explanation for the speaker’s interest in upping the punishment could be teip affiliation, or it could be, as I believe it to be, that it has more to do with bringing the practice to an end and bringing Ingushetia in line with the rest of the Russian Federation. The only piece of evidence for the former is self-evident; for the latter, there are two key factors, namely the fact that the speaker is part of United Russia, and the example of Chechnya. Kadyrov has proven that it is possible to bring about the ends of norms in a way that benefits a ruling regime – having any rate of bridal abduction is likely a source of embarrassment for the patrimonial network within Ingushetia, adding to the perception of instability, if not

actually contributing to instability in the republic. Yevkurov is flippant on the issue, worrying about the legal issues it will cause, while the parliament wants to toughen restrictions on the practice. In reality, Yevkurov, and even Mutsulgov, are not concerned with the legal issues of harsher punishments – they are fighting for the preservation of a patriarchal tradition. Given the almost complete lack of women’s voices in civil society in Ingushetia at this time, it is unsurprising that this is effectively the end of the debate. It seems that Yevkurov and parts of the opposition are too scared to cross this line, which they may well see, consciously or not, as threatening the patriarchy – despite religious organisations being against this, and teip kkhels “moderating” the practice. Given that there is only one instance of the “proper ritual”, as Jaimoukha puts it, this tradition has been changed into one of outright violence against women, and not a faux-chivalric ritual – if it ever was one to begin with.

#### 7.6.2 Gender, Society and Politics in Ingushetia

When taking a broader look at the role of gender in Ingushetia, and the role of women in society, the picture painted is mixed. As can be seen in the graph at the start of this section, there is not much reported that can be classed as a gender issue save for the bride kidnappings. As is the case with other issues, these too can be divided into pre and post the protests; it is much starker here, however, due to the involvement of some women in the protests garnering a high level of coverage in the press.

The role of women in the unrest is an interesting one that we can glean not just from the articles found but also from the photographs and videos of the protests published elsewhere. The overall picture is mixed – a good example of this is the single article exclusively about women’s roles in the protest that I was able to find on the Caucasian Knot. In the article, their role is described in a way that reflects the patriarchal social structure of the wider North Caucasus:

“In Magas, women are on duty around the clock in the square which hosts a rally against the change in the border with Chechnya. They help to cook food and solve the

everyday issues of the protesters... Starting from October 8, they began to leave for home for a night, except for two volunteers. "Starting from the very first days, I spent nights here until my parents asked me to spend a couple of nights at home. The women help us. At the kitchen, two women are always on duty around the clock, since it is cold at night, and the old people sometimes want to drink hot tea to warm up. There are a lot of women here from 6:00 a.m. till nightfall," said Muslim, a participant of the rally" (Caucasian Knot, 11/10/2018).

That said, the same article has this quote from one of the women taking part in the rally:

"I take part in the action together with my husband. I spent the first day here with my husband and two sons, but when a shooting started, I sent them home. At present, four children stay at home... I've been here since the very first day, since the very morning. I spent the first three days here. Then I left home to change my clothes. And yesterday, I left earlier, since it's physically impossible to stay here without sleep and rest. I had to have a rest," said Isabella, a participant of the action. According to the woman, she wants the republic, her homeland, to stay integral. "I don't want the pieces to be torn from it. It is important for me to ensure the republic exists. If we leave it this way, tomorrow there can be no Ingushetia at all,"" (Caucasian Knot, 11/10/2018).

These two perspectives of the roles of the women are interesting in their difference. The first account makes it seem like the women are in more of a supportive role, as does the rest of the article and the image they use to illustrate it. The participant, Muslim, draws a line between the participants – “us” – and “the women”. Rather than being in the rally with the protesters, the women are “on duty” from a certain time. Meanwhile, the woman interviewed, Isabella, identifies herself as a participant, saying that she takes part with her husband and holds political opinions in line with the broad opinion. The article also identifies herself as a participant. Yet, aside from a description of where and how long her children are,

she does not describe her role in the protests. This is a vague bit of information, unfortunately, though the omission of description of role, in my opinion, may point to her taking a similar role to the women – on the sidelines, rather in the roads and marches. This may not necessarily be as a cook, but the fact that the only description of what she had been doing is of homekeeping, it may not be too far of a stretch. Thus, in both descriptions given to the role of women in this big, political event, the role is by and large “traditional” and patriarchal.

This is seconded by photos from the protests. The below photos, from a Mediazona article on the protests, demonstrate the gender imbalance well.



(Figure 8.6.2.1: Ingush women at a protest in Magas, Ingushetia (Mediazona, 05/10/2018))



(Figure 8.6.2.2: Namaz at the Magas Protest (Mediazona, 05/10/2018))

The larger crowd is exclusively male, the practice of prayer necessitating gender segregation (hence why it is important to refer to the earlier figure, without the religious activity present), with women on the sidelines. Further, the earlier mention of women providing services at the protest does not seem to be present here, though absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Still, these photos, from the earliest part of the protests, clearly show the gender divide within them.

There are also cases of women being persecuted by the government of the republic for taking part in the protests. There are two of importance: Angela Matieva and Zarifa Sautieva. Angela Matieva was employed by *Ingushneft*, an oil company that was at the time a subsidiary of the larger *Rosneft*, dismissed from her position in December 2018 for, she alleged, political reasons as she had attended the protests in October, taking the company to court for illegally firing her (Caucasian Knot, 12/01/2019). The court refused to reinstate her, and she was fined 10,000 roubles for attending a protest before being acquitted “due to the insignificance of her offence” (Caucasian Knot, 06/07/2019). This is a smaller case, to be sure, but does highlight again the role of women in the protests and the general wave of prosecution that follows them. The greater case is that of Zarifa Sautieva, the first woman detained because of participation in the protests. Like Matieva, Sautieva was dismissed from her position – the deputy director of the Memorial Complex of Victims of Repression – for, she and her superior claim, participation in the protests (the museum is under the control of the Ingush Cultural Ministry (Caucasian Knot, 27/01/2019). In July, she was detained – one comment on her arrest is rather telling about the male perspective on all this:

“Now, they detain even women ... It turns out that unhappy law enforcers were beaten not only by elders, but also by women,” Timur Uzhakhov wrote on Facebook” (Caucasian Knot, 14/07/2019).

This comment tells us a lot about the perspective of some – while there is concern that Sautieva has been arrested, the main point is that the law enforcers have gone after women and the elderly, in a sense going against the code that is prevalent in Ingushetia. Others are more sympathetic, including, surprisingly, a council of Ingush imams (Caucasian Knot, 22/07/2019). One of the religious figures,

“Ibragim Batyrov, the imam of the Malgobek mosque, reminded the audience that in Ingushetia, women were detained rarely and only in Soviet times. “We all know that she did not participate in the beating of public officers, but she was taken into custody” (Caucasian Knot, 22/07/2019).

A petition was started, signed by more than 170 people, calling to free her (Caucasian Knot, 28/01/2020); her sisters launched their own, smaller protest calling for her release, during a period of “softening” coercion in Ingushetia, which was broken up by law enforcement (Caucasian Knot, 24/09/2019); recall that teip leaders stated that her arrest was a “slap in the face,” one of their reasons for boycotting the vote in 2020; the list goes on. She has been declared a political prisoner by the European Court of Human Rights, to no avail. Zarifa is part of a group which has been extensively prosecuted and publicised since the protest, including Malsag Uzhakov, a teip leader – in these two, it is easy to see the roots of the earlier comment. It may well be that these two have been chosen to be deliberately made examples of, highlighting that two groups whom Ingush society holds in extreme reverence are not untouchable, in an almost Kadyrovian display of power. Ultimately, though, the authorities cannot control the sympathies of the population, which are directed at the two.

Other instances of gender-related issues are few and far between; recall the earlier graph at the start of this section, highlighting that there were no news stories found relating to gender before 2015, save for bridal kidnapping. Many of the other stories are to do with social-political issues, such as feminism in the North Caucasus, female genital mutilation and a case of honour killing. It is noted in one of these that there have not been any protests or

movements on the scale of the feminist march in Baku in 2019 (Caucasian Knot, 14/03/2019); other articles from other news outlets do note that there are some movements in the North Caucasus, but none specifically mention Ingushetia. One of these articles also notes that the wider feminist movement in Russia has not made ground in the North Caucasus, with one activist attributing it to a lack of understanding from Russian feminists towards the North Caucasus, with another stating that rising Islamism has provided an alternative belonging (Kobzeva, 2023), much like Kaliszewska has found in her study (Kaliszewska, 2023) and has been argued earlier in this chapter. It is also significant that nothing on the scale of the LGBT Purge in Chechnya took place, nor were LGBTQ+ issues found in the research. Women in Ingush society still face major issues, and while we have traced that, as with many things, in 2018/2019 they achieved a relative importance, in terms of the wider attitude, not much changed over the research period.

## 7.7 Forced Apologies and Conclusion

The final practice to discuss is that of forced apologies in Ingushetia. Surprisingly, given the spread of Forced Apologies out from Chechnya that we discussed in the last chapter, there are few apologies in Ingushetia. In the databases on Ingushetia and Forced Apologies, there are nine forced apologies in Ingushetia in the timeframe; in the first month of 2022, just outside of the main period of data collection, there are two other instances. Of the nine in the research timeframe, five are apologies to Kadyrov, with the two instances outside the research timeframe being the same. Two are to do with morally unacceptable behaviour – interestingly, these are two separate apologies for the same offence – one is for plotting a terrorist attack and the last is hard to fit into one category.

The apologies for morally unacceptable behaviour deal with a 2017 incident where a comedy group on the TV channel TNT, based in Moscow, made a joke about Ingush women working as escorts. This led to an almost immediate outrage, with the first apology coming quite quickly after, being linked by the interviewed human rights defenders to the practice in Chechnya

(Caucasian Knot, 13/12/2017). One day later, they apologise again (Caucasian Knot, 14/12/2017). This is similar to a few cases in Chechnya, in which there is an apology made from elsewhere in Russia to the people of Ingushetia, that the apologies are themselves directed to the Ingush people, and finally that it fits in with the rare examples of when apologies have broad public support. These are expected similarities (the final point especially so, since the offices of TNT were nearly stormed by an angry mob) and serve as a good introduction to the issues with apologies in Ingushetia – namely that they are often linked to Chechnya, and that those few that aren't are somewhat weaker. This latter point should be addressed first; in the above examples, the apologies *are* towards the Ingush people, as is standard for the forced apologies, but, as one of the interviewed human rights defenders states:

“Members of the "Comedy Club Production" likely realized by themselves that the joke about an Ingush woman from escort service was inappropriate, but the producers could also recall "a story of public apologies to Ramzan Kadyrov and the Chechen people clearly got through threats," believes Alexander Verkhovsky, the director of the Human Rights Centre "Sova"” (Caucasian Knot, 13/12/2017).

The Ingush government, as has been demonstrated throughout this chapter, does not have the same strength that the Kadyrov regime has. It cannot hope to command the fear that Kadyrov strikes within his own borders and throughout Russia as a whole. Therefore, it is not unexpected that these people, while apologising for similar reasons, are doing this not because they feel that the Ingush government will make them, but because it is known that this happens in the North Caucasus (or, more specifically, Chechnya). Compare this to the other apologies that do not concern Kadyrov: in 2020, a supposed militant confesses to and apologises for planning an attack against a school – in contrast to virtually every apology in Chechnya, his identity is protected. It is perhaps possible to discover *who* the man is, but only through similarities of the story (Caucasian Knot, 05/09/2020). In 2021, a man, the head of a local dance ensemble named Sunzha, apologised for two members of the ensemble's

actions in dressing in Ingush traditional dress and giving food to truck drivers awaiting the re-opening of the blocked Georgian Military Highway (Caucasian Knot, 24/03/2021). This apology, too, came after public outrage, further evidence to the relative weakness of the Ingush government in this matter. The apologies from Ingush to Kadyrov are either connected to the border protests or to the blood feud previously discussed – issues where Kadyrov has the upper hand due to his power over the region and, in the case of the blood feud, where Chechnya arguably has the moral high ground.

Ingushetia is a fascinating case study, so underresearched in English academia. This chapter is but a brief overview of a small yet complex case. We have seen that norms play a much larger, more pronounced role in the republic than in Chechnya; that norms contribute to the instability of the republic, and that they are stronger *because* of the instability. We have seen two successive Ingush governments fail to get a grasp on these issues. We have examined the very controversial issue of what Islam even looks like to Ingush, and how these different strands of the faith both act as “fifth columns” against the republic’s leadership. All of this makes the voice of the Ingush people a lot stronger in comparison to their Chechen cousins; strong enough to topple a regime in protests that stem, ultimately, from issues surrounding land usage and national pride. Finally, we have seen that despite all of this, some of the norms cause active harm to the people of Ingushetia, through routine cycles of blood vengeance to the regular kidnapping of women (a lot of which may not be fully reported). Ingushetia shows the dynamism that exists within an authoritarian regime, in this case at its periphery, as well as, arguably, the plight of regions sandwiched between two authoritarian regimes (Moscow and Grozny). It demonstrates how vibrant politics actually *is* in a system that, stereotypically, invites visions of conformity, and just how traditional cultural norms contribute to this. There is a final aspect to consider; the place of Ingushetia and Chechnya within the wider regime of the Russian Federation.

## 8. Russian Federal Politics and the Vainakh Republics

### 8.1 Introduction

Before moving on to a more in-depth comparison of the authoritarian regime dynamics and the role of traditional cultural norms within the Vainakh republics, there is one final aspect that must be examined; their role in the wider Russian authoritarian system. This presents an interesting opportunity for the research and the main takeaways from the previous chapters. There are, to my mind, three central questions to which answers can now be provided. Firstly, how did the Vainakh republics interact with the Kremlin in the research period, and what are the differences between the two republics? Secondly, how, if at all, do traditional cultural norms interact with these relationships? Finally, in line with the findings in Chapter 7, what else can be gleaned about subnational authoritarian learning?

These questions do provide us with answers. Firstly, Chechnya, unsurprisingly, is afforded a lot more freedom, though acts in line with the Kremlin's objectives; Ingushetia is more reliant on both federal intervention and federal resources, though there are far more appeals to Putin from the people of Ingushetia than in Chechnya. Further, surprisingly, there are far more articles relating to federal actions, i.e. in the category "Federal" in the database, for Chechnya than there are for Ingushetia – 92 compared to 52. Secondly, cultural norms do, to a certain extent interact with these relationships and the interactions between the federal centre and the republics. These come in the major forms of the authoritarian learning seen in Chapter 7 and in how the Kremlin manages Islam and associated security risks throughout Russia. There are also other, minor factors such as the appeals from Ingushetia and to whom the Kremlin listens to and affords protection from organisations such as the FSB. Finally, unfortunately, there is little else to be gleaned for what we can learn about subnational authoritarian learning – though, as seen in the last chapter, the new incumbent in Ingushetia can be seen learning from his predecessor(s) and being more in line with the Kremlin's message.

This chapter will examine the above points in detail before drawing to a general conclusion concerning the Kremlin's role and status in the North Caucasus. Firstly, we will examine the evidence concerning the Kremlin and the Russian Federal Government to build a more nuanced presentation of how these two republics interact with these centres of power. This will be done by looking at the two case studies individually before looking at the impact of the border disagreements on these relationships. Following this, the most important norm in terms of Kremlin interaction – Islam – will be examined, the relationship with the topic of Traditional Islam. Finally, we will conclude by looking at what we can learn about subnational authoritarianism from these two cases, and their place in this literature.

## 8.2 Kremlin involvement in Chechnya and Ingushetia – the findings

The findings concerning the federal involvement in Chechnya and Ingushetia, when viewed in a more abstract way as above, seem to at first contradict my earlier statements about the Kremlin being much more involved in the running of Ingushetia than Chechnya. Since there's a lot more stories involving federal Russian politics in Chechnya (92 in total) than in Ingushetia (52), this at first looks like a basic error. However, the difference is best displayed with the other two categories noted for their relevance in this category, foreign policy and appeals to Putin. These two categories are effectively mutually exclusive – foreign policy is the purview of Chechnya, appeals to Putin are that of Ingushetia. Further, once the federal category is examined, there is a lot more diversity for the category in Chechnya than Ingushetia. Chechnya, then, seems the best place to start.

### 8.2.1 Chechnya

Chechnya's experience of the federal centre is a strange mixture. At the core of the analysis are two fundamental truths. Firstly, that Kadyrov is through and through a Russian and Putinist loyalist. Secondly, Kadyrov is an active and controversial figure in federal Russian politics. There are interactions between the Kremlin and Kadyrov that one might expect, including discussions over the budget allocation for Chechnya, on two occasions becoming

disputes with the Ministry of Finance – crucially never with Putin, however (Caucasian Knot, 01/11/2016; Caucasian Knot, 27/09/2017). When dealing with Putin, Kadyrov often praises his own progress to the Russian president, playing up his achievements and appealing to Putin personally:

“At the meeting with the Russian President, Ramzan Kadyrov has reported to Vladimir Putin on the increase in the number of milk cows in Chechnya, the growth of teachers' salaries, and the reduction in unemployment. The President has expressed interest in Ramzan Kadyrov's proposal to attend training of athletes of the "Edelweiss" Judo Club in Grozny” (Caucasian Knot, 26/08/2016).

These are little things but these are the sort of things that Kadyrov cares about and, given the dire state of the economy for the average Chechen as discussed earlier. The budget is a key concern for the legitimacy of Kadyrov. As the latter is quoted as saying by one of the articles:

“The budget model offered to us by the federal centre is not acceptable for the Chechen Republic. We're just getting on our feet; the republic has plenty of problems. Chechnya is among the only two regions, where pupils go to schools in three shifts. We have restored the facilities, but now the most complicated period begins: to buy equipment and train professionals. We need to advance in main areas of economy” (Caucasian Knot, 01/11/2016).

This highlights once again some priorities of Kadyrov in terms of what he wants from his relationship with the Kremlin. The Kadyrov regime needs funds, both to finance the economy and his lifestyle/what can be broadly labelled as “ruling expenses,” i.e. rewards to subordinates, payment for his soldiers, etc (something which he probably can manage by himself but is more profitable for him if he gets more money from up the tree). There is no reason to doubt his sincerity in wanting to develop Chechnya with federal funds since this is a mutually beneficial outcome for him and Putin's government. Kadyrov gets money invested into his regime from the Kremlin, he uses that money to develop – and securitise – Chechnya,

he builds a stronger economic base to contribute to the wider federal Russian economy and Putin gets a secure Chechnya as a way of legitimising himself. Further to this, Kadyrov gets to build his own legitimacy further from this. An authoritarian version of the virtuous economic cycle. Yet what is unique about Kadyrov in comparison to other regional Heads – and especially both in Ingushetia during the research period – is the combativeness of his words.

This is something that does not even end with financial matters, as Kadyrov is also a useful tool for the Kremlin on the foreign stage yet has his own clearly set beliefs that do not always match to official Kremlin policy. On the first point, Kadyrov makes frequent trips to the Middle East, particularly the Gulf States (Caucasian Knot, 01/11/2019). Here, he represents not just his own interests but the wider interests of the Russian Federation, leveraging the common faith and, especially in the cases of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, common interests and personalities (sports, in particular the immensely popular MMA, and the associated “sports-washing” these regimes participate in is a big part of this). Given Russian strategic interests in the region both before and during the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, this not only suggests a great deal of confidence but a great deal of importance for Kadyrov in this role. It is also worth noting that this transcends sectarian boundaries, with Kadyrov hosting Iranian delegates – this is not on the same scale as his visits to the Gulf States, but at a time when a “cold war” between Sunni Gulf States and Shiite Iran was at its height. On the other hand, Kadyrov has disagreed with/sought to influence Russia’s foreign policy stances on issues concerning Islam. The most notable instance of this concerns the Rohingya genocide in Myanmar during 2017. During this crisis, Kadyrov posted a video to his social media: in this video,

“Ramzan Kadyrov called the events in Myanmar "the genocide of Muslims" and reported getting "a lot of letters" asking him to "send troops" to the country. According to Ramzan Kadyrov, if he could, he would "strike with a nuclear weapon" the people who "kill children, women, and old people." The leader of Chechnya has called the organizers of the tragic events in Myanmar "shaitans" (devils). He has

noted if Russia supports them, then he will oppose the position of Russia” (Caucasian Knot, 04/09/2017).

At the same time, Kadyrov organised a rally in Grozny in support of the Rohingya: according to his government, 1.1 million people attended the rally, out of Chechnya’s population of 1.4 million at the time (Caucasian Knot, 05/09/2017). Organising rallies is something that Kadyrov has made into an art form – he somewhat frequently organises pro-Putin/pro-Russian rallies in Grozny, ranging from national day rallies, election rallies and rallies in support of Putin’s goals and actions, most prominently in support of the annexation of Crimea (Caucasian Knot, 19/03/2015). The latter form a backbone of showing Putin that he is on side when it comes to certain issues and can independently manufacture public consent to his actions: the former is, therefore, the opposite. Given that Putin had not yet made a public stance on the Rohingya genocide at that point, this is also an attempt to “create” foreign policy objectives for Putin, or at the very least make it clear what the Chechen government wants to be a foreign policy objective.

However, the latter does hint at a way in which Kadyrov is indispensable to Putin and his government: manufacturing support, or at least the ever-critical appearance of public support. The rallies above are usually accused of such manufacturing – the Crimean rally referred to earlier is one such case:

“Already two days before the rally, we were informed that at five o'clock in the evening on March 18 we should go and take part in a rally in support of Russia's incorporation of the Crimea. Yesterday, on March 18, by the end of the working day, we were given a variety of posters and banners, portraits of Putin and Kadyrov and brought to the city centre," Ramzan I, an employee of one of republic's institutions, told the "Caucasian Knot" correspondent. "We were at the rally in honour of the anniversary of the annexation of the Crimea together with our teachers and other leaders. As usual, all were warned that the participation in the rally is mandatory..."

said Adam, a university student from Grozny. However, as he noted, the supervision over the participation in the rally was "not as strong as before." "Several of my friends went home under various pretexts,"" (Caucasian Knot, 18/03/2015).

This is the issue with rallies; while they might be very visible displays of loyalty to the Kremlin from Kadyrov, and at least the superficial support of the Chechen people, that superficiality is easily shattered by reports like this. This is not just limited to Chechnya; there have been some claims about a similar manufactured-ness in some of the rallies in support of the 2022 invasion. This brings us to more subtle ways that Kadyrov maintains the Russian status quo. In 2018, it was reported that out of 8 candidates in the Presidential election, only Putin had a campaign office in the republic, with one resident summarising the feelings around this:

“"Ordinary people express no particular interest in the upcoming election. The preferences of our leaders and officials are well known to everybody, and that is why people consider the result of this election to be a predetermined conclusion. The fact that we have only an office of candidate Putin in our republic, while there is still no visual agitation of at least one of the seven other candidates, already speaks a lot," said local resident Umar.” (Caucasian Knot, 02/03/2018).

In the same article, the Caucasian states that they interviewed 25 people on this topic:

“Out of 25 respondents interviewed by the "Caucasian Knot" in Grozny, 13 people said that the result of the upcoming election "is already known," five did not rule out the second round of the voting, and eight preferred not to comment on the situation” (Caucasian Knot, 02/03/2018).

Later that year, the Chechen parliament voted in favour of granting additional terms for Putin (Caucasian Knot, 10/05/2018). The results of such actions, the high turnouts at rigged elections and displays of “support” for Putin speak for themselves: below is a chart, from 2000 to 2024, showing the result for the incumbent Russian President in each election cycle in the North Caucasus.

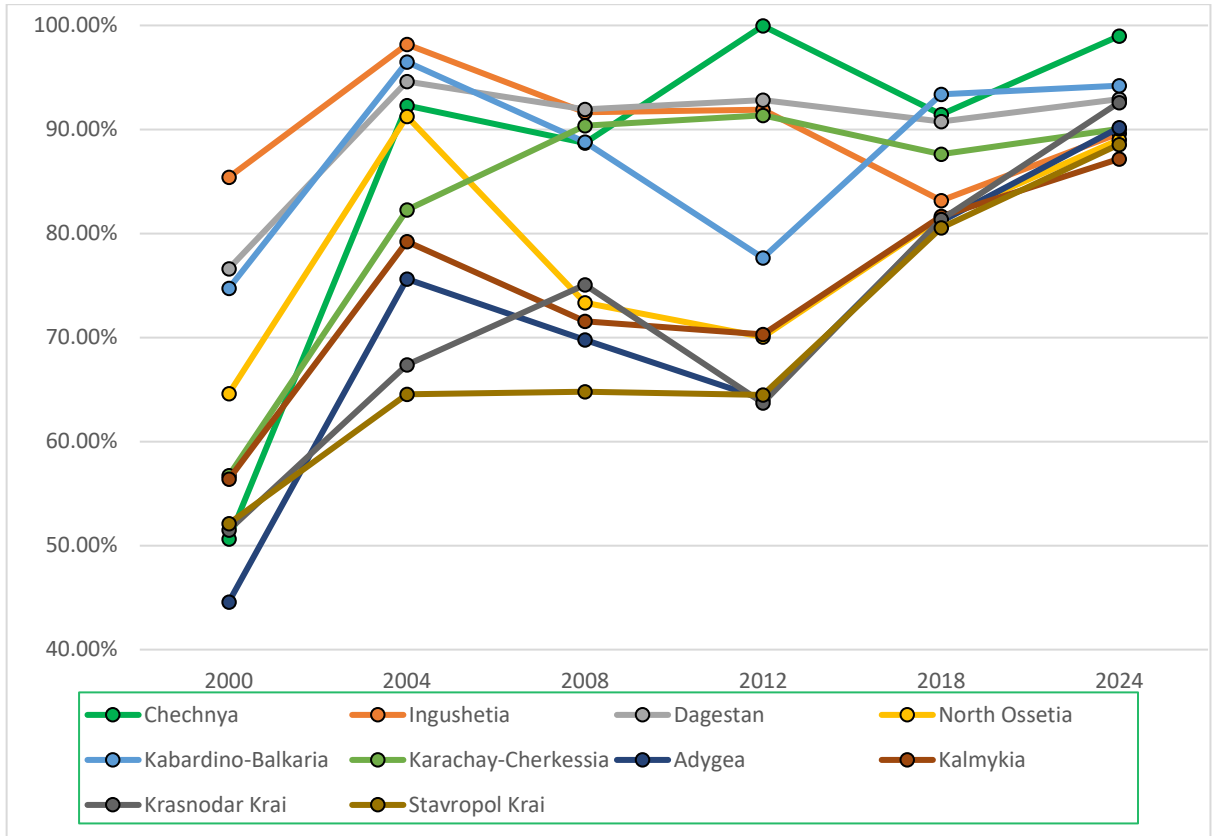
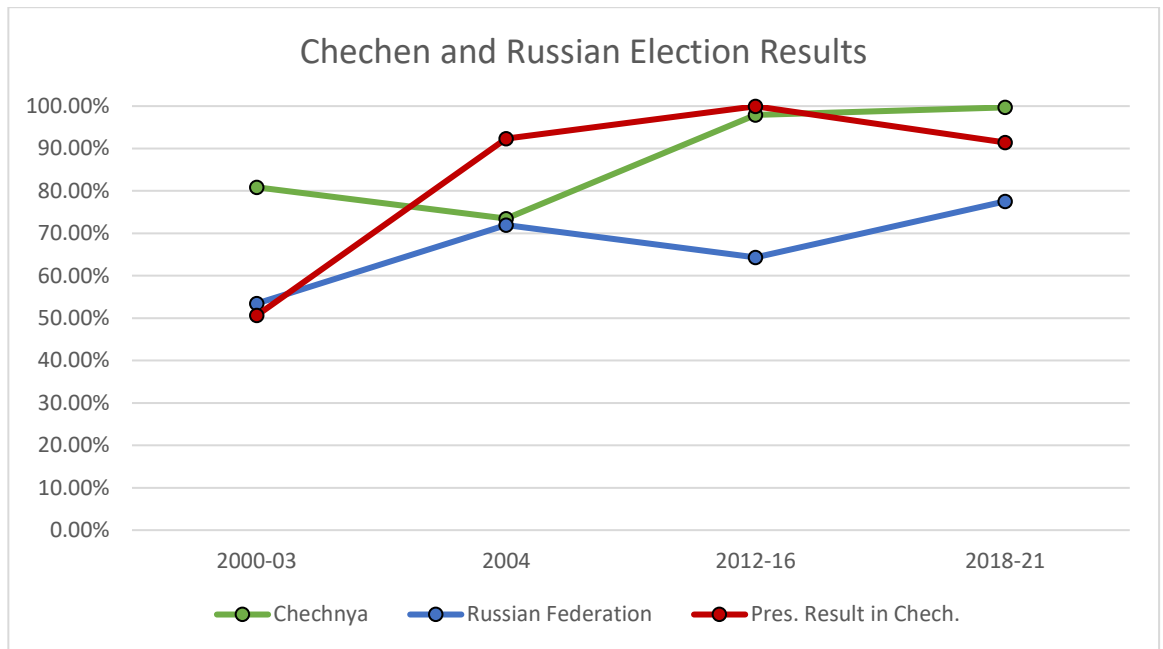


Figure 9.2.1: Results for the incumbent/incumbent endorsed President of the Russian Federation in the North Caucasus, 2000-2024. Source: Central Electoral Commission of the Russian Federation

As well as, perhaps, proving the point of the 13 aforementioned Chechens, this shows that during Putin’s latest elections, Chechnya has registered the highest percentage of votes for the president two out of three elections: the only one where this was not the case was 2018, where it was second; the highest result, in 2024, was 98.99% of the vote in Chechnya. There is, however, one person who does consistently better in elections in Chechnya: Kadyrov, as the next chart demonstrates.



*Figure 9.2.2: Results for the incumbent/incumbent endorsed candidates for the Chechen and Russian executive leadership through similarly timed election cycles, 2000-2021. Source: Central Electoral Commission of the Russian Federation.*

While Putin’s highest result in Chechnya might be a mere 98.99% of the vote, Kadyrov has registered 99.70% of the vote. These are ridiculous results, let us make no pretences otherwise but they are illustrative nonetheless. Firstly, as explored in the earlier literature review focusing on authoritarian political studies, elections are about displaying the strength of a patrimonial network (Hale, 2015). Kadyrov is part of the Russian patrimonial network – he is part of the flexing-of-power that Putin needs to do to show the strength of his patrimonial network. Ballot-box stuffing is a crucial, yet easy way to do this. It involves the different levels of the local patrimonial network, gets a good result for the leader (and a sense of legitimacy), and is relatively easy to pull off and get away with (especially when many people are already resigned to the result or are too scared to give a comment on it). Given that getting good results is part of getting rewards from the patrimonial centre, and bearing in mind his close friendship with Putin, Kadyrov is very keen to deliver the best results – hence why the Chechen government was keen to make sure only one candidate was present in the republic during the 2018 election cycle. However, Kadyrov also wants to flex his patrimonial power,

and is given the unique ability to do this as the last Russian republic with elections. It is a minor point – to reiterate, neither Putin or Kadyrov were ever going to *lose* these elections - but the slight difference between Kadyrov and Putin’s polling in Chechnya is nonetheless important, a minor signal to the Russian centre that Kadyrov’s network is reliable and strong. Further, Kadyrov also strikes out against other parts of the wider network – unsurprisingly, Zhirinovskiy’s blatant racist views earn him the ire of Kadyrov, with the Chechen parliament demanding that he lose his mandate in the State Duma and Kadyrov demanding an apology from him seven years later for similar reasons (Caucasian Knot, 28/10/2013; Caucasian Knot, 31/10/2020).

How and why does Kadyrov get away with the combative language seen at various points above? There are some golden rules and common understandings going into this, it would seem.

1. Kadyrov can never directly criticise Putin. None of the angered statements and demands from Kadyrov are aimed directly at Putin, but rather his ministers and others in the Russian Patrimonial network. *Tsar khoroshiy, Boyare plokhie*.
2. Kadyrov must provide a crucial link in the chain of the legitimisation of Putin’s regime. Bringing Russian peace to the North Caucasus was described by Putin as his historic mission – before Ukraine took precedence – and as such, guaranteeing Chechen “support”, or at least frightened compliance, for Russia’s goals acts as a crucial part of Putin’s legitimacy.
3. Kadyrov has a certain power over Russian foreign policy, especially when it comes to the Muslim world. Disagreeing with potential Russian policy is permitted, so long as there is compliance with the rest of Putin’s foreign policy goals.
4. Kadyrov is not above punishment, Putin might need him but he is not the most valuable part of the network. While this punishment is much, much lighter, Putin can keep Kadyrov in check.

There is something that should be obvious by now when discussing this – not much of this relates to federal involvement in Chechnya. So long as Kadyrov stays loyal and ensures the continued control of Chechnya, the Kremlin is content to let him continue.

Kadyrov has also sought to integrate as much of his own network into the higher echelons of the Russian patrimonial network as he can. Adam Delimkhanov is perhaps the most obvious example, but in terms of closeness to Putin, there is Abubakar Edelgeriev, once head of the Chechen government, who was appointed as an adviser to the Russian president in 2018 (Caucasian Knot, 22/06/2018). The Kremlin has also lent its support and its silence to certain actions of Kadyrov's over the years, from not reacting to Kadyrov's threats to blogger Tumso Abdurrakhmanov (Caucasian Knot, 16/03/2019) to helping build up Kadyrov's personality cult, awarding him the Hero of Russia medal (Caucasian Knot, 11/12/2019) and renaming Grozny Airport after Akhmat Kadyrov (Caucasian Knot, 23/08/2021). A more significant event was when the athlete Murad Amiriev, who claimed he had been tortured by the Kadyrov regime and turned into a minor opposition figure, was arrested and sent to Kadyrov (Caucasian Knot, 09/06/2017). This is significant in how it works – it is less like a government acting with a local governor and much, much more like how two authoritarian states act in the Authoritarian International. Another key event comes towards the end of the research period – in 2021, Kadyrov threatens that he will annex more Ingush land with the backing of the Kremlin, though nothing comes of this (Caucasian Knot, 25/11/2021). This is a flexing of power that no other regions in Russia have effective access to; Kadyrov not only has his place in the patrimonial network, he claims to have Putin's express backing in his actions against other federal subjects. Given that he was able to annex part of Ingushetia with federal approval in 2018, he may well be correct in his 2021 claim. However, there are instances of the Kremlin, and of Putin, sending negative signals to Kadyrov as well. The only instance I could find in the research period of a disagreement directly involving Putin was when Putin disagreed that the new Shali Mosque – a pet project of Kadyrov's – was the most beautiful in the world (Caucasian Knot, 01/09/2019). Putin instead claimed this title belonged to the St.

Petersburg Mosque, and Kadyrov did not argue. This is a minor event, but it does show that Putin does not always support Kadyrov's growing of his personality cult. Similar events involve the wider Russian patrimonial network – Gazprom refuses to write off Chechen debt (Caucasian Knot, 24/01/2019), the head of the Chechen branch of *Sberbank* is put on the federal wanted list (Caucasian Knot, 03/07/2017) and in one instance the coercive capabilities of Stavropol Krai, are used against Chechen dissidents within Chechnya, to Kadyrov's chagrin (Caucasian Knot, 23/07/2015). However, even this shows the growth of Kadyrov's power – there are no other instances against Kadyrov, and even those later incidents from 2017 onwards focus more on those below Kadyrov. It seems to be another instance of *Tsar Khoroshi, Boyare Plokhi* – but applying to Kadyrov instead of Putin.

What of norms and federal involvement in the republic? While these will be discussed at length in a later section, it is worth making a note of them here. Religion is the main norm that appears in relation to the Kremlin-Grozny relationship. When Crimea was annexed into the Russian Federation, religious leaders from the Tatar community toured the North Caucasus, including Chechnya, to “learn” how religion in public life works in Putin's Russia (Caucasian Knot, 26/08/2014). Kadyrov, like Chumakov in the previous chapter, appeals against the labelling of certain verses of the Qu'ran as extremist in a Russian court (Caucasian Knot, 09/09/2015). A quite interesting story emerged after many Russian Islamic figures – in particular the Russian Council of Muftis – condemned the resolution of a Chechen Sufi conference which issued a *fatwa* proclaiming that only followers of Sufism were true Muslims (Caucasian Knot, 28/09/2016). This is something we will explore later, as this shows the struggle between Kadyrov making himself Islamic Russia's representative, and the fact that Islam in Russia, and even Putin himself, have other ideas of who/what this should look like. Aside from that, only the blood feud declarations make an appearance as norms involved with Kadyrov's federal relationship with Putin.

### 8.2.2 Ingushetia

Ingushetia is once again rather different to Chechnya when it comes to the involvement of federal Russia. While there are not as many instances of the category as Chechnya, these instances are much more about the Kremlin's involvement in the governance of Ingushetia. This is somewhat expected; as opposed to Chechnya, Ingushetia has had to deal with a much more recent insurgency, diminished resources, a lack of internal coercive capabilities and a much less secure leadership. This all results in, and is, occasionally, caused by increased Russian involvement in this republic. Putin's first historical mission was to bring peace to the North Caucasus – Ingushetia, for a long time, represented a great challenge to this, eventually not just through the insurgency but through the discontent brought about by the border protests.

It is easiest to start with coercive capabilities from the Kremlin in Ingushetia. The Russian military and National Guard are the forces behind the numerous "Special Operations" in the republic, but the Kremlin's involvement in this part of governance goes beyond this. For starters, the FSB have been involved in the prevention of attacks in Ingushetia. One incident is reported in April 2018, as part of wider anti-terror efforts across Russia:

"In February, in the Nazran District of the Republic of Ingushetia, two militants from among the supporters of the international terrorist organization 'Islamic State'... were killed. They were plotting a terror act at one of the polling stations during the Russian presidential election.... The FSB Director has also added that since early 2018, "the activities of 12 hidden terrorist units have been suppressed... In total, since early 2018, 189 militants and their accomplices were detained and 15 others were neutralized"" (Caucasian Knot, 10/04/2018).

There was a Counter Terrorist Operation (CTO) reported in February that year, on the 10th. The mention of the Islamic State grounds this neatly – consider the former discussions about Salafism in the last two chapters. While some Salafis are willing to work with the Russian

state, others are not – and the Russian state clearly has no qualms about going over the heads and plans of its regional leaders to neutralise such a threat. However, there are also instances such as that in 2017 where the FSB prevents attacks against Salafi public figures, in this case Imam Khamzat Chumakov (RFE/RL, 18/10/2017). This is particularly strange when paired with the later coercive and punishment efforts against Chumakov and other Salafist preachers that we discussed in the last chapter. This is a carry-on of the effects from Yevkurov's attempts to integrate those Salafis that Yevkurov has deemed peaceful, and while it may well be just a case of the FSB doing their supposed job, it is telling that other acts are, apparently, unpreventable. The fact that this policy could change with the wind created an unstable atmosphere for people like Chumakov – after all, a year before the prevention of this attack, Chumakov was prevented from leaving Russia (Caucasian Knot, 08/08/2016).

Yevkurov, like Kadyrov, also engages in federal politics – however, in a greatly different way. While Kadyrov is an active participant in federal politics, Yevkurov seems to lose his acumen for politics that he has in Ingush politics when dealing with the Kremlin, being much more passive. Early on, Yevkurov is named by an independent, all-Russian institution as the third most open regional governor in the country (Caucasian Knot, 10/01/2012) – which, it does need to be said, is not something we can just write off. This is well before the closing of Russian society, which begins to alter during Putin's third term as President, and civil society in Russia still existed in a meaningful way. That such an institute names Yevkurov as one of the most open heads is certainly an achievement for him. Later on, Yevkurov turns down a mandate for the Duma from electoral lists, being one of United Russia's candidates for a Duma MP for Ingushetia, choosing to stay on as the head of Ingushetia (Caucasian Knot, 21/09/2016) - endorsed by the party in both the earlier and next cycles of regional governor appointments (Caucasian Knot, 27/06/2016; Caucasian Knot, 17/08/2018). The latter comes amid the growing domestic issues for Yevkurov that ultimately fuel the border protests and lead to his fall – clearly, he had the backing of the Kremlin throughout his career and, if the reports that the border changes had been a goal for a while before their eventual reveal are to

be believed, this may be an implicit backing of these. Other than that, Yevkurov's involvement in federal politics, at least prior to his resignation, is rather minimal; Kalimatov's is, apart from his appointment, even lesser. Furthermore, there is nothing like the responsibility shown to Chechnya, no instances of training, of a regional leadership role in any field.

What there is a lot of, however, is political engagement from Ingush residents with the federal centre, particularly in the form of appeals to Putin. Appeals to Putin occur throughout the research period, from a range of sources from individuals, NGOs and petitions – the largest of which reaches 50,000 people. The first occurs in 2013, with the Mekhk Kkhel organising a petition against the abolition of gubernatorial elections off the back of the wider Russian protests after the 2012 election:

“According to the activists, the people of Ingushetia "treat the outcome of the elections as invalid; and the 'elected' deputies as illegitimate," says the appeal of February 3 posted on the website of the movement. Because of the corruption, rampant in Ingushetia, the abolition of direct elections would harm the republic and prevent the holding of democratic processes, said Idris Abadiev, the chairman of the regional social movement "Mekhk-Kkhel"” (Caucasian Knot, 07/02/2013).

That same year, an NGO, the All-Ingush Civic Council, appeals to Putin for a reaction to a statement by the then-PM, Dmitry Medvedev, about the unsuitability of certain regions for elections (Caucasian Knot, 23/08/2013). While the petitions are classed as appeals to Putin, this is the first instance of a much more direct appeal to the Russian president. During the Nasyr-Kort standoff, Khamzat Chumakov appeals to Putin for protection and to punish those he sees as causing the violence (Caucasian Knot, 06/06/2015). Later, a group of Ingush religious figures appeal to Putin to condemn the words of the Mufti of Chechnya:

“"Salakh Mezhiev, Mufti of the Chechen Republic, has repeatedly voiced sharp insults concerning spiritual leaders Isa Tsechoev and Khamzat Chumakov, well-

known and respected by tens of thousands of people in Ingushetia and beyond, as well as their followers. He called them 'dogs', 'cowards', 'extremists', etc. Mezhiiev completely groundlessly continues to accuse these theologians and their followers of extremism and involvement in terrorist organizations," states the appeal" (Caucasian Knot, 04/07/2016).

These appeals are interesting in their relation to Islam, more specifically Salafism; we have discussed at length the stories these relate to in the previous chapter. They are both different phases of the same issue, though slightly in reverse – the latter appeal relates to the language levelled towards the Salafis, while the former, appealing for protection, is the result of said language. What's more, the second is an instance of Chechen meddling in the politics of Ingushetia, where, thanks to Yevkurov's policies, working with the more "peaceful" Salafis means that such rhetoric can be incredibly dangerous to this project of peacebuilding.

While we examine these in a little more detail later, we must now turn to the most common subject of appeals: the border protests. We will stay away from the issue at large for the time being, just focusing on the appeals based around it. The first of these comes relatively early on, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of October 2018. The following quote is lengthy, but in its topic, how it approaches the appeal and what the authors are trying to achieve, and who they are, make this a very interesting. It is simultaneously very par for the course, as far as the appeals go, while also rather different – this all makes it a very good general example:

"The appeal of the organizing committee of the rally to Vladimir Putin was posted on October 12 by Magomed Mutsolgov, an Ingush human rights defender and a blogger of the "Caucasian Knot". The agreement of Kadyrov with Evkurov, "prepared secretly from the people," provides for the transfer of several dozen hectares of the territory of Ingushetia to the jurisdiction of Chechnya, the authors of the appeal point out. The Ingush MPs declared falsification of the outcomes of voting for the approval of the agreement, says the appeal. According to the Russian Constitution, the Constitution

of Ingushetia and the republic's laws, "the issue of changing borders and territories can be resolved exclusively by a nationwide referendum," the appeal posted by Magomed Mutsolgov has emphasized. According to the organizers of the rally, the republic's leadership is putting pressure on the MPs, who try to repeal the law adopted through falsification. "According to MPs, threats, blackmail and bribery are used," the appeal says. Speaking on behalf of the residents of Ingushetia who gathered at the rally in Magas, the authors of the appeal ask Putin to "cancel the unconstitutional and illegal agreement and consider the responsibility of Yunus-Bek Evkurov, the head of the Republic of Ingushetia." (Caucasian Knot, 18/10/2018).

Like most appeals, there is a call to consider the constitutions of both Ingushetia and the Russian Federation, pointing out the illegality of it and providing the Kremlin an out of sorts, showing a solution for the problem rather than just the problem itself. It establishes a wider net of appellants, being a message relayed by a select few on behalf of a great many; this and the prior point give the appeal a sense of great legitimacy, both legally and arguably morally. It is different to other appeals in how it concludes – while it shows the illegal actions taken towards MPs, again standard for an appeal, the call for Putin to “consider the responsibility of Yunus-Bek Yevkurov” is somewhat extraordinary. Compare this with the previous appeals. The most recent one examined before this does not ask for much except an inferred chastisement of the Mufti of Chechnya; the one we examined before that, however, was much more explicit and took aim at the very system that got Putin where he was (yet still appealing to him). This makes this appeal a great example – it is a good mixture of a more “societal” appeal and an appeal from the opposition. Following on from this, there was an appeal in the form of a petition, signed by over 51,000 people from Ingushetia (Caucasian Knot, 19/01/2019). Later, the Council of Teips sent an appeal to Putin over the border issue, while also complaining about the Prigorodny district of North Ossetia, which many Ingush consider rightful Ingush land; part of their appeal reads:

“The republic is literally flooded with law enforcers; military vehicles can be seen in the streets of the cities ... We demand to radically revise the national policy towards the Ingush people," the website of the Council of Teips reports” (Caucasian Knot, 03/05/2019).

The results of these should be obvious – nothing happened to change the border, and the work of the Council of Teips was suspended by the Russian Federation’s own ministries (Caucasian Knot, 30/05/2019). Recall that the co-Chair of the Council of Teips, Akhmed Pogorov, was arrested as part of this crackdown: all of this did not stop his father from appealing personally to Putin.

“Vladimir Vladimirovich, at present, more than 30 detainees are being kept at SIZO (pre-trial prison), in the cities of Nalchik and in Vladikavkaz," says Sarazhudin Pogorov. He notes that the activists are "not guilty of anything." The Elder asks Vladimir Putin if he possesses the information about what "is happening in the republic." The father of Akhmed Pogorov also states that his son, an "honest officer," has been put on the federal wanted list. "Please consider [my appeal] and respond to it," says Sarazhudin Pogorov” (Caucasian Knot, 20/06/2019 (1)).

Later, on the same day, other relatives of detained activists made their own appeal:

“We are mothers, wives, and close relatives of the political prisoners who are being [unreasonably] kept in custody because they defended by peaceful means the legal rights and freedoms of the Ingush people. Our relatives and friends, about 30 people, who were not hiding anywhere and were staying at home, were arrested with the use of armoured vehicles and masked law enforcers, who frightened us and our young children. <...> Vladimir Vladimirovich, please take the situation in Ingushetia under your personal control and set free our [unjustifiably] detained fathers, sons, brothers, and husbands," state the female relatives of the Ingush activists in their video appeal. (Caucasian Knot, 20/06/2019 (2)).

These appeals are, in a sense, the anti-apology. Rather than being forced to apologise for their behaviour, or to condemn their relatives, as we have seen happen in Chechnya, these people are, by all appearances, appealing out of desperation, with a clear intent and sincerity. There is, to my mind, no reason to doubt their motives here; the language of these more personal appeals is too emotive to be anything else than worried relatives asking for mercy.

There are other appeals after these, following much the same pattern as established – political appeals and appeals for fair treatment/release of imprisoned relatives. As far as I have been able to tell, they were not listened to – unless you want to include Yevkurov’s resignation as a late reaction to the appeals, and not a case of network reshuffling. The appeal calling for Yevkurov’s resignation had a decision postponed for a month in late January (Caucasian Knot, 02/02/2019); the next story on this appears as Yevkurov is dismissed and with Kalimatov’s appointment (Caucasian Knot, 27/06/2019). Once again with Ingushetia, in the same way as other trends go, Kalimatov goes quiet in comparison to Yevkurov. While Yevkurov’s involvement with the federal politics of Russia was already minimal, Kalimatov’s is even lesser. During Kalimatov’s rule, the Kremlin is the main driver of federal interaction, and seems to be skipping the middleman of Kalimatov and the Ingush government; the FSB reports another prevented terror attack (Caucasian Knot, 06/09/2021), and the Ministry of Justice spurs on another effort to try and suppress the Council of Teips (Caucasian Knot, 08/11/2019).

### 8.2.3 Border Issues, Ethnic Tensions and the North Caucasus

A final aspect of federal politics to cover is how these two republics interact with each other, how they interact with other republics in the region and how the Kremlin fits into these considerations.

The 2018-2019 protests and border issues are the most obvious place to start. The first comment from the Kremlin on the issues comes on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October – not from Putin, but his press secretary, Dmitry Peskov:

“When asked whether the Kremlin is worried about the situation there, where the protest has been on for several days, and whether the Kremlin will somehow intervene in the situation, Mr Peskov replied: "We certainly are carefully monitoring the developments and receive information from the republic's leadership. So far, the work is being done by the republic's leadership... The main point for us is that everything remains within the constitutional field and within the bounds of the law," Dmitry Peskov told reporters, while refusing to talk about the Kremlin's position regarding the Chechen-Ingush border” (Caucasian Knot, 08/10/2018).

The Caucasian Knot summarises this response quite well in its headline for this event – the Kremlin here is disavowing any responsibility for the issue. In fairness, this is a reasonable comment – the issue was purely down to negotiations between Yevkurov and Kadyrov. The first comments from Putin himself arrive several days later, though they are not direct; they come from Yevkurov, reporting on a call shared between the two:

“According to Evkurov, Putin also asked about "the option of taking people away from the squares." The president recommended not to take "any force actions" and "talk to people by democratic methods,"” (Caucasian Knot, 15/10/2018).

Putin, therefore, removed himself from being blamed for both the crisis and any methods Yevkurov and Kadyrov may have used to stop it. It is important to note that while this was not, on the surface, a conflict between two of his subordinates in the patrimonial network, he was clearly concerned about the perception of the issue as such. As part of this, the Kremlin took an aloof stance on the issue, with the message being, as seen above, that this was a local issue. The only actions from the federal centre to alleviate tensions in the protests come from the Constitutional Court, following a request from Yevkurov after the Ingush

Constitutional Court declared the agreement illegal (Caucasian Knot, 15/11/2018). In a hearing scheduled for November the 27<sup>th</sup>, Yevkurov and Kadyrov, as well as other figures from their respective governments, were summoned (Caucasian Knot, 16/11/2018). Before the session, a counter-terrorist operation was conducted on the Ingush side of the border, preventing a symbolic *Subbotnik* from taking place: while noted opposition figures associated the operation with the Subbotnik, veterans of the counter-terror units were sceptical:

“There is some tension in connection with the signing of the border agreement. But no one should say that now the federal centre or the local authorities are allegedly trying to carry out some operations in connection with the problem of the borders. The operations of the National Antiterrorist Committee (NAC) are carried out for certain reasons against terrorism,” Sergey Goncharov believes” (Caucasian Knot, 22/11/2018).

The session of the constitutional court lasted from the 27<sup>th</sup> of November to the 6<sup>th</sup> of December; ultimately, they ruled that the transfer was legal:

“The agreement on the Ingush-Chechen border has been found as conforming to the Constitution, and shall enter into force immediately, Valery Zorkin, the Chairman of the Russian Constitutional Court (CC), has announced today... According to his version, the agreement is not contrary to the basic law of Russia (Constitution); and the CC's decision cannot be appealed against... The CC's decision also notes that there is no need to hold a referendum on the establishment of an administrative border with Chechnya in Ingushetia... Let us note here that earlier members of the Ingush Committee of National Unity stated that should the Russian CC supported the border agreement, protests would resume; and the issue of the jurisdiction of the Prigorodny District would be raised” (Caucasian Knot, 06/12/2018).

The protests did resume shortly after this, and as we have seen, resulted in the resignation of Yevkurov. This is the end of the Kremlin's involvement, save for the reshuffle of leadership in Ingushetia.

What did the Kremlin want from all this trouble over the border? It is difficult to see Kadyrov going through with such a combative policy without some kind of implicit approval from Putin, though, surely, Putin would not wish such discord to sweep the North Caucasus. As we have seen, Kremlin involvement is limited to tacit approval and abdication of responsibility, with the citizens of Ingushetia being more inclined to think that the Kremlin will be open to their plight. It is hard to see the Kremlin wanting the borders of its republics to be defined by anyone other than the Kremlin itself, and yet it was allowed. There are to my mind two explanations: firstly, the border change could be interpreted as a "concrete reward" as per Hale's definitions of patronalism. Under this interpretation, the Kremlin accepts the border change as a reward for Kadyrov's compliance with and enforcement of their wishes for the region. In this way, it is in my opinion less likely that Kadyrov asked permission first, and more likely that this crisis happened and, in the mind of keeping a powerful vassal happy, the Kremlin acquiesced. The abdication of responsibility, therefore, is a seal of a transaction, the final stamp of approval, and given that the land exchanged was not of particularly high economic value, the Kremlin felt comfortable with the whole thing. The second explanation is that the Kremlin did not want to give Chechnya the land and that Kadyrov simply acted behind the scenes and Moscow felt no other option other than to acquiesce. The land's lack of value, in this interpretation, convinced the Kremlin not to get too involved; perhaps the situation was misconstrued to them to make it seem like less of a big deal. Due to Kadyrov's importance, they are too worried to confront him on this issue; therefore, they decide to weather the storm in Ingushetia. It is difficult to say with certainty which is the true scenario – or if there is another way this played out behind the scenes – but to my mind, these seem the most likely.

There is, however, one more aspect of the Chechen-Ingush border to consider: in 2021, another border crisis briefly emerged between Ingushetia and Chechnya, over the course and ownership of the Fortanga river. While nothing came of this and the tensions died down eventually, the situation displayed the difference in power between the two republics: on the 24<sup>th</sup> of November, Kadyrov deployed his own paramilitary forces to the Fortanga as part of a training exercise, which he blamed on tensions across the world (Caucasian Knot, 25/11/2018). A day later, he claimed that he would take 8 disputed villages with the Kremlin's help:

““If they do not agree with what we have done, then we will request the state leaders to make the right decision <...> Thus, our eight villages will return to us,” said the leader of Chechnya as quoted in the today's publication of the “Kavkaz.Realii”... The original video from the meeting, which was held in the Chechen language, was posted on the Ramzan Kadyrov's page on the “VKontakte” on the night of November 25. In the accompanying text, the leader of Chechnya states that “the issue of setting up the borders has been closed once and for ever.” “And it is not subject to revision. It's time for everyone to learn that. The current situation is fully consistent with the current laws and Sharia norms. And we are ready to prove it to anyone!” Ramzan Kadyrov states in the post (Caucasian Knot, 25/11/2018).

This is a very telling comment. While, again, nothing came of this dispute, the comments from Kadyrov show the degree of power that he has over not only Chechnya but over the whole North Caucasus. It is not known whether the Kremlin would have assisted Kadyrov – I would guess not, given the desire to remain aloof in the 2018-2019 crisis, but then again, Kalimatov is in a much weaker position compared to Kadyrov. In some respects it is almost irrelevant whether he had the Kremlin's backing – the fact that he can use any supposed backing as a threat is the more important factor. It is also interesting that he brings up Sharia – not the first time Islam has been used in such a way, as we will examine in a later section.

Let us go back to the back and forth of the constitutional courts – in the quote, it is noted that the Ingush opposition would raise the long-disputed Prigorodny District with the Kremlin should their appeals fall on deaf ears. In fact, Prigorodny has come up in the research before this as ethnic tensions between Ossetians and Ingush have flared up several times over the research period, sometimes over Prigorodny, other times over completely different issues. The first time this occurs in the research period, for example, is the death of an Ingush football player during a fight in Vladikavkaz<sup>29</sup> in January 2012 (Caucasian Knot, 16/01/2012); extremely early on in the period studied. The next year, there are complaints about Ossetian football fans inciting ethnic hatred (Caucasian Knot, 21/12/2013); in 2017, Ingush living in Beslan were beaten amid claims they were drug addicts (Caucasian Knot, 29/09/2017) and another Ingush, Isa Gambetov, had his prison sentence extended because, his relatives assert, of the 1992 clashes (Caucasian Knot, 12/11/2017). In 2018, despite villagers in Ingushetia and North Ossetia wanting a road between the two republics to be opened, the issue was discarded and the road remained closed, leading the villagers to believe that this was done for political purposes (Caucasian Knot, 12/07/2018). However, perhaps the strangest – and most important – of these tensions came in early 2017; an online petition calling for Ingushetia to be renamed Alania caused large protests in Vladikavkaz, with between 500 to 1,000 people, mostly young people, attending (Caucasian Knot, 06/03/2017). The Head of North Ossetia at the time attended the rally:

“Vyacheslav Bitarov, the leader of the republic, came out to the crowd to prevent a possible escalation of the situation and to answer all questions. Besides, the leader of the republic also explained to the young people that such rallies and conflicts between the people would not result in anything good, especially since such provocations occurred regularly. Vyacheslav Bitarov called on the young people not to rise to it," ... According to Aslan Tsutsiev, Minister for Nationalities Affairs of North

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<sup>29</sup> In what appears to be a mistake that has been overlooked in this article, the headline states that this incident occurred in South Ossetia.

Ossetia, such disputes should not be resolved at rallies. "These disputes should not be held at rallies, since they are a subject for serious scientific discussions. There are experts on the matters related to Alania. They are specialists in historical linguistics, in paleogenetics, and let them dot 'all the i's'," (Caucasian Knot, 07/03/2017).

The attitude displayed by the Ossetian government through their language here is informative. On the one hand, we see Bitarov behaving as a regional governor ideally should in Putin's patrimonial network, calling for an end to the tensions and for the people "not to rise to provocations". On the other hand, this is rather dismissive of the whole situation, as if the Ossetians needn't even trouble themselves with what the Ingush think, because obviously this petition is grounded in falsities; this is reinforced by the words of Tsutsiev's appeals to science. Recall that North Ossetia's name, officially, is the *Republic of North Ossetia – Alania*, a nomenclature that extends to South Ossetia, whose official name is the *Republic of South Ossetia – State of Alania*. Alania recalls the Alans, whom the Ossetes claim, with a solid reasoning, descent from<sup>30</sup>. Furthermore, the ancient capital of the Alanian Kingdom – an early medieval polity – was the city of Magas<sup>31</sup>, from which the modern capital of Ingushetia takes its name from. Given all this and the resentful feelings left over from the 1992 clashes, it is not hard to see why such actions as this petition would lead to such a strong reaction. While there are calls to raise the issue – as well as an attempt to change the Constitution of the Russian Federation purely to help Ingushetia "get back" Prigorodny (Caucasian Knot, 03/02/2020) – nothing, once again, comes of this. However, it is a good idea for the purposes of this thesis to end this point by noting that it is not all doom and gloom – both sides commemorate the killings in a sombre, slightly reconciliatory tone (Caucasian Knot, 01/11/2012), there is the aforementioned story of the desire to literally connect the

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<sup>30</sup> Ossetes are certainly the linguistic and cultural inheritors of the Alans; Ossetian is the direct descendent of the Alanian language, itself a form of the Scythian language. Their culture is the same, and the Nart Sagas shared between the Ossetes are distinct and imply a level of Alanian influence. However, they are most probably the descendants of "Alanised/Scythianised" peoples of the Caucasus, albeit with some undeniable genetic inheritance. I heartily recommend Richard Foltz's *The Ossetes* (2023) for those wishing to learn more.

<sup>31</sup> I have seen this spelt Maghas, to avoid confusion with the modern city.

republics via a rebuilt road, and there is the story of Redant. In this settlement, an Ingush cemetery was claimed by a resident of North Ossetia as his land – it was later returned, allowing Ingush families to visit their dead once again (Caucasian Knot, 23/03/2015). It isn't much, but it is at the very least a slight glimmer of hope.

What of the rest of the North Caucasus? They do not appear much, save for Dagestan which we have already discussed in the Chechnya case study. Once again, the main way this appears is through Islam. During the border protests, mufti Isa Khamkhoev of Ingushetia had his membership of the Muslim Coordination Centre (MCC) of the North Caucasus (Caucasian Knot, 13/01/2019). The reasoning makes it clear that this is a punitive measure:

“The Muslims' Coordinating Centre (MCC) of Northern Caucasus has suspended the participation of the Mufti of Ingushetia, Isa Khamkhoev, in its activities, urging him to "return to the framework of Sharia norms" and not to interfere in the work of state bodies... The sitting of the MCC Council, at which Khamkhoev's actions were condemned, was held on Saturday, January 12, in Pyatigorsk. Khamkhoev did not come to the sitting, the "Argumenty I Fauty" writes... Mufti Khamkhoev was accused of trying "to please his personal ambitions and draw the Muslims' Spiritual Centre of Ingushetia into opposition to the republic's authorities." According to the authors of the statement, the Mufti "continues sowing discord and provoking Muslims to illegal actions."” (Caucasian Knot, 13/01/2019).

This is perhaps the most explicit use of Islam as a tool of the Kremlin in the North Caucasus – something that we have seen political actors in Chechnya and Ingushetia do. Isa Khamkhoev, after all, was trying to use a sharia court to settle the border dispute. Usage of Islam as a tool of politics is widespread in this part of Russia. This begs the question – how does this match with the sort of Islam that the Kremlin wants to see in Russia?

### 8.3 Islam and Cultural Norms in Russian Federal Politics

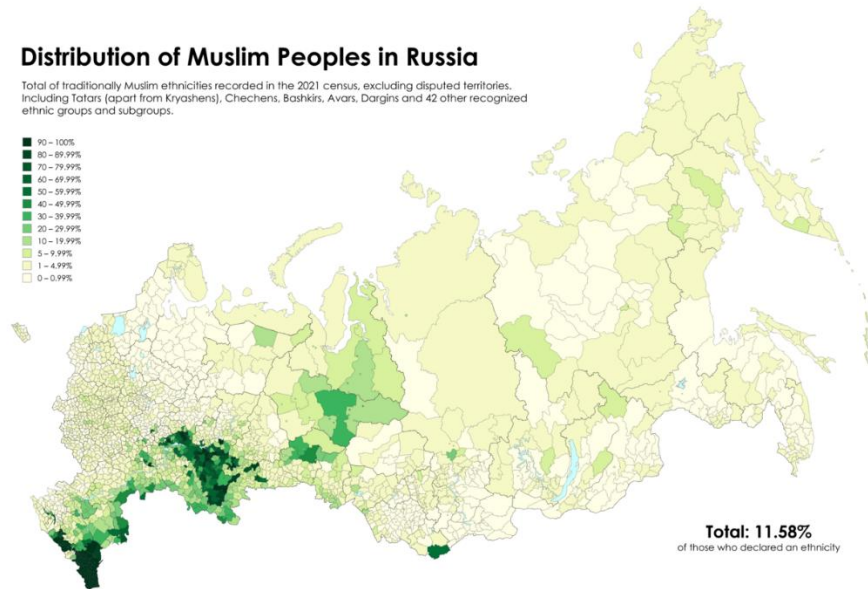


Figure 9.3.1.: Russia’s Muslim population, according to the 2021 census, mapped. Republic of Crimea not included, due to illegality under international law of said annexation (Wikimedia Commons, accessed 01/08/2025).

Putin’s policies towards Islam must walk a fine tightrope – on the one hand, you have the increasing nationalistic trend in Russia leading to the emphasis of Orthodox Christianity in the Russian national identity. You have the concept of *Russkiy Mir*, the “Russian World,” and that concept’s application to the Muslims of Russia – especially in the case of Crimea, where a Muslim minority has been forcibly joined to Russia and raised to the status of the titular nationality of the republic. Finally, we must consider that there are many other Muslim republics in Russia, and that while Islam’s influence is strong in the North Caucasus, neither Chechens nor Ingush are Russia’s largest – the Tatars, Russia’s largest minority, hold that distinction. Islam in Russia, then, has four major “directions” from which it interacts with the federal centre:

1. Tatarstan (and, by association, Bashkortostan) and its long, long history of Islam, represented by the Hanafi and Maturidi maddhabs.
2. The Hanafi Maddhab in the North Caucasus, most prominent in Karachay-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria.

- a. The Crimean Tatar minority, likewise Hanafis, may be included in either this direction or the above direction.
3. Sufism and the Shafi Maddhab of the North-eastern Caucasus.
    - a. Dagestan is almost its own direction, hosting the oldest Islamic tradition in Russia.
  4. Wahhabism and Salafism, the most modern of the directions and not tied to a particular region though strongest in the North-eastern Caucasus.

It should be noted that there are other interpretations on the above; Malashenko, for example, simplifies this to the North Caucasian and the Volga-Tatar strands (Malashenko, 2015). This is a good understanding, but I believe the four stated above give a fuller view of the subject and highlights the issue facing the Kremlin.

How then does Putinist Russia wish to approach Islam? Much of the recent scholarship on the issue focuses on a point brought up before – “traditional Islam,” in much the same way this has been approached in Azerbaijan. We can also use evidence from the research to support this conclusion – the last story examined, for instance, where a body made up of “traditional” Islamic leadership, in this case muftis, strikes out against Khamkhoev, wanting Islam to be kept out of matters of state. The face of this is Tatarstan, where traditional Islam is a controversial topic, where much of the research is focused on and where there are legitimization efforts to make Tatarstan the “face” of Russian Islam. This last point is set into stone in the form of Kul Sharif Mosque in the Kazan Kremlin.

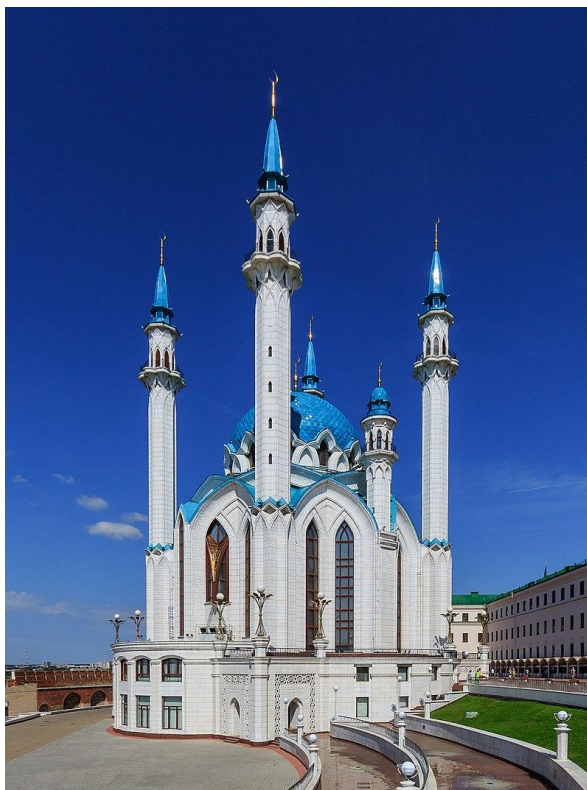


Figure 9.3.2 Kul Sharif Mosque, Kazan (Wikimedia Commons, accessed 01/08/2025).

The architecture is a blend of both Islamic and Russian architectural influences, named after a defender of Kazan who died in Ivan the Terrible's siege of the city. It is another to add to the list of symbolic buildings that this thesis has so far amassed.

What exactly is “traditional Islam”<sup>32</sup>? We have encountered this term before in reference to Azerbaijan, where Bedford et al state that it:

“is defined as a political project created and promoted by state actors. TI is understood as a ‘state-loyal’ or ‘state-approved’ form of Islam, one seen as desirable by the authorities while ‘non-traditional’ forms of Islam (NTI) are rejected as undesirable. Another important aspect is that TI is supposedly non-political, in contrast to NTI, which are ‘political’. This distinction is believed to stem from the final major perceived dichotomy: TI as ‘local’ and NTI as ‘foreign’ (Bedford et al, 2021, p.9).

In contrast to this stand, as stated above, “non traditional Islam”, which is, essentially everything that traditional Islam isn't. This changes from state to state, which presents a

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<sup>32</sup> In the cited article referred to as TI

challenge for understanding the phenomenon in Russia; as we have just seen, there are approximately 3 “traditional Islams” in Russia – Northeast Caucasian Sufism, Northwest Caucasian Sunnism and Volga Turkic Sunnism, saying nothing of the myriads of differences that this belies. This is an issue for both us as scholars and for the Kremlin, as Putin has been quoted in 2013 as saying:

“One of the most important tasks [is] recreation of our own Islamic theological school, which will guarantee the sovereignty of the Russian spiritual sphere and, which its primary importance, will be acknowledged by the majority of Muslim scholars of the world” (Aitamurto, 2019, p.1).

Putin is wrong in his assessment – the Putin regime does not need to recreate its own Islam, it needs to *create* it. This is exacerbated by the sheer numbers of Muslims from Russia who went to join the Islamic State, saying nothing of the growth of other Salafist groups being both a potential security risk (at least in the eyes of the regime) and a challenge to the traditional centres of power. By creating a “traditional Islam,” states attempt to manage this dilemma, give state support to more security-averse forms of the faith and attempt to coerce believers away from those forms perceived as a threat.

Following from this, it is worth considering and briefly comparing the case studies examined in this thesis with the case of Tatarstan. Tatarstan occupies an important place in the Kremlin’s narrative building around both Islam and the Russian Federation’s myriad minority groups. Smith, for example, notes that its capital, Kazan, is seen as “the face of the Turkic world” and a “site of tolerance and coexistence of different cultures” (Smith, 2021, p.16). There is also the role that Tatarstan plays for Tatars nationally, using its large amount of funding to support Tatar groups throughout the Russian Federation (Smith, 2021, p.16). Before moving back to Islam, consider first the contrasts here with Chechnya on this latter point; the assistance that Smith refers to cultural associations and other such groups throughout the Russian Federation (Smith, 2021). When Chechens from outside Chechnya

came up in the research for this thesis, in contrast, it was in a very different light. For example, using the Akki Chechens of Dagestan as a way to attempt to pry their region from Dagestan as part of Kadyrov's territorial ambitions and forcing a Chechen who chanted a regime slogan on the Moscow Metro to apologise. Furthermore, Tatarstan does not seek to assassinate the enemies of its leaders in Europe through a version of a blood feud tradition. The situation in Ingushetia is also quite starkly different for another reason entirely, in that the governments are mostly silent on Ingush issues outside of Ingushetia, and, as previously discussed, the people of Ingushetia have appealed to Putin directly than engage with the Ingush government on several occasions.

This difference between the three in a "secular" policy field leads into the difference between the Islamic policy. In short, it can be argued, based on the evidence, that the Kremlin has solved the problem of how to build a single Russian traditional Islam by building at the very least two and outsourcing these efforts to the republics, more specifically to Chechnya and Tatarstan. Firstly, there are similarities between these different forms. There is opposition to Salafism/Wahhabism and other differing views of Islam, as we have seen in chapter 6 through Kadyrov's suppression of Salafist groups, as well as other groups he does not like – in Tatarstan, following the 2018 shooting in Kizlyar, Dagestan, in which a Salafi attacked a church, the Mufti of Tatarstan, Kamil Samigullin, proposed outlawing the belief system as an extremist ideology (Muftiyat Respubliki Dagestan, 2018). Interestingly, if we recall the events leading to the Grozny Fatwa in 2016, Kadyrov faced pushback from the wider Russian Islamic community for in essence doing the same thing. Secondly, Tatarstan and Chechnya both host Muslim leaders from across the world. However, this is where the similarities end; for one, the types of foreign policy done here are rather different. Tatarstan has good relations with Turkey, providing a formal and informal link between Istanbul and Moscow; further, recall the comment on Kazan being "the face of the Turkic world" (Smith, 2021, p.16). Tatarstan has likewise hosted leaders of Hamas, sent aid to Gaza during the ongoing war, and, like Chechnya, has connections to Iran. Finally, in 2025, Kazan hosted the KazanForum

event, a huge conference officially billed as a conference between Russia and the Islamic World. These are very formal events and links. Compare this with Kadyrov; as discussed, Kadyrov's Chechnya has an odd relationship with Salafism, repressing Salafist groups while picking and choosing bits of the faith that Kadyrov likes. In doing this, he has built common ground with leaders in the Gulf, something furthered by Sportswashing and a shared interest in martial arts. While regimes such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates may be in the sphere of the United States of America, this connection provides an informal link for Russia to these countries. Therefore, through supporting both republics, Russia benefits. This could not exist without the distinct versions of traditional Islam in Tatarstan and Chechnya.

Finally, there are the differences in how traditional Islam is created and enforced in both republics. Recall chapter 6, section 2 for the Chechen example; monitoring of mosques, "checking" of Imams, controlled appointments of imams, beard shavings, inspections of Islamic shops, etc. There is a lot more direct control from the Kadyrov regime on display, in line with Kadyrov's goals on making Chechnya conform to his image of it. Contrast this with Tatarstan; Benussi reports in his 2020 article that the project of traditional Islam was, in many ways, still being constructed and was met with scorn by those outside the circles of scholars and government officials promoting it, while personally worrying about the future of those who do not fall into the category, calling the policy exclusionary (Benussi, 2020, p.21). There are crackdowns, make no mistake, but Tatarstan does not have the coercive capabilities to do this by itself and on the scale that Kadyrov is able to achieve. Tatarstan may be able to use the threat of Salafism as a bargaining chip (Malashenko, 2015), but Kadyrov can actively enforce his image of Islam, rather than merely promote it. This results in the two versions of traditional Islam seen in Russia – despite Putin's best wishes, as reported by Aitamurto (Aitamurto, 2019, p.1), these two different strands of traditional Islam cannot, truthfully, form one single form of Islam. This does have some benefits for Russia, in the

different forms of outreach that the approach allows, but means that, so long as a single version of Russian Islam remains a goal, these two versions will be competing.

### 8.3 Subnational Authoritarianism, Regime Dynamics and the Vainakh Republics

Now that we have discussed the place of Islam in relation to federal dynamics, there is one concluding point for discussion – how these findings contribute to studies relating to the “subnational authoritarianism” and the federal politics of Russia itself. To look and understand how this all works requires addressing some conclusions and pre-conceptions of how an authoritarian state is run. As is to be expected from such a broad field, there are many conclusions and components to this. In his book on regional policy in the Russian Federation, for example, Starodubtsev argues that federal politics in Russia is firmly under the control of the Kremlin, especially in relation to the control of the political processes of these different territorial units, before stating that Putin’s authoritarian systems have “demonstrated excellent results” in combatting political uncertainty in Russia (Starodubtsev, 2018). However, as demonstrated by the research for this thesis, Kadyrov’s policies are of self-reliance, self-perpetuation and the creation of a high-on totalitarian state outside of Putin’s control – only the issue of funding comes to blows, and even then, Kadyrov *does* get funding, despite it not being as much as he would like. Furthermore, while it happened in the Federal framework, the people of Ingushetia were successful in their demands for Yunus-Bek Yevkurov to leave his role. Rather than eliminating political uncertainty, then, here we see Putin losing de-facto control of Chechnya and losing a regional governor whom, he had such a degree of trust in that he received a relatively important role in the Ministry of Defence. Starodubtsev isn’t necessarily wrong – his book is informative on how policy works in most of Russia – but there is something missing here. The issue certainly isn’t helped by the rapid descent into authoritarianism in Russia, a phenomenon that occurs over the research period; some of the pieces of literature talk of the lack of free and fair elections as a recent novelty. The research is, almost by accident, a documentation of this descent as seen through the eyes of two interesting case studies. The

protests against the 2012 Russian Presidential election did not appear in the research, with no reports on them. There were protests in both Chechnya and Ingushetia in the years 2012-2013, but they were concerned with local issues; only in 2013 did a protest against the federal centre occur when a protest against the abolition of direct elections took place in Ingushetia (as discussed earlier, this became something of a cause-celebre for Ingush oppositionists). In that year, referring to the earlier figures, both republics returned a high result for the Russian president that year, with both over 90% – Kadyrov’s Chechnya returned one of the highest in the country.

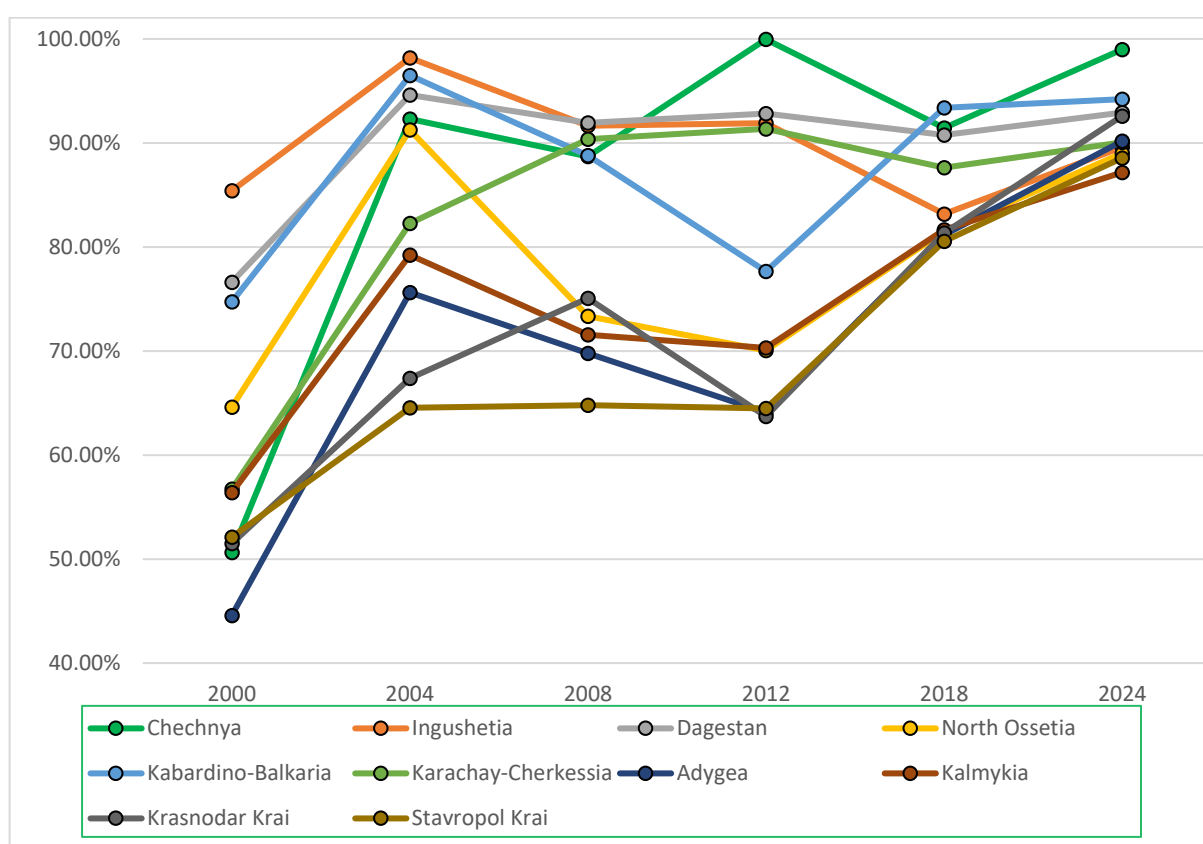


Figure 8.2.1: Results for the incumbent/incumbent endorsed President of the Russian Federation in the North Caucasus, 2000-2024. Source: Central Electoral Commission of the Russian Federation

These election results are demonstrative of this decline, yet they tell us an exceedingly great deal about Ingushetia and Chechnya. Ross and Panov state that these two republics fall under the banner of what they call “hegemonic authoritarianism” (Ross & Panov, 2019), due to

the percentages of votes that they are able to secure for United Russia (their case examines local parliament/assembly elections over two cycles).

I agree with their conclusion in this article, that examination of such results shows the variety of regimes within a regime. However, I do not think they take enough into consideration when it comes to these two examples, for the simple reason of how these supposedly similar regimes *themselves* function. Across Russia, since the start of his third term and especially since the invasion of Ukraine, a personality cult around Putin has been constructed. Ingushetia hosts this personality cult; Chechnya hosts two additional cults. Ingush leaders are in dire need of external assistance securing their republic; Kadyrov has been able to bully Ingushetia into giving away its land. Both are supposedly hegemonic, yet since 2012, support for Putin in Chechnya has, officially, never dropped below 90%; in Ingushetia, it has not been able to breach that mark since the 2018 elections, when support markedly dropped. Yet, Ingushetia is the republic that is more under the thumb of the Kremlin. For the reasons discussed in the previous chapter, the different leadership in the republic cannot escape the cycle of instability that plagues it. Further, due to the strategic importance of the North Caucasus, the importance of the region to Putin's legitimation and that there is not a leader as charismatic and connected as Kadyrov, the leadership cannot build-up its own paramilitary forces, and is thus reliant on the federal centre for its survival. Many people in Ingushetia have complained about the loss of lands, lands they are extremely unlikely to get back for these same reasons.

#### 8.4 Conclusion

To conclude, the role of the Federal government in the Vainakh republics – and the role of the Vainakh republics in the Federal government – is quite mixed. We see Kadyrov getting actively involved in federal politics while the Kremlin by and large lets him do his own thing in Chechnya. In Ingushetia, the Kremlin is forced into a more active role – however, once Kadyrov begins his territorial claims, the Kremlin abdicates responsibility, leaving it mostly

with the Vainakh republics themselves to sort out and responding to a crisis when the protests in Ingushetia continue. In Chechnya's relationship with the Kremlin, we see the issue of Islam in Russia – the only major instance of traditional cultural norms appearing in the context of federal politics. The influence of Kadyrov's desire to make his own version of Chechen Islam has almost poisoned the project of building a single form of "Russian Islam". Finally, we have seen how all the issues within the republics, as discussed in the other major chapters, have influenced the relative strength and/or weakness of the regional leadership here.

The resulting image from this chapter largely reinforces the earlier conclusions from these other chapters. It is also revealing about the wider dynamics of Russian influence during the events described in said chapters, namely the relative lack of Kremlin involvement. Norms can explain how this has occurred, and even how Vainakh cultural norms have influenced the policy of the Kremlin via the necessity of "outsourcing" the construction of traditional Islam in Russia. Yet, the relevant lack of appearances of Kremlin interference in the Vainakh republics is the main conclusion to be taken from this part of the research. The Kremlin, despite the securitisation of Russian society, despite the messages of control and peace in the Caucasus, even despite having a high degree of control of the security apparatus in one of the two republics studied, seems very hesitant about getting involved in any of the issues in the region. It does bring the overall strategy that the Kremlin has into question – perhaps this is why the change of governors in Ingushetia occurred, to wipe the slate clean. However, given the fact that discontent in the republic remained at the end of 2021, it is hard to see how successful it was in this period. Kadyrov's style of rule, of controlling and manipulating traditional cultural norms to his own ends, seems the most successful – a very worrying fact.

## 9. Comparisons and Conclusions

Now that we have gone through all the case studies, examining and analysing the evidence gathered from the research, we can now move towards the overall conclusions. To do this, the two case studies of Ingushetia and Chechnya will be examined on their own in relation to the overall research question before a direct comparison is made to form the overall conclusion. As well as this, this chapter will also explore other comparisons with outside case studies, which are the most likely avenues for future research.

### 9.1 Chechnya and Ingushetia – individual conclusions

Before beginning, it is helpful to remind ourselves of what the overarching question for this research is.

*What is the interplay between traditional cultural norms, religion and politics among the Vainakh peoples?*

This has been the underlying question when analysing all the presented evidence over the last four chapters. Over the course of the thesis, we have examined a great deal, including norms that were not accounted for when the original norms were defined. The topics covered range from governmental uses of norms, to local shootouts fuelled by blood feuds, to the influence of these norms on Kremlin policy. As such, it is best to go over each case study individually and assess the different norms within them, to build larger conclusions both for the individual case studies and, eventually, for the thesis as a whole.

#### 9.1.1 Chechnya

The case of Chechnya provides both a clear-cut answer to this question, as well as an extremely valuable level of nuance. In its shortest form, traditional cultural norms have a clear importance to the politics of Kadyrov's Chechnya, becoming an obsession of the regime's in the latter half of this research period. However, when it comes to how the politics of Chechnya work – and especially when considering the authoritarian regime dynamics of

Kadyrov's Chechnya – their role is a lot more complex. The norms do not seem to influence the “bottom-up” politics that much, i.e. these norms do not seem to influence bottom-up organising. Even this, though, is much more complicated than it seems. Firstly, what little opposition that is active in Chechnya during this period is, by and large, Islamist, either more “homegrown” movements, like the relics of the Imarat Kavkaz – which became more oriented towards the wider North Caucasus and the issues these other republics provide (Youngman, 2025) – and, increasingly from 2015, the more “globally-oriented” Islamic State. These movements may not represent the “traditional” forms of Islam that are present in Chechnya, but that makes their appearance as a form of opposition to Kadyrov even more significant and interesting. These movements represent the more violent tendencies of those parts of Chechen society frustrated with the rule of Kadyrov *and* with the more traditionally oriented Islam he has tied himself to. The continued prominence of these groups, then, represents a reaction to at least one of the norms that this thesis set out to study (with disillusionment with teips and customary laws being possibilities for other reasons why it is so prominent).

The second way these norms “manifest” from the bottom-up is in the ways they do not. This is because of how the Kadyrov uses, or rather abuses, cultural norms. The absence of the teip, of blood feud, the lack of relevance of the *wird* outside of its use for Kadyrov; all of these occur because of the actions of the Kadyrov regime. This does not always occur through the Kadyrov's regimes uses. The teip, for example, is pushed underground as a result of the general “closing” of Chechen society – but there are some key examples of this being the case. Firstly, there is the custom of blood feud disappearing from society due to the coercion of the Kadyrov regime, as well as a policy of reconciliation, something shared with Ingushetia although less infrequent and done more for the legitimacy of the regime. On the flipside to this reconciliation is the covert programme of targeted punishment of enemies of the regime, and particularly their family members, as well as the use of language relating to blood feuds, including the declaration of blood feuds, against opponents whom they cannot reach (i.e. the diaspora). Furthermore, there is the irrelevance of the concept of *wirds* outside of their

usefulness to the regime or, in the rare instances where *wirds/tariqa* are used in a “bottom-up” context, actively suppressed by the regime if their practices are deemed unacceptable.

Two chapters focus almost entirely on Chechnya – the case study and the chapter examining false apologies – and by far the overarching theme, the concept that glues it all together, is that of the policing of behaviour and the role of traditional cultural norms in society. There are instances of the Chechen government using norms, and these forming part of their internal dynamics, but these are twisted into different versions than those that traditionally exist. The only *teip* that matters is that of Kadyrov’s – except, by all accounts, the actual *teip* is less important, and Kadyrov relies on a different form of *teip*, as defined by Sokirianskaia (2005). The *wird*, specifically the *Kunta-haji wird*, is only tolerable because Kadyrov can use it to legitimise his rule. By all accounts, what is much more important to Kadyrov is the policing of these norms. This is seen early on in chapter 2 with the construction of “traditional Islam” in Chechnya via the suppression of certain forms of Islam, the prohibition of some kinds of “Islamic goods”, the shaving of beards and the systematic surveillance of Mosques. These two latter examples bring us neatly to the usage of punishments to enforce both morals and laws – the shaving of beards and the burning of houses are linked in this way and are prime examples of the start of an obsession with punishing Chechen citizens for both actual and supposed crimes. In any case, the punishment far outweighs these crimes. These two examples also highlight two overarching themes with punishments in Chechnya, namely humiliation (as seen with the beard shavings) and with collective punishment for the crimes of an individual relative (as seen in the house burnings).

That brings us to the forced apologies. These are the most important way that traditional cultural norms affect and are affected by authoritarian regime dynamics. Grounded in the deeply important cultural norms surrounding pride and guilt, chapter 6 demonstrated the scope of their use by the Kadyrov regime. While they are used against issues not relating to cultural norms, most prominently criticism of Kadyrov and his policies, this grounding in concepts of pride that are specific to the Chechen experience shows the effects of cultural

norms on the functioning of the Kadyrov regime. However, it is their use in policing morally unacceptable behaviour that both defines the whole practice, being the single most common reason for people to make an apology. This alone highlights the obsession with policing the morals of the Chechen people that Kadyrov and his government have; it also shows that this obsession goes beyond traditional cultural norms and all the way into regular, “day-to-day” behaviour such as drinking alcohol, driving and what people do in their free time. The shift from apologies to public condemnations that happens at the end of the research period displays a desire from the regime to apply this practice to people outside their reach, something rendered especially apparent with the wave of condemnations against opposition bloggers in the Chechen diaspora. Linking this back to the practices and changes to norms that we’ve previously discussed in this conclusion, this is one of two ways this is attempted to be achieved, the other being attempted murder done under the guise of blood feud killings. Both methods show the desire of Kadyrov to control the Chechen people who live outside of Chechnya. Combined with the overall trend of forced apologies themselves, the totalitarian aspirations of the Kadyrov regime are laid bare. Given that it is most likely that the forced apologies declined not because the regime lost interest in them but because they worked, i.e. that the approved morals are more rigidly followed, it seems these aspirations have been by and large successful.

There is more to be said on Chechnya and the forced apologies, but first it is important to turn to Ingushetia, to give us a direct comparison.

### 9.1.2 Ingushetia

Ingushetia shows the importance of cultural norms for the dynamics of these local authoritarian regimes in a very different way. Unlike in Chechnya, these norms are used by a much wider range of the political spectrum in Ingushetia and as such have a more varied effect on the regime dynamics in the republic. In its largest forms, this results in a mobilised opposition movement that is present from the start of the research and results in the toppling

of Yunus-bek Yevkurov as well as a Sufi order acting almost as a state within a state. In smaller-scale instances, the norms manifest in a wide variety of forms, from violence through blood feuds and bridal kidnappings, to the survival and adaptation of the teip and the importance of the muftiate in politics (a comparably weaker institution in Chechnya).

Islam brings some of the greatest differences between the two. In chapters 5 and 6, we examined the usage of Islam as a force of legitimation for Kadyrov and Chechnya. In contrast, the scene in Ingushetia is more dynamic; the Salafist community faces pressure from the Batakhadzintsey wurd and the muftiate but partnership from Yevkurov, resulting in a more politically important movement. However, another result of this is, like Chechnya, the local rise of the Islamic State as an actor against the state and as a semi-popular force. Secondly, we have the Batakhadzintsey themselves, a Sufi order that acts as an arm of Kadyrov's regime in Ingushetia, as an actual spiritual movement, as a teip and, allegedly, an organised crime syndicate. Simply put, there are no similar movements, state sanctioned or otherwise, in Chechnya. The Batakhadzintsey brotherhood act above the law with impunity, able to attack their own members trying to leave the brotherhood and, most likely, orchestrate an assassination on an Ingush government official in Moscow. These actions are undertaken in Chechnya almost exclusively by Kadyrov's inner circle, not by an outside actor. Their mere existence in this manner highlights the importance of these sets of traditional cultural norms in Ingushetia, and the tremendous difference between how Islam is treated in the two republics.

Next are the teips, which are still active in the republic in a way not seen in Chechnya. The teips act as a loose political bloc throughout the research period, as seen in the Mekhk Kkhel's political activity. This activity is significant, especially since these actions lead to some of the Mekhk Kkhel's leadership persecuted by the Ingush government following the 2018-2019 border protests. However, as seen in chapter 7, these are not the only ways in which the teips act. They act in ways that reflect, to a certain extent, the way a teip is "meant" to act, according to tradition and adat. They protect members, seeking out

retribution or reconciliation if members are involved in circumstances leading to a blood feud. Their level of success in these manners is not great, but it almost does not matter – there are still actions done in the manner as described among Ingush adat. Another key difference is that for Kalimatov and Yevkurov, unlike Kadyrov, either definition of teip does not seem to influence personnel policy and their local patrimonial networks. This is best demonstrated by Kalimatov initially making no personnel changes in Ingushetia, before dismissing most of the Ingush government – something that is almost unthinkable when one considers Kadyrov’s Chechnya and the number of family members he has appointed to positions of power. Possibly the most significant appearance of adat that emerged in the research was that of blood vengeance. Unlike in Chechnya, the only times the government got involved in blood feuds was a programme of reconciliations of blood enemies, never invoking the practice and believing that it should not exist. Outside the government, however, blood vengeance is frequently reported as a motive for murder in Ingushetia. There are single-victim blood feuds, shootouts over feuds, and cycles of violence perpetuated by the norm and the code of vengeance in the republic. As stated, the Batakhadzintsy engage in the practice and the practice, in some cases, seems to cross borders into Chechnya. Alongside the Sufi brotherhoods, and the final norm to discuss, blood vengeance is perhaps the most significant norm affecting authoritarianism in Ingushetia, though not as a tool used by an authoritarian regime, but as an obstacle for the regime, providing instability and, as such, reducing the legitimacy of the Ingush government.

Finally, there are norms of gender in Ingushetia. These norms were for the chapter on Ingushetia what norms of place and geography were for those on Chechnya; an unexpected appearance that proved important to understanding the role of norms in Ingushetia. The most important of these norms was bridal kidnapping. As with blood feuds, these are relatively frequent and, to an extent, outside of the reach of the various Ingush governments, as an act of violence that the leaders of Ingushetia seem unsure how to deal with. Yunus-bek Yevkurov clearly had little wrong with it inasmuch as kidnapping is already illegal and thus, to

his mind, there is little need to specifically ban the practice. This dismissive attitude to what is, effectively, a localised version of gender-based violence speaks to uncomfortable truths about the place of women in Ingush society, even those aspects which, as seen in Yevkurov's attitude to blood feuds, are clearly embarrassed and ashamed of other parts of Ingush traditional culture. Kidnapping is illegal, unless you're kidnapping a bride, in which case the issue suddenly becomes complex. There is also the role of women in both other norms and the protests of 2018/2019, which are not insignificant but are seen as slightly different to the roles that men play. It is a shame that outside of this section, women are mostly absent. This section acts to demonstrate the extent to which the North Caucasus, even among this time of change to many of its cultural norms, remains deeply patriarchal – it can be argued that this is one norm that has resisted change.

### 9.1.3 Direct comparisons and the Federal context

The final point of consideration is the federal context and the relationship between the two Vainakh republics themselves. The most immediate point of discussion here is the extent to which traditional cultural norms affect or are affected by the federal government of Russia. There are two extremely significant ways in which they do; the most recent of these discussed in the thesis is the outsourcing of traditional Islam to the Russian republics, in particular Chechnya and Tatarstan. Through this outsourcing, the Kremlin can reconcile both a more moderate and more "extreme" (for want of a better word) version of this practice, adaptable to different circumstances. Ingushetia, lacking the power and prestige of Chechnya and Tatarstan, is not included in these discussions/outourcing, and arguably, as a republic with the unique situation of a radical Salafist *and* Sufi movement in its borders, is not really able to make use of either of these forms of "traditional Islam" – this is another factor for us to consider when comparing Chechnya and Ingushetia's use of Islam as legitimisation, i.e. the relative lack of it in Ingushetia. Due to this absence, Islam is used as legitimisation almost exclusively by opposition movements in Ingushetia, as can be seen in the 2018-2019 protests.

However, the most significant norm-related practice in the federal context is the spread of forced apologies. Due to their root in Chechen cultural norms, the spread to the rest of Russia – and beyond to the former Soviet Union – makes this the most “impactful” of the norms and related practices studied. It is used in both a political and moral sense in the Russian Federation, as can be seen by its use in suppressing anti-Russian messages in occupied parts of Ukraine and for punishing the participants of the “almost naked party” to name two prominent examples. There is also the issue of how the practice extends the reach of the Kadyrov regime to Chechens outside of Chechnya, as well as any other enemies of Kadyrov within the Russian Federation. Apologies to Kadyrov come from Ingushetia, Moscow and the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Oblast to name a few examples. Apologies to Azerbaijan are elicited by a pressure group in Russia, as described in chapter 6, to name one of the more interesting cases of the spread of the practice. The practice can be found in Azerbaijan, in Belarus and throughout Central Asia, with similar effects. As the world at large continues a descent into authoritarianism, I believe that it is not long until the practice spreads to other authoritarian systems, especially those with interconnected elite networks, and to “Western” states undergoing democratic backsliding. This is evident in the last weeks leading up to this thesis’ submission. In the United States, following the assassination of far-right commentator Charlie Kirk, several public figures and institutions have had apologies demanded of them for social media posts and statements on television. Prominent media figures such as Jimmy Kimmel have been told to apologise, and others have been, effectively, forced to apologise, for their comments as Kirk is turned into a martyr for the far-right in America. Whether or not this practice has the same roots as the practice in the former Soviet Union is debatable, but it is something that cannot be disregarded. is debatable, but it is something that cannot be disregarded.

That leaves us with the comparison; how do the Vainakh republics compare in the prevalence of traditional cultural norms in the dynamics of their localised authoritarian regimes? The answer is actually relatively simple, and has been alluded to and stated at

various points throughout the thesis. Ingushetia's local authoritarian regime – or, given the instability, local authoritarian network – suffers from the continued presence of strong traditional cultural norms. Chechnya's regime actually benefits from these norms, though it has effectively dismembered these norms and put them back together in a way that benefits the regime and ultimately contributes to the stability of the regime, in the short term at any rate. In the long term, it is harder to say; though, studying these norms over a decade has given us better grounding to do so. The decade of 2012-2021 demonstrated a sharp consolidation of Kadyrov's regime in Chechnya, with, at the end, the obsession with morals and societal norms creating a self-policing, effectively totalitarian state-within-a-state. Kadyrov has been called a feudal lord ruling a fiefdom, but this is slightly misconstruing the relationship Kadyrov has with the Kremlin. Up until very recently – 2022 at earliest – Chechnya was markedly more authoritarian and totalitarian than the rest of Russia. Given the path Russia has taken since the invasion of Ukraine, it is not outlandish to argue that Putin has learned yet more from Kadyrov. Ingushetia, conversely, spent the decade of 2012-2021 in a spiral of instability that really only ended after this research period. The two leaders of Ingushetia in this period could not dismember the norms and rebuild them to their liking; they couldn't even really lift their finger to the issue. It is very, very telling that Kalimatov has been more secure by simply not being as public as Yevkurov was, especially on issues relating to traditional cultural norms and their related power structures.

## 9.2 Other Cases and future research

This thesis has, for many reasons, been almost entirely focused on the North Caucasian republics. This has allowed for a much more detailed look at the processes that affect norms and the ways in which the norms affect them. These conclusions, therefore, are very case-specific. It is important to note, however, that there are other areas where a similar piece of research could be conducted and compared to the cases presented here. To my mind, there are four levels of immediate separation for this: the wider Caucasus, the Russian Federation and its republics, the post-Soviet space and the former “Eastern bloc”. Finally, there are

cases from across the rest of the world that lend themselves well to this kind of research. The following discussion centres on these potential future cases. However, beforehand, it is worth briefly looking at other ways this thesis could have been conducted, due to this affecting the nature of how these theoretical next research steps could take place. The obvious other method for this research would have been interviews. These would have allowed for a much more personal research project, with a much more direct placing of individual experience of norms and, thus, a better assessment of how these norms hold up. However, there is the issue of actually conducting this research – due to the extremely obvious safety concerns, it would be impossible to do this in the field. Asking about any of the topics with the current climate in Chechnya and in Russia is, put bluntly, quite dangerous. One could, potentially, do interviews online but even this is risky, since you would need to find participants somehow and that poses challenges and risks that, outside of having a pre-built network of contacts, are exceedingly difficult to overcome. But, supposing for a second it is possible at some time in the future, it would be best to conduct the interviews with locals and elites to get as wide as possible of a view.

### ***The Wider Caucasus***

This is perhaps the most obvious next area for research given how many parts of the Caucasus, in particular the North Caucasian peoples and those cultures that have their roots in them (namely the Kist, Lezgins, (South) Ossetes and Abkhaz), share many cultural elements. Adat is present throughout the Caucasus, with many different names: *Apswaara* for Abkhazia, *Iron Æghdæu* for the Ossetes, and *Adyghe Habze* for the Adyghe; many, though not all, of these peoples profess Islam; clans are prevalent. Doing such projects for the other parts of the region would therefore add in another comparable case (or a universe of cases) allowing us to analyse how different cultures and areas have responded to the changes of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and what role, if any, their cultural norms play in governance, politics and (if applicable) authoritarian regime dynamics.

Dagestan would be best suited to such a study (i.e., a one-to-one replication) of this. One aspect that is interesting, but would perhaps take a while to properly do, is to examine how the norms of some of the many different ethnic groups affect their experience of politics, and how “strong” the respective traditional cultural norms are. Given that until relatively recently Dagestan was governed by a system of “ethnic federalism,” wherein power was shared between Avars and Dargins (with the Head being from one of these two groups until 2017) (Ware & Kisriev, 2015; Kazenin, 2019), a study done over a ten year period focusing on the before and after the change in regime dynamic in Dagestan could, potentially, glean very interesting results.

Elsewhere in the Caucasus, the Kists of Georgia are another candidate for research, especially if one were to choose interviews over process-tracing (or alongside it). The Kists are extremely under-researched, with much focus being given to the Chechens who live alongside them in the Pankisi Valley. The Kists represent an opportunity to research these cultural norms, and the way they affect and are affected by politics, in a hybrid regime (of Georgia) as opposed to an authoritarian regime. This is perhaps hampered by the recent authoritarian trend in Georgia, and perhaps is now riskier than before the 2024 election, though it may be less risky than, say, research in Russia. The Kists deserve a proper look into their culture and their present situation; such a project is a natural next step.

Another potential piece of research focuses on the Chechen diaspora. Though mostly located in Europe, I am including it in this section. The diaspora was avoided in this thesis due to the fact that it is, in many ways, its own beast. It was mentioned though, and does form an important part of political goings-on at various points, most notably in the actions of opposition blogger Tumso Aburrakhmanov. It does lend itself much more to interviews than a desk-based project and, as I have heard from experts on this subject matter whom I trust, figures within the diaspora tend to keep to themselves, making an entry into this part of society difficult. Yet, it is safer than research in Chechnya, and the Chechen European diaspora has, surprisingly, two potential comparisons; Chechnya itself and the much older

diasporic community in Jordan. Research into the role of cultural norms in politics within the Chechen diasporic community could, therefore, be extremely fruitful.

### ***The Russian Federation***

The Republics of Russia, meant to act as representative bodies for their titular nationalities, have complicated, varying relationships to the peoples they claim to represent. There are some republics which, I believe, would lend themselves very well to a similar research project. Tatarstan immediately springs to mind, alongside Bashkortostan. Both have a strong Islamic presence and tradition, both have this complex relationship between state and people and, like Chechnya and Ingushetia, are culturally very similar, allowing for a good comparison to be made. Kalmykia also could be an extremely interesting case-study, as the only Buddhist region west of the Urals. Such projects would also allow for a comparison of the effects of “Russification” on these peoples. However, the Russian Federation itself could be an entire research project on its own. Since the invasion of Ukraine, as stated at various points beforehand in the thesis, Russia has gone further down the path of authoritarianism, with a civilisational aspect central to the Kremlin’s war legitimisation. Given the Kremlin’s focus on morals and encroaching totalitarianism, studying these trends through a lens of cultural norms and their shift in the modern day may be an important study, though a long and difficult.

### ***Central and Eastern Europe and beyond***

There are many potential case studies across the world. In Central and Eastern Europe, Albania, home to a system of clans and blood feuds which changes from North to South, as well as Kosovo is a potentially very interesting project. These norms are very weak as is stands – which may, in fact, be all the more reason to conduct such a study. There is also a research gap in that the only recent study found on the subject, Hille’s (2023) work, focuses on the 90s and 2000s primarily, and makes factual errors about Albania’s culture (including classifying one of the two main dialects of the Albanian language as Slavic). While Albania

and Kosovo themselves provide an interesting point of comparison, perhaps a more worthwhile study may be into the Gheg and the Tosk, the two halves of the Albanian nation. Going further afield, there are the Pashtuns of Afghanistan and Pakistan, two halves of one nation that are subjected to extremely different political systems.

### 9.3 Final Remarks

This thesis evolved into a rather different product than I intended at the start of this project. Some of the norms that appeared in the research as major points of interest were not what I expected to find – hence why, in chapter 3, there are really only 3 norms examined. Yet, norms ranging from customary law and clans to gender and land usage have defined this project. Through these rather unexpected trends, I believe the work presented here to be a much more “complete” image than that which I expected to find. This thesis set out to discover the ways and extent to which traditional cultural norms in Chechnya and Ingushetia influence and are influenced by local authoritarian regime practices. After setting out the definitions of these practices and norms, and laying out how the research was conducted, it has demonstrated that the ways in which this influence occurs is greatly complex and very different from republic to republic. In Chechnya, the regime’s obsession with cultural norms and their associated moral standards has led the country down a very dark path, markedly more totalitarian than the regime that rules over it. It has allowed a dangerous authoritarian method of coercion – forced public apologies – to grow and spread, leading to public humiliation on a scale that is somewhat hard to fathom. In Ingushetia, by contrast, these norms constrain the republic’s leaders, forcing the Kremlin and the local patrimonial network to contend and bow to them. We saw how a protest over land, land that was empty forest but had cultural value, destroyed one regime and caused its successor to take a markedly different approach. We have also examined how these norms have, frankly, destroyed lives by perpetuating cycles of vengeance and excusing the kidnapping of women. Finally, we have seen how these norms potentially effect and limit the Kremlin’s influence in these two

republics, and the implications that has for Russian authoritarianism and Putin's civilisational aspirations.

The War in Ukraine has changed Russia for the worse and led to a closing of Russian society. Further, continued study is needed to keep track of how the norms examined in this thesis fare in this dangerous new world. This thesis has done its best in tracing these processes over a ten year period – perhaps once this war is over a similar study of the effects of wartime on these norms can be conducted. Given the extremely alarming spread of forced apologies to the wider Russian authoritarian system and beyond, it is likely their importance has continued. These norms and the people who live by them are important. As drones strike Grozny, as Chechens fighting for Ukraine profess a desire to liberate the Caucasus from Russian rule – and those fighting against Ukraine perform lezginkas in newly occupied cities – it seems that Chechnya's importance to the world is not yet over. What, then, will this continued importance, attention, scrutiny and influence of these two peoples of the North Caucasus and the ways they live have on the future of themselves and their homelands? Of Russia? Of authoritarianism? Of the very norms themselves? It seems that these questions will need to be considered greatly over the coming years.

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## Appendix 1: Results from Chechnya and Ingushetia, year by year

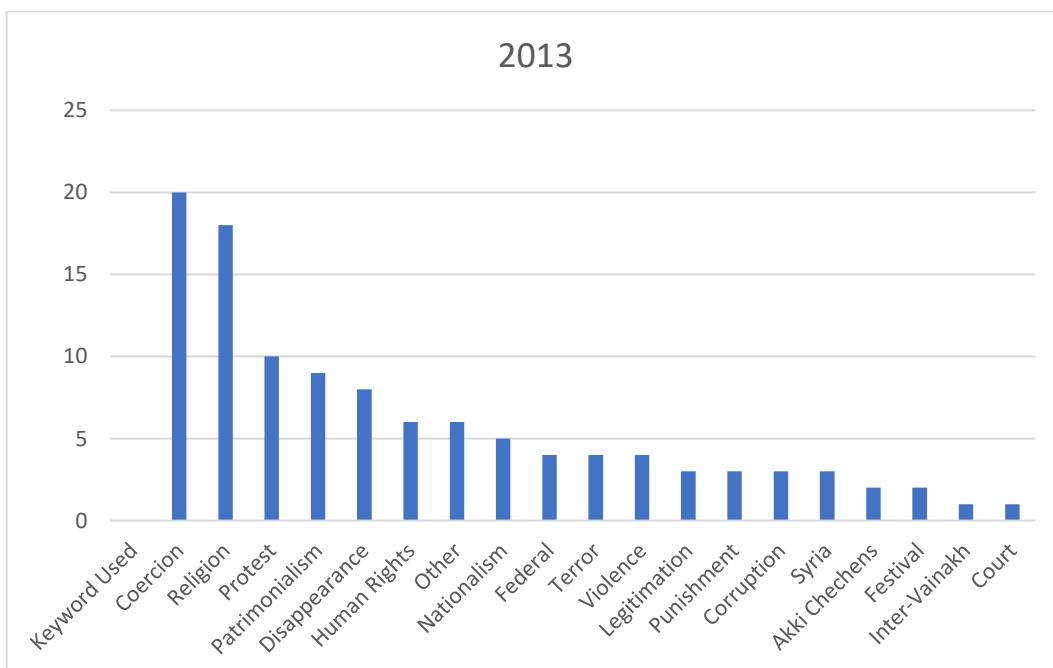
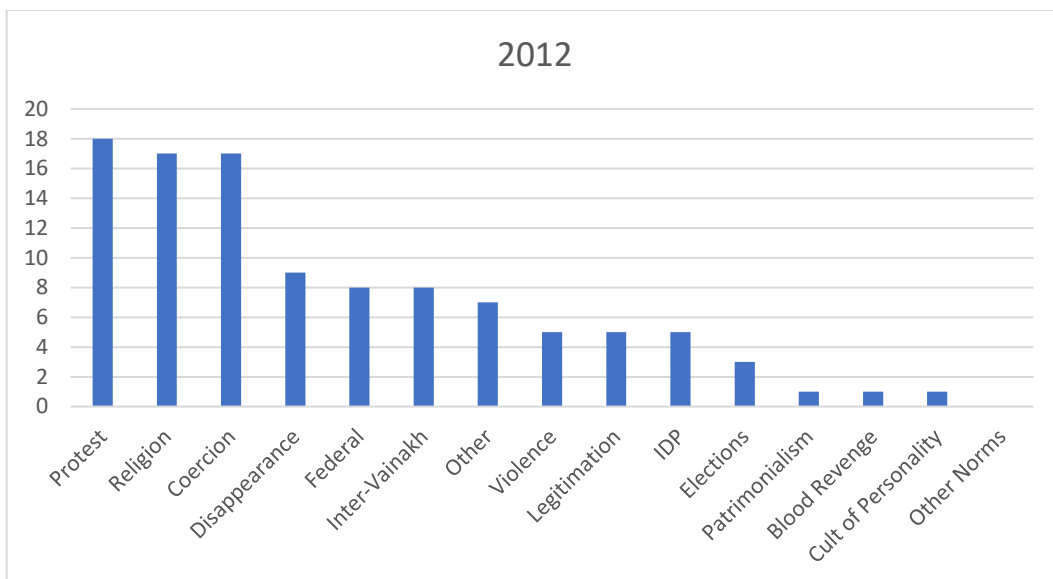
As a reminder: the number of articles per keyword is how many articles had the respective

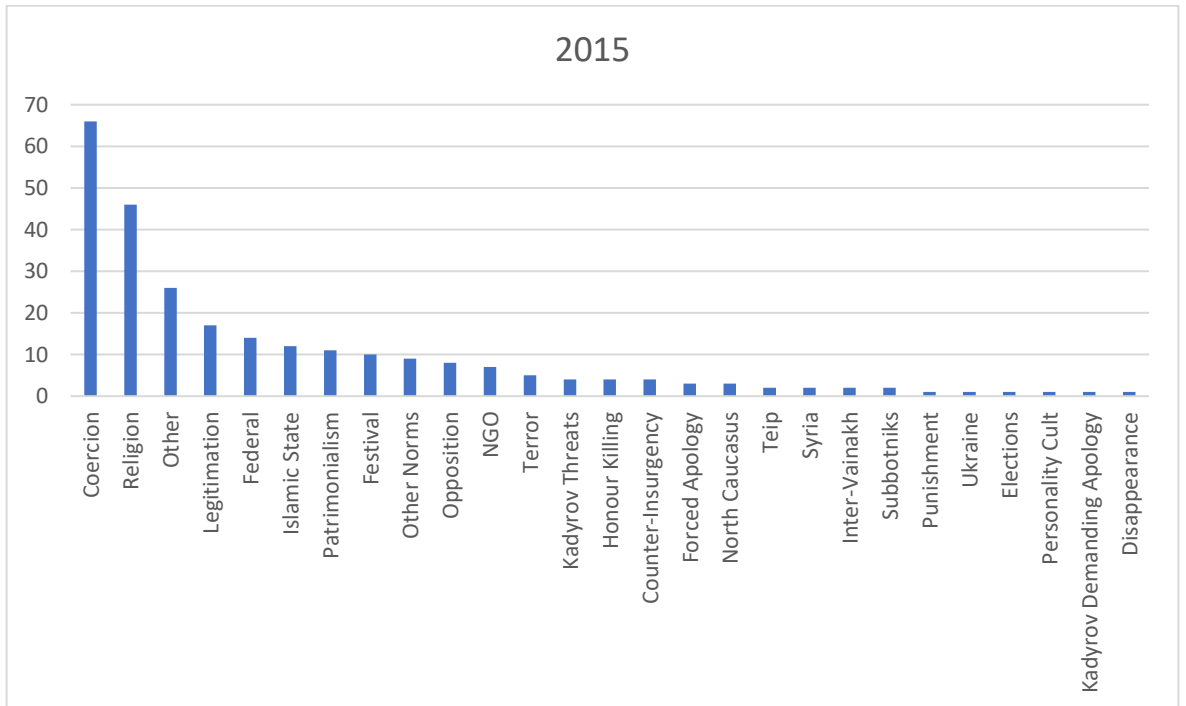
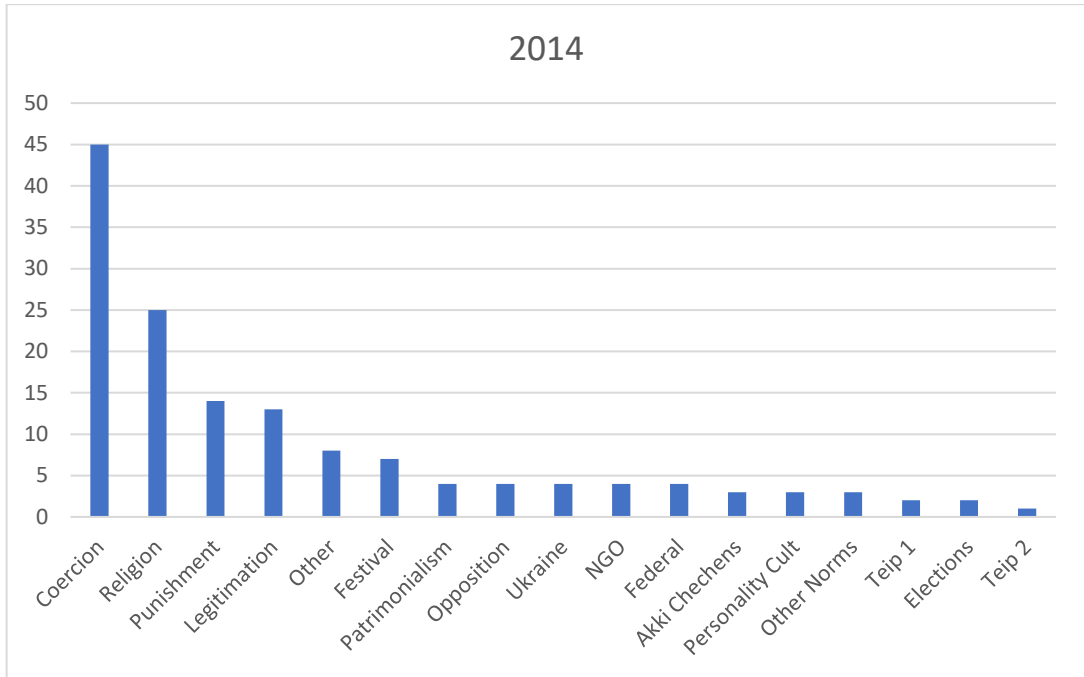
keywords as one of the three possible keywords. Due to not every article having three keywords,

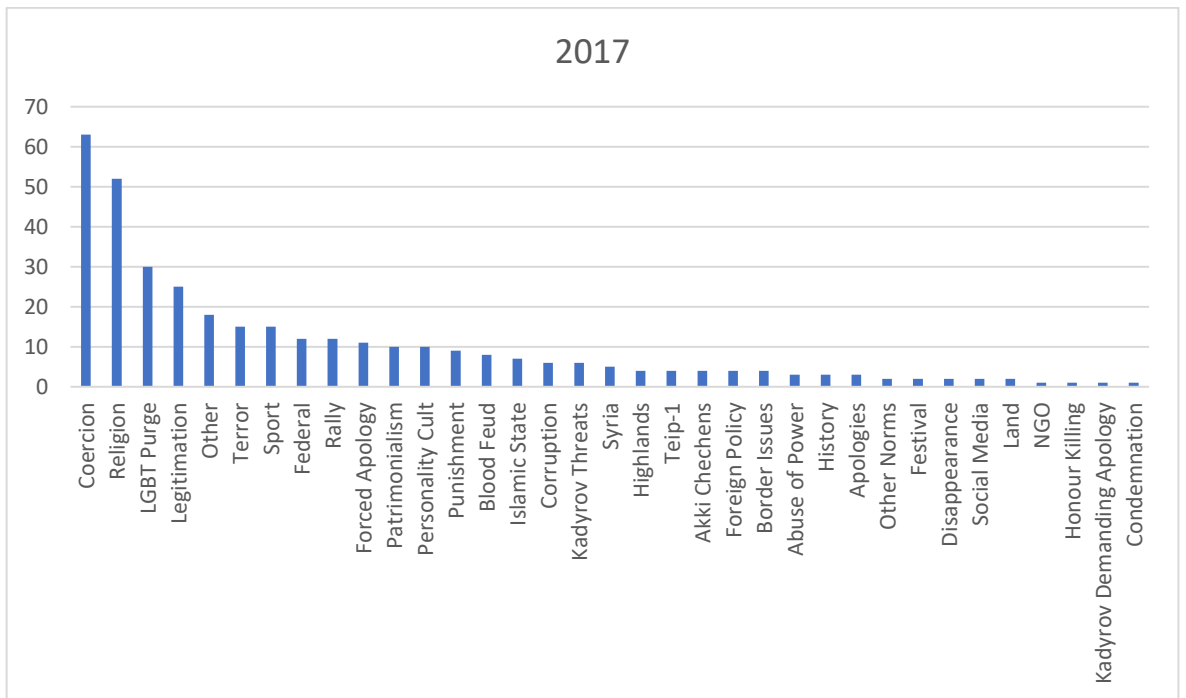
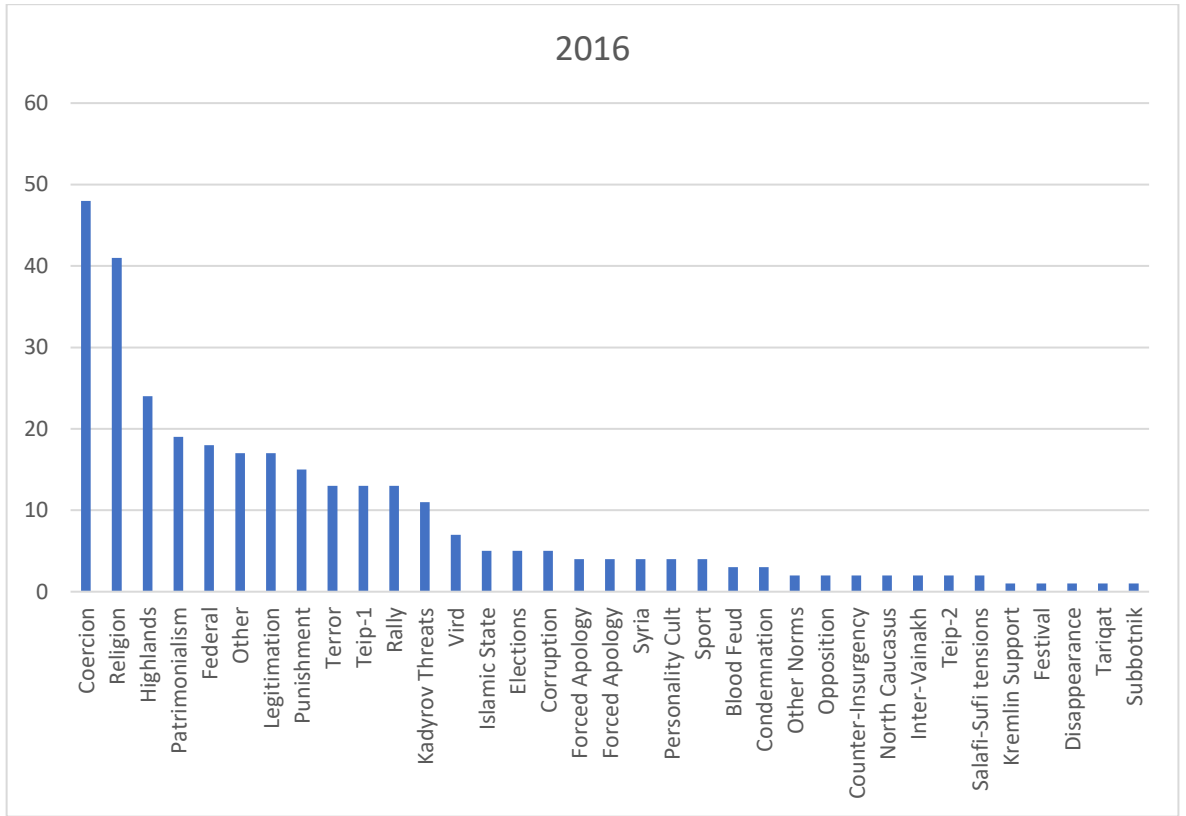
this means that the following articles do not represent the total number of articles (2,808 in

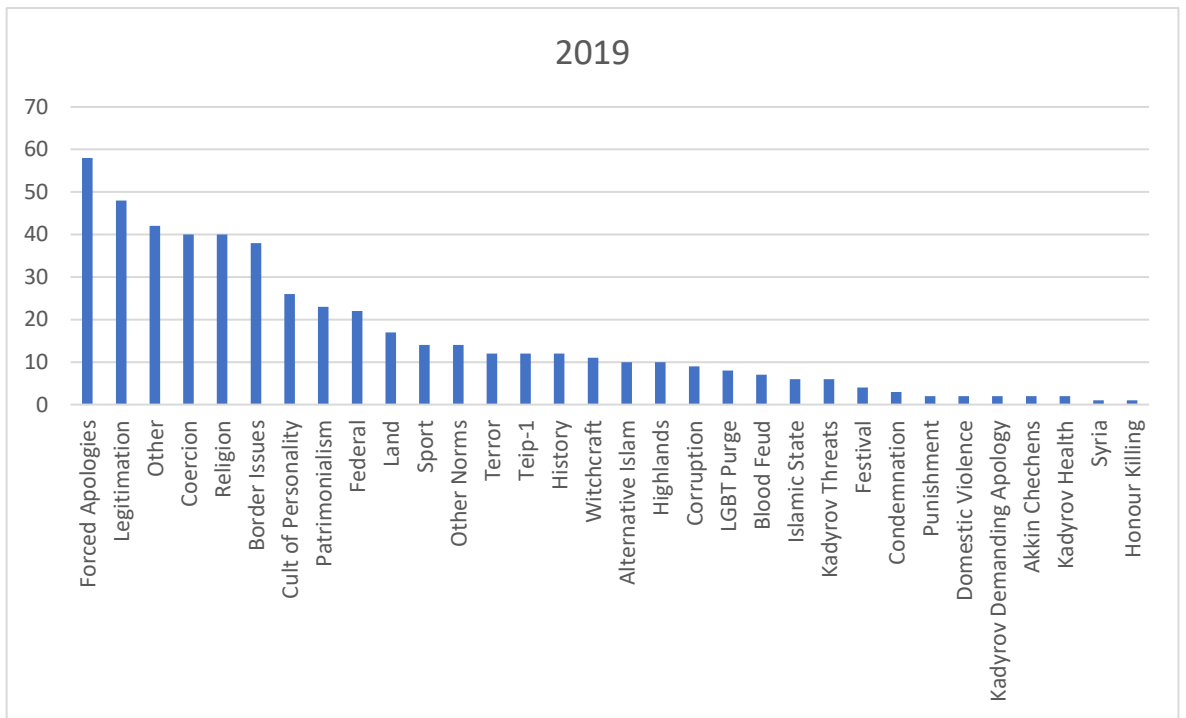
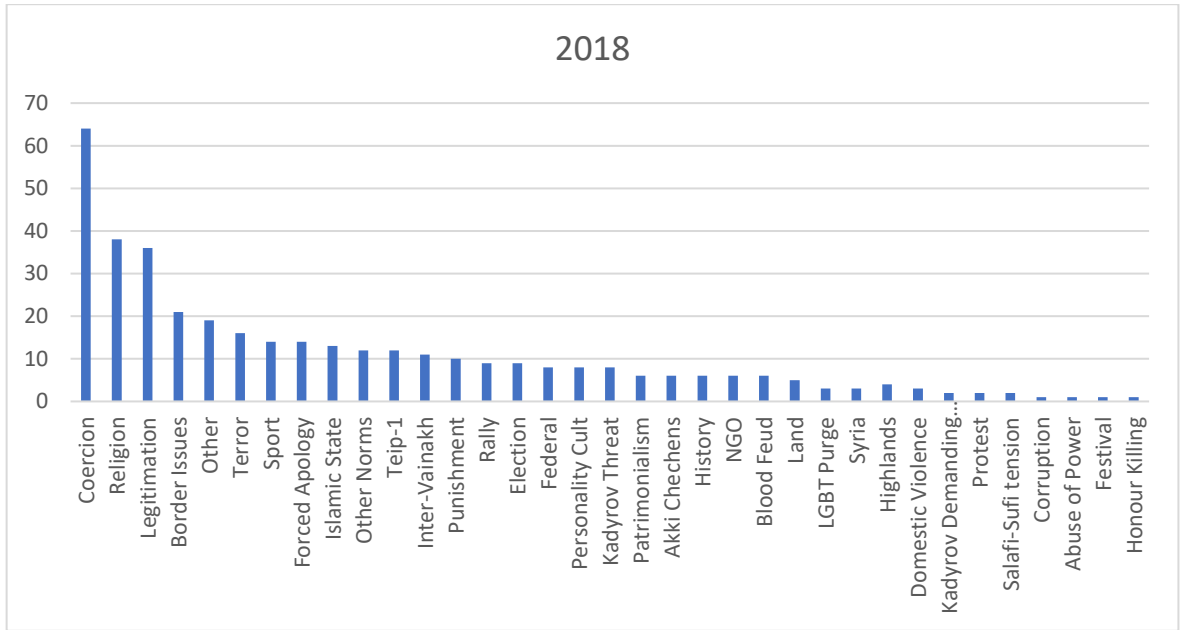
total).

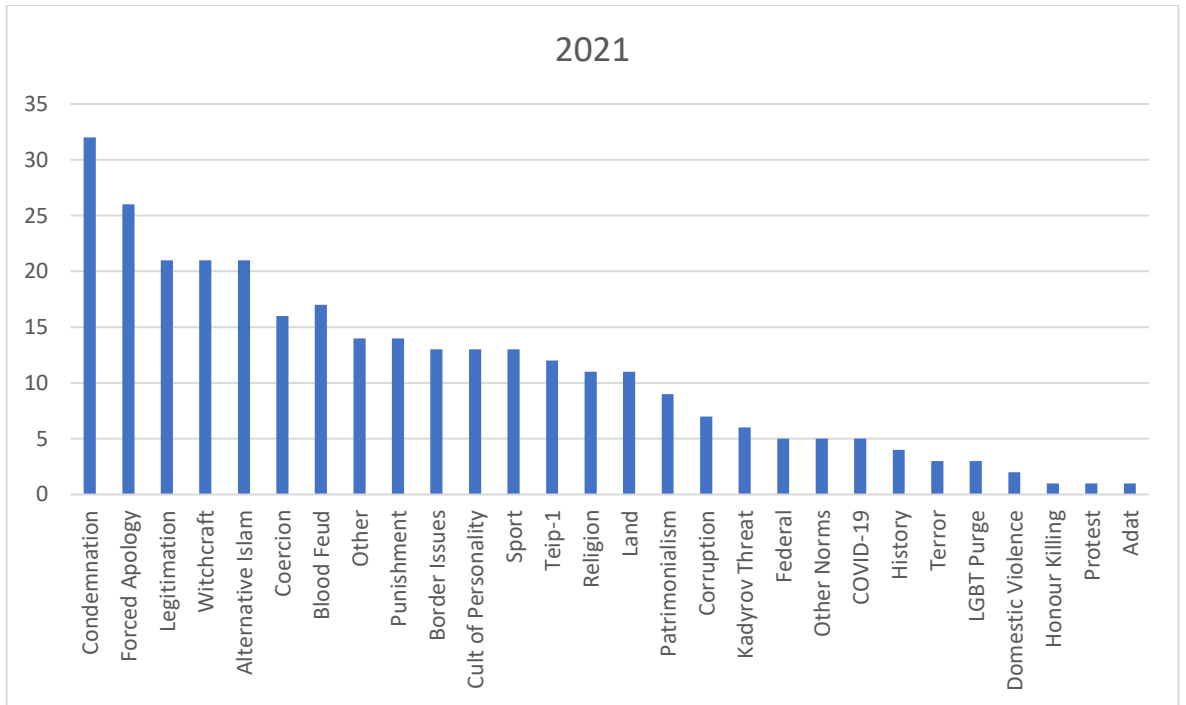
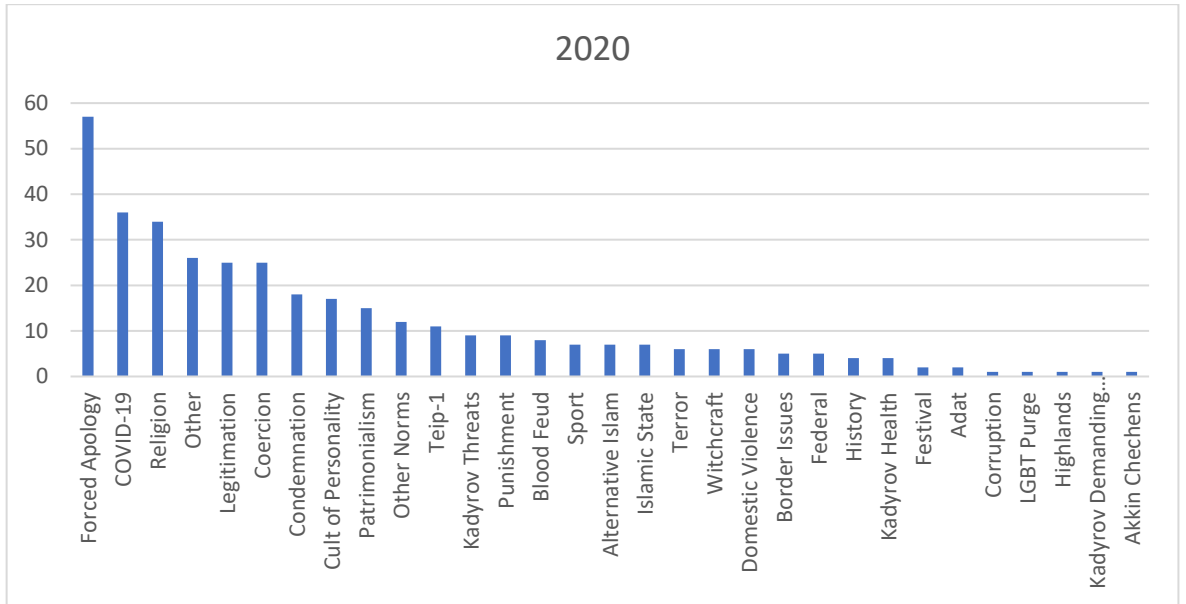
### **Results for Chechnya per year:**



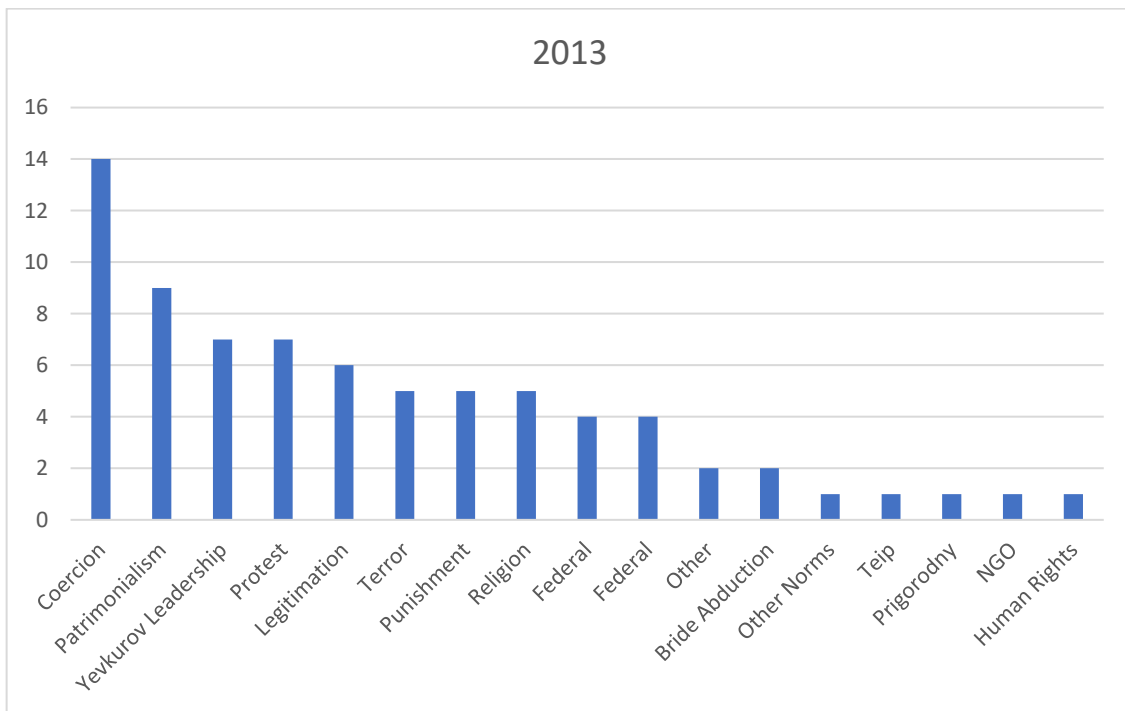
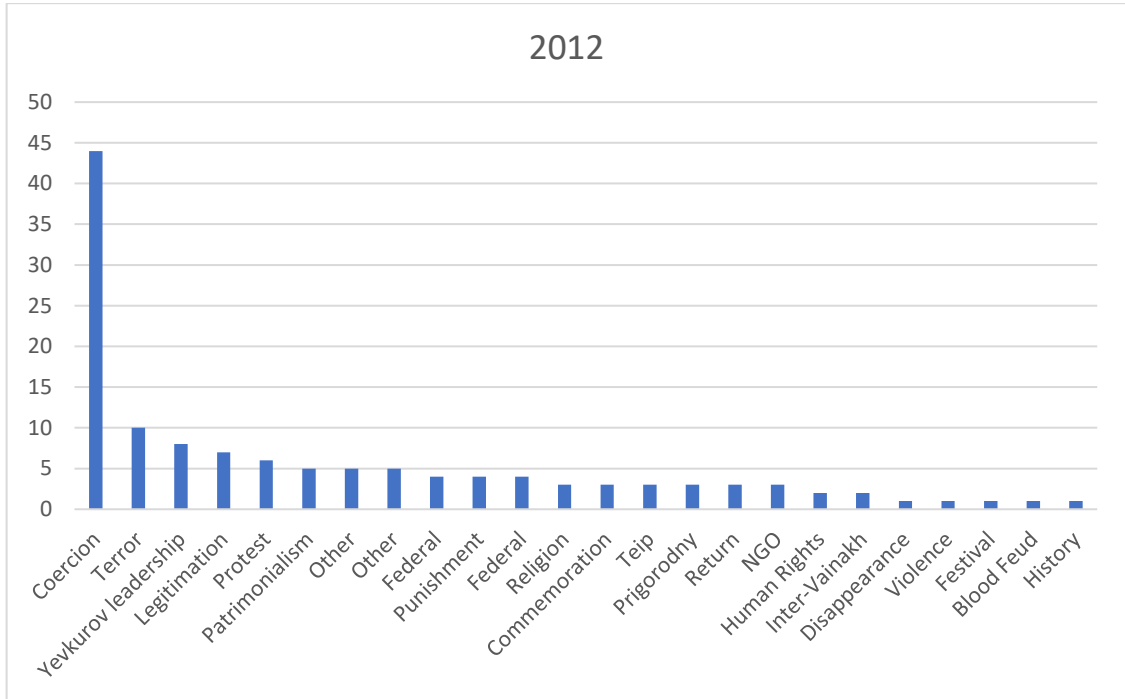


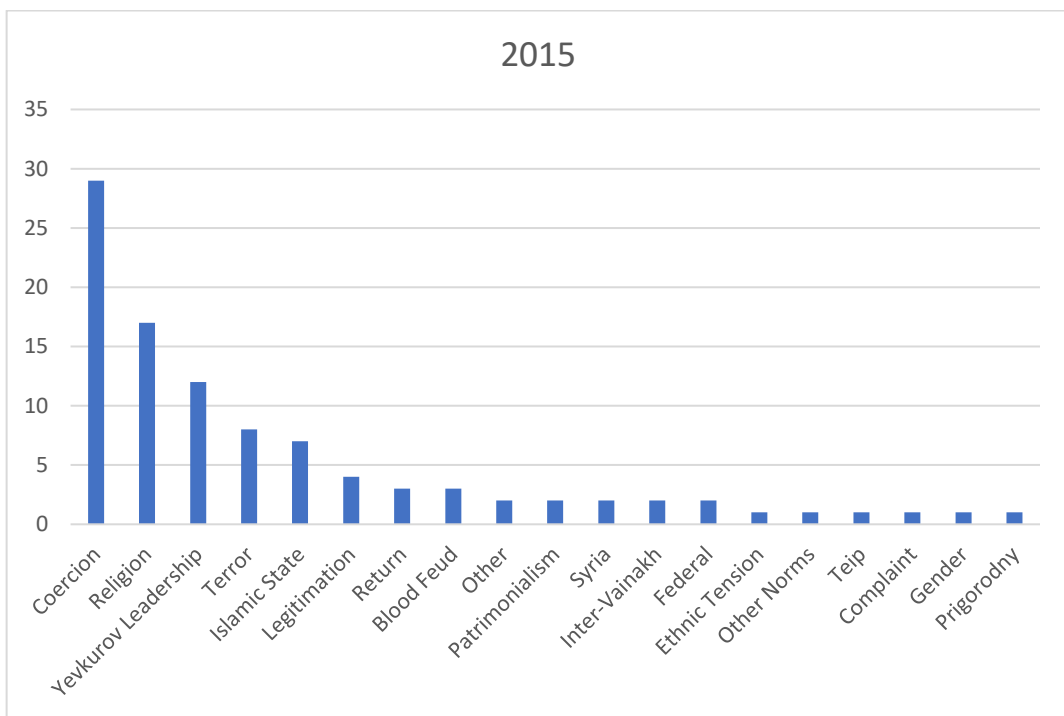
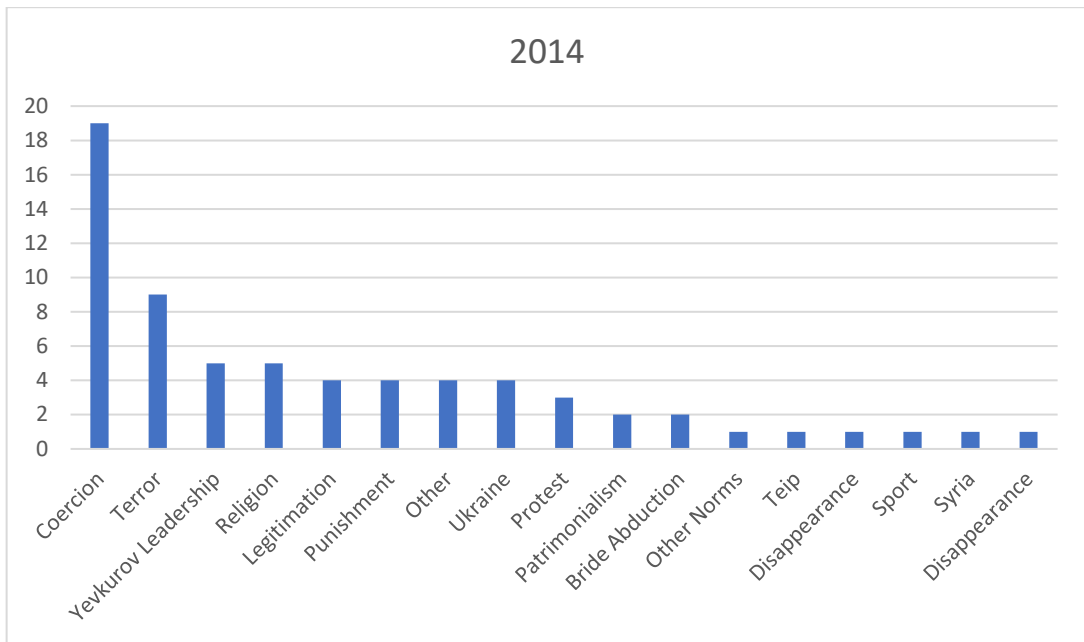


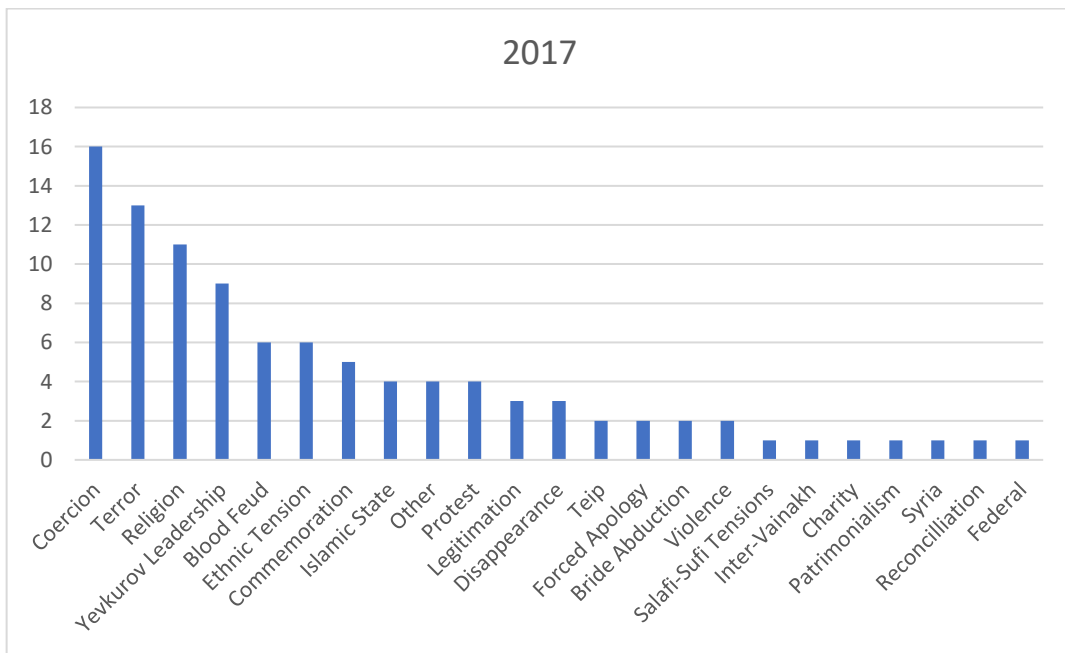
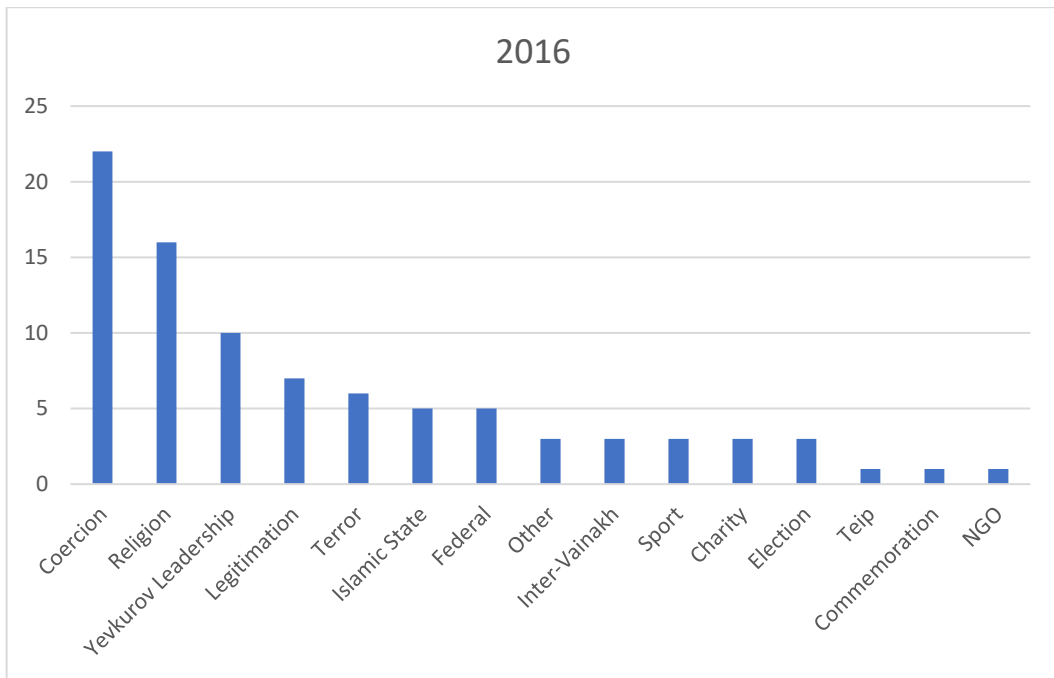


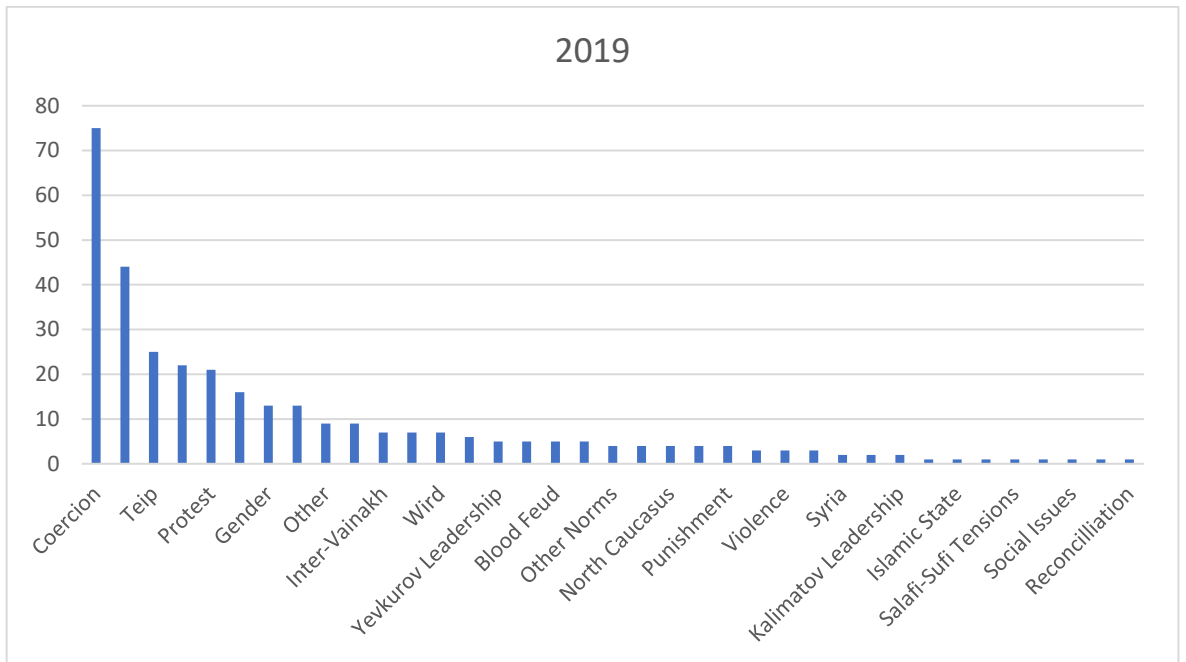
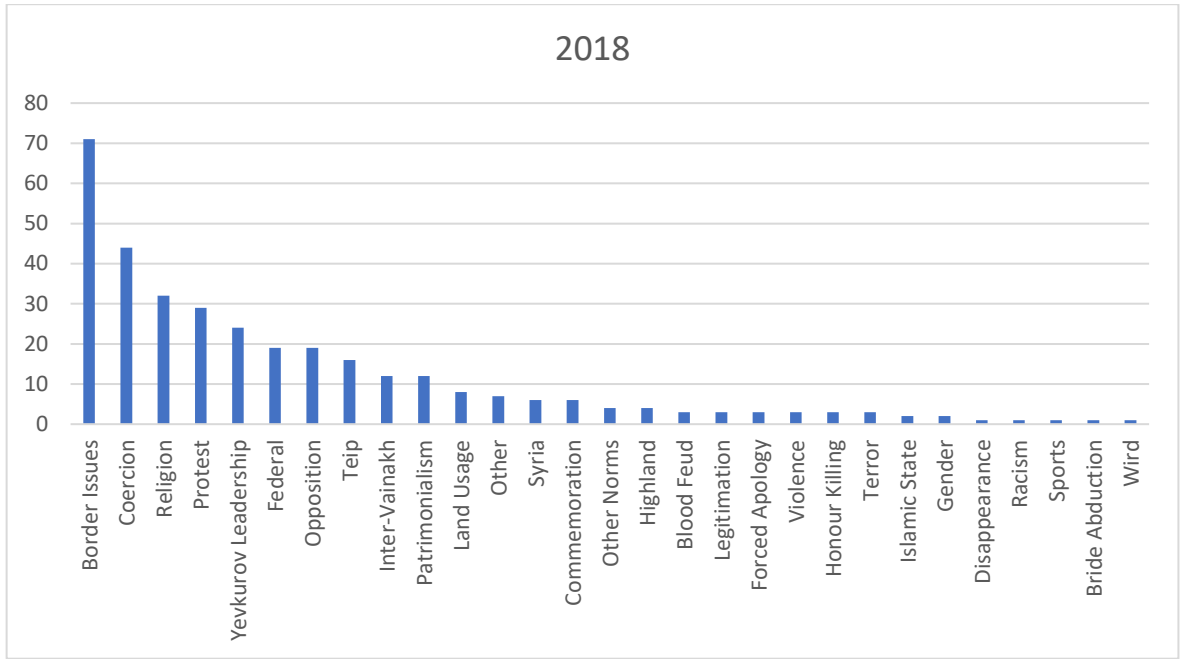


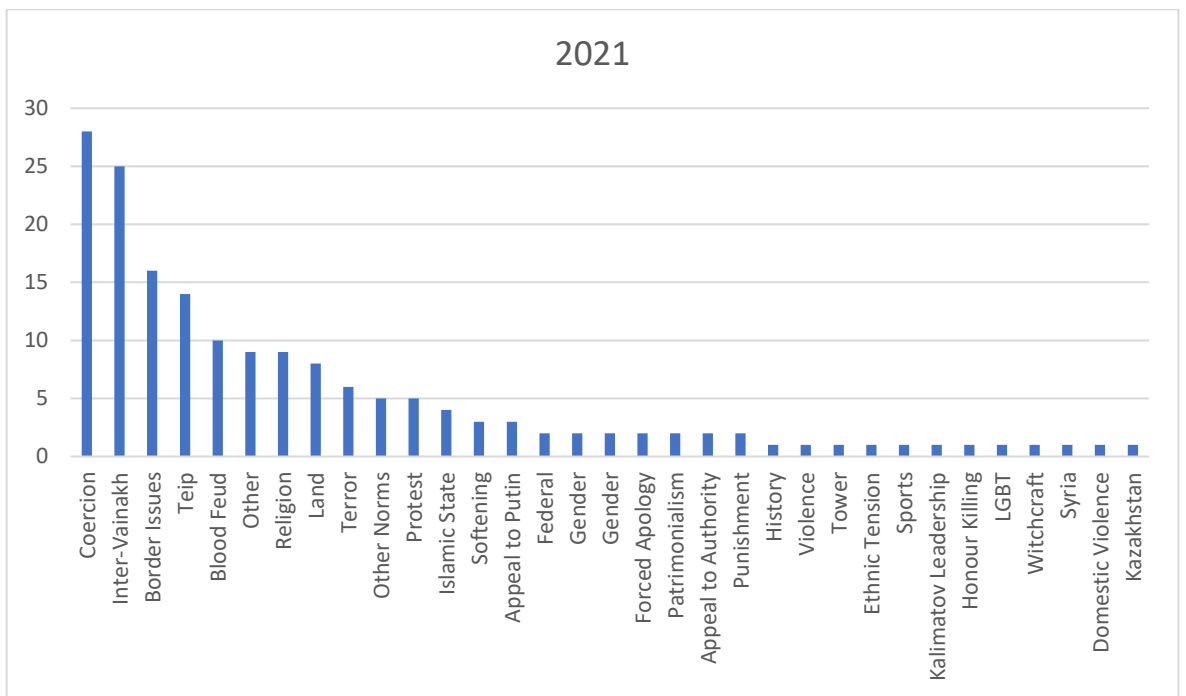
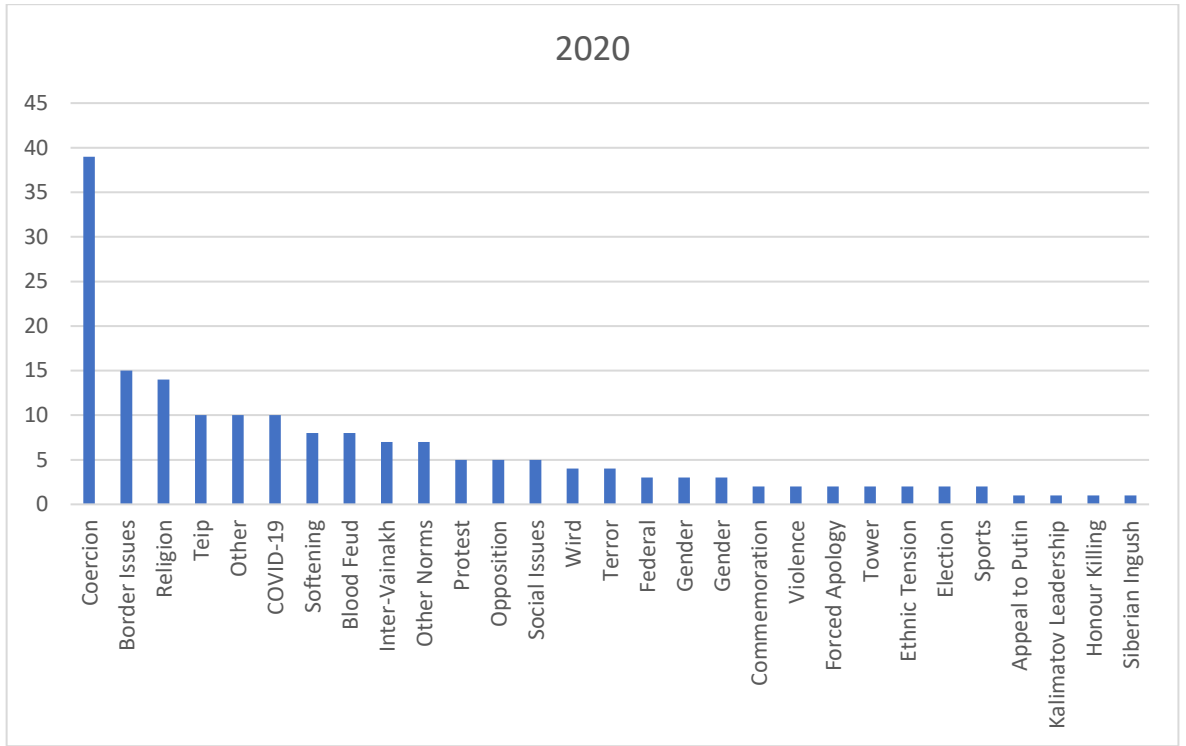
**Results for Ingushetia per year**









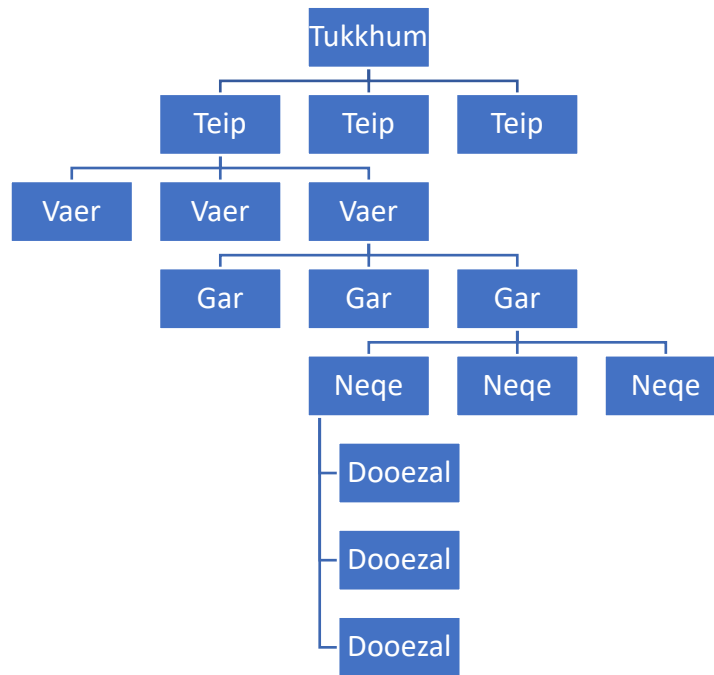


## Appendix 2: Structures of the Teip and Tariqa

The structure of the teips and tariqas are referred to on occasion throughout the text, while not totally explored. The structure of these informal institutions is nonetheless important, especially in terms of individual identity building. The following are compiled primarily from Amjad Jaimoukha's 2005 *The Chechens: A Handbook* and Ekaterina Sokirianskaia's 2023 book *Bonds of Blood? State-building and Clanship in Chechnya and Ingushetia*.

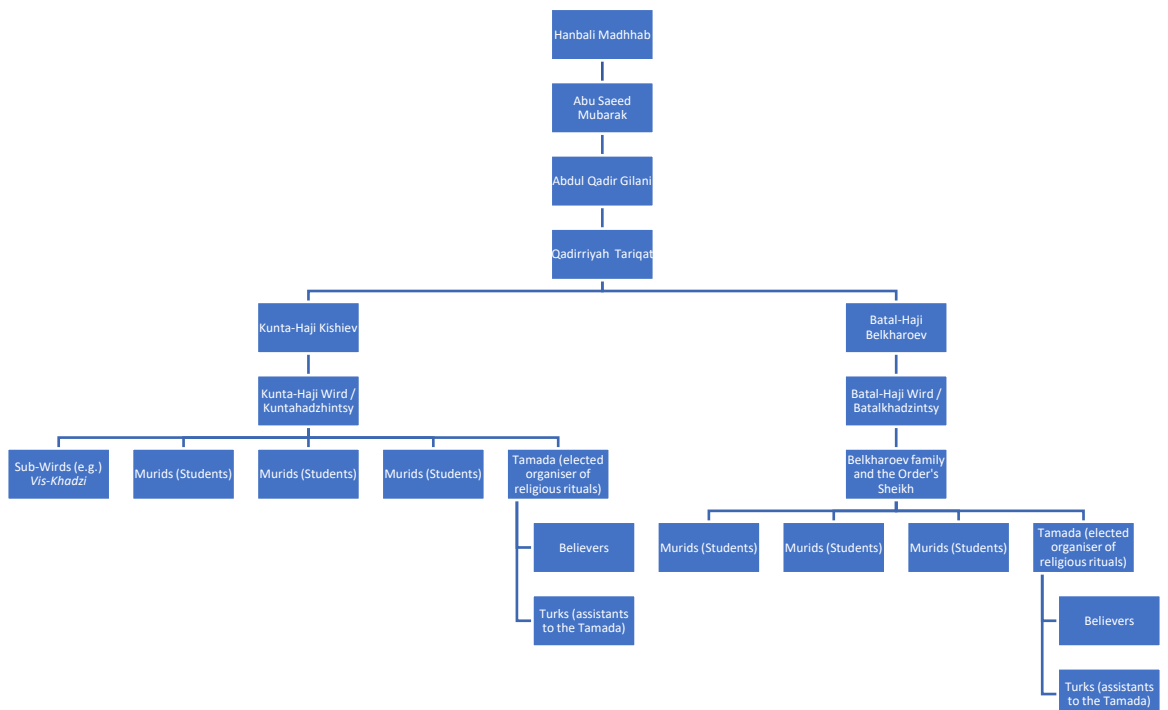
### Teip Structure

The Teip system's highest level is not the teip but the *Tukkhum*, a union of teips (originally a political-military union). Tukkhums are much more fluid than the lower levels of the system, with some not claiming kindred or common ancestry but uniting for economic or political purposes. Tukkhums had larger versions of the *Mekkh Kkhel*. Teips form the second level and do claim common ancestry, are typically/traditionally spread out over several *auls*, are exogamous – with members having to marry outside the teip – and have a *Mekkh Kkhel*. Below are two further branches, the *Vaer* and the *Gar* – a *Gar* is a lineage of the *neqe*, itself a group of households with a common surname. Below this is the *Dooezal*, the more common extended family of global society consisting of parents, grandparents and children. Sometimes included in the system is the very concept of the nation, sometimes conceptualised as a union of *Tukkhums*, which is used as a way of separating the Ingush and Chechen nations. Jaimoukha lists around 150 teips falling into 9 Tukkhums. Below, a chart demonstrates the above hierarchy.



Sufi Tariqas

The Sufi Tariqa is a more straightforward and much more important structure to follow for the purposes of the research. As stated in Chapter 4, there are two Tariqas present in Chechnya and Ingushetia, the Qadiri and the Naqshbandi, with the Qadiri being the largest of the two and easiest to map out. Normally, this mapping would stop at the wirds, but there are additional layers beyond this – crucially, the master-student dynamic at the heart of Sufism.



There are a couple of notes to this. Firstly, this is a simplified version of the relationship displayed; as is the case with many Islamic groups, such as the Shi'a Nizari Imamate, the Bektashi Order and the other Sunni Maddhabs, to Muhammad himself. In the case of the Nizaris, this is a blood connection; for the Kunta-Hajis and the Batal-Hajis, this is a theological connection, a direct continuation of the Master-Student relationship at the core of Sufism. Secondly, the *Tamada* is, as an elected, not always strictly part of the Brotherhood, but may act as a link between the wider believers and the Brotherhood's teachings. The *Tamada* may be a Salafi, a more "traditional" Sunni scholar – I have included it here as there instances of a direct connection between this role and Sufism. On a different note, *Tamada* bears linguistic resemblance to the Adyghe word for Prince, in this case the highest ring of the Adyghe caste system, *Thamada*. Likewise, *Turk* stands out as another obvious similarity. I could not find any linguistic works on these similarities; it may be coincidence, it may not. Finally, this is only for one of the two Tariqas in the republics – there exists the Naqshbandi, with an entirely different lineage for their brotherhoods. There are many more Naqshbandi wirts in the republics, though their followers are a minority and only one, the *Deni-Arasnov* wird, is described as integrated and, crucially, never appears in the research.