Post-Soviet Affairs, 18, 4, December 2002

Dagestani Perspectives on Russia and Chechnya

Robert Bruce Ware, Enver F. Kisriev, Werner J. Patzelt, Ute Roericht[1]

Abstract: Recent federal recentralizing processes have brought a variety of pressures to bear upon the unique political institutions that the Dagestani people have developed in order to cope with their ethnic diversity. How are Dagestanis likely to view these modifications? Survey and interview data that we gathered at the beginning of this process indicate strong identification with Russia and remarkable confidence in federal officials during periods of acute crisis. However, attitudes vary significantly among ethnic groups, and the maintenance of stability in this strategic region may depend upon perseverance and ingenuity on the parts of local officials as well as upon the flexibility of those in Moscow.

Will current efforts to bend Dagestan's political institutions to fit a Russian federal mold have a destabilizing effect in the Caspian and Caucasus regions? Located strategically at Russia's southernmost tip, and accounting for seventy percent of its Caspian Sea coast, Dagestan is Russia's most heterogeneous republic. It's two million plus citizens are divided among thirty-

---

[1] Robert Bruce Ware is Associate Professor of Philosophical Studies at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (email: rware@siue.edu). Enver F. Kisriev is Senior Researcher at the Institute of Hsitory, Archeology and Ethnography of the Dagestan Scientific Center, Russian Academy of Science, Mahachkala, and Senior Researcher at the Center for Civilization and Regional Studies, Russian Academy of Science, Moscow (email: enver@datacom.ru, kisriev.dagestan@mtu-net.ru). Werner J. Patzelt is Professor and Chair of Political Science at Technische Universität Dresden (email: werner_j.patzelt@mailbox.tu-dresden.de). Ute Roericht is a doctoral candidate at Technische Universität Dresden (email: roericht@spwnw1.phil.tu-dresden.de). This is a revision of a paper presented at the Caspian Sea Regional Policy Symposium in Shepardstown, WV, administered by the International Research and Exchanges Board and the Kennan Institute of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. The authors are grateful for a Research and Policy Fellowship from the National Council for Eurasian and Eastern

four ethno-linguistic groups. Some of these groups, such as Avars, Azeris, Chechens, Lezgins, and Nogais, are themselves divided by contentious frontiers, and Dagestan's predominantly Muslim population has seen violence between Islamic traditionalists and Islamist fundamentalists locally described as "Wahhabis".

Since the conflict in August and September of 1999 on its Western frontier,[2] Dagestan has rapidly moved closer to Moscow (Kisriev and Ware, 2000). Budgetary transfers from Moscow to Mahachkala have increased dramatically, and Moscow has done much to promote and develop Mahachkala as a hub for hydrocarbon transfers from Caspian fields to Western markets. This trend stands in stark contrast with the transitional period that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union, when there was minimal central influence upon events in Dagestan. Indeed there were times in the earlier period when it seemed that the influence and authority of Azerbaijani leader, Geydar Aliev, was stronger than that of Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

The political latitude of this period is reflected in the constitution that Dagestan adopted in 1994. While Dagestan's unique political institutions differ dramatically from those of any other Russian region, from those of the Federation as a whole, and indeed from those of any other part of the world, they have proven both effective and resilient in managing and avoiding ethnic conflicts. Dagestan's chief executive body is the State Council (*Gos Sovet*), which consists of one representative from each of Dagestan's 14 principal ethnic groups. Representatives to the State Council are selected for four year terms by Dagestan's Constitutional Assembly. The Constitutional Assembly consists of 242 members. Half of these members are the representatives elected to Dagestan's People's Assembly (*Narodnoe Sobranie*).

European Research and a travel grant from the National Research Council. They are also grateful to Tatiana Chubrikova and Zulia Ware. The authors are solely responsible for the contents.

[2] On August 2 and September 5, 1999, Dagestan was invaded by Islamist militants based in training camps in eastern Chechnya that were connected to the Al Qaeda organization.

The other 121 members of the Constitutional Assembly are specially elected to this body from each of Dagestan's 121 Assembly districts. (Kisriev and Ware, 2001a; Ware and Kisriev, 1999a, 2000a, 2001a, b).

Until 2000, representatives to the People's Assembly were successfully elected by means of an elaborate ethnic electoral system (Kisriev and Ware, 2001a; Ware and Kisriev, 1999a, 2000a, 2001a, b). In order to avoid ethnic conflicts, provide ethnic proportionality, and reduce thesalience of ethnicity as a campaign issue, 66 electoral districts that were located in multi-ethnic areas were designated by the Dagestani Electoral Commission as ethnic electoral districts. In these districts only candidates of the designated ethnicity could stand for election. The remaining 55 districts were in mono-ethnic regions, predominantly in the highlands. Residency requirements were dropped so that candidates could seek office in any district corresponding with their ethnicity. This system, which was widely regarded as equitable and legitimate, provided representation in the Assembly for each ethnic group often within a few tenths of a percentage point of it representation in the broader population districts (Kisriev and Ware, 2001a; Ware and Kisriev, 1999a, 2000a, 2001a, b). However, beginning in 2000 the People's Assembly enacted legislation altering the Republic's electoral system, due in part to central influence (Ware and Kisriev, 2001b).

Central control over Dagestani structures has been rapidly increasing. Following recent efforts by the Kremlin to recentralize the Russian political system, a wide range of Dagestan's political institutions and practices have became the focus of judicial and executive pressures applied upon Dagestani officials from the federal center. Dagestan's collegial executive and its ethnic electoral districts were challenged in Russia's Constitutional Court, and Dagestani

officials found Moscow signaling in a variety of ways that Dagestan's entire political structure must be modified (Ware and Kisriev, 2001b).

Regional autonomy is giving way to uniform practice and centralized means of control, illustrated by the seven new federal districts patterned upon the top-down organization of the Russian military. Like other regional elites, Dagestani officials remain uncertain of their position within this new federal structure. Yet while the full implications of this reorganization remain unclear the process has already had significant effects in Dagestan.

What effect will Russian recentralizing trends have upon regional stability in the Caspian? Will current efforts to bend Dagestani institutions to fit a federal mold have a destabilizing effect? The current Dagestani system is the result of a lengthy historical process of political evolution that has extended informally over centuries in response to constant power clashes and complex counter-balancing forces, none of which can be readily eliminated from the political scene (Ware and Kisriev, 2001a). Since Moscow cannot hope to modify the localized internal pressures that have produced this system and that successfully have been channeled within it, will externally imposed modifications prove to be counterproductive?

As it happened, we were conducting a field research project in Dagestan during the spring and summer of 2000 just as President Putin's recentralization program was getting under way. Since the study was proposed in 1998 and funded in early 1999, before Putin ascended to power, it was not focused upon issues of recentralization. Among other things, however, the study was intended to examine Dagestani attitudes toward the Republic's democratic institutions, toward Russia, and toward threats to Dagestan's stability. Hence, while the fieldwork did not directly address issues of recentralization, and while the full spectrum of data is presented in a

series of articles,[3] survey and interview data on Dagestani attitudes toward governments in Moscow and Mahachkala, and to relations between them, taken at the beginning of the federal recentralization program may nevertheless shed some light upon the preceding questions concerning the potential effects of Russian recentralization upon stability in Dagestan.

The present article is divided among four sections. The first two sections are intended to provide an introduction to the issues involved by sampling two of the complex problems, respectively concerning electoral practices and ethnic rights, that have been raised as recent centralizing pressures have confronted Dagestan's unique political practices. The third section presents survey and interview data on Dagestani attitudes toward issues relevant to Russian recentralization, and the final section presents our concluding thoughts.

Electoral Alternations

The process of centralization arrived in Dagestan in the spring of 2000 by way of two ostensibly unrelated events. Federal officials initially requested that the Attorney General of Dagestan, Imam Yaraliev, identify all articles of the Dagestani Constitution that did not match the Constitution of the Russian Federation. In early May 2000, Yaraliev appealed to the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation to grant dispensation concerning disparities in many articles of the Dagestani Constitution with respect to its federal counterpart.

Yet before the Court could rule on Yaraliev's appeal it had already begun to hear another case springing from an incident that occurred two years earlier in Dagestan's capitol,

[3] Ware, Kisriev, Patzelt, Roericht: "Political Islam in Dagestan" *Europe and Asia Studies* (forthcoming); "Ethnicity and Identity in Dagestan" under consideration by *Nations and Nationalisms,* "Does Dagestan's Democracy Work?" under consideration by *Comparative Politics*, "Stability in the Caucasus: The Perspective from Dagestan" under

Mahachkala. The latter case, which the Court addressed on 16 May 2000, was filed by Islamagomed Nabiev, the Chairman of the Independent Trade Union of the Entrepreneurs and Truck Drivers of Dagestan, who challenged the institution of ethnic electoral districts in the selection of local councils and the People's Assembly of Dagestan. During the Mahachkala City Council race of April 1998 Mr. Nabiyev wished to stand for election in the district of his residence, though he was an ethnic Avar and it was Lezgin.

When Dagestani leaders learned that the Court was likely to rule against Dagestan in this case, they urgently worked to modify Dagestan's electoral law. In an effort to preserve the ethnic balance of its representative organs Dagestan's monoethnic electoral districts were replaced by multiethnic districts, in which candidates of any ethnicity are permitted to run.

According to the new plan, blocks of candidates appear on the ballot of each district. Candidates from the ethnicities that need special proportional representation are gathered in "monoethnic" blocks, while the rest of the candidates are gathered in a section of miscellaneous "others". The candidates that win a majority of votes in their particular blocks are considered the winners. Thus, within the framework of a single ballot candidates compete within electoral lists that may be specified on an ethnic basis. This approach is intended to sustain proportionate representation throughout Dagestan's legislative bodies.

Though this system will not be fully tested until the next Assembly election in 2003, it is likely to generate new problems. For instance, a candidate who receives fewer votes than others in his block, and therefore is not elected, might still receive more votes than candidates in other blocks who are elected. It appears that such a candidate would have a basis to seek judicial redress for ethnic discrimination, much as did Mr. Nabiyev who initially precipitated these

---

consideration by *Problems of Post-Communism*, and "Dagestan: the pillar of Russian influence in the Caspian and Caucasus regions" under consideration by *Central Asian Survey.*

changes when he took his claims of electoral ethnic discrimination before the Russian Constitutional Court. Yet this complaint was against the ethnic basis of the electoral system as a whole, and not against the outcome of any particular election. Thus the new system might actually lead to more complaints, and to complaints of a more contentious nature, than the old. Previously, ethnic electoral districts were established well in advance of elections, and only candidates of the specified ethnicity were registered. Since one of these was ultimately elected there were no surprises of an ethnic nature, and an election itself was unlikely to be challenged on grounds of ethnic discrimination. The new system seems likely to produce challenges to the results of particular elections, which are consequently likely to produce diminished consensus and legitimacy.

The new system also encounters issues of identity. Since the new Russian passports do not designate the ethnicity of their holder how will ethnic identity be determined in equivocal cases? While this might also have posed problems for the previous system, it is significant that the old method of predetermined ethnic electoral districts, which required that all candidates should be from the same group, served to minimize the electoral salience of ethnic identity. Under the new system, a voter may choose from among multiple ethnic lists in order to cast a single vote on a single list. For example, in a new multimandate district, an Avar might have to choose whether to vote for a candidate on an Avar, a Lak, or a Lezgin list. If he chooses to vote for an Avar candidate then he has no influence in the Lak or Lezgin elections. On the other hand, he might be persuaded to cast his vote in the Lezgin race. Thus, there will inevitably be efforts to persuade voters to focus on one ethnic list or another, and in this way ethnic considerations will likely reappear in Dagestan's electoral contests.

Despite these considerations, the Dagestani People's Assembly adopted the new electoral rules in the spring of 2001. Moscow appears to be satisfied, but the altered procedures may prove a compromise of limited feasibility.

Ethnic Rights

Dagestan's State Council, is the only collegial executive in the Russian Federation, and the only executive that is not chosen by direct election. Its fourteen members each represent one of Dagestan's principal recognized ethnic groups: Aguls, Avars, Azeris, Chechen-Akhins, Dargins, Kumyks, Laks, Lezgins, Nogais, Rutuls, Russians, Tabasarans, Tats, and Tsakhurs. Because the State Council ostensibly provides representation for all, most Dagestanis have favored this arrangement for its protection of the smaller ethnicities, and therefore have thrice rejected referenda that would have established a presidential system.

Hence, it is ironic that these arrangements should be jeopardized by a federal law providing a "Guarantee of the Rights of Indigenous Small Ethnicities in the Russian Federation." Enacted on 30 April 1999, the law obligates parties to take necessary measures to foster equity between members of smaller and larger ethnic groups in all areas of economic, social, political and cultural life. This legislation is particularly significant for Dagestan given that its population is comprised by 34 ethno-linguistic groups, many of whom are subsisting in highland regions under conditions of near total economic collapse. Yet whereas this legislation was intended to assist such groups throughout the Federation, the peculiarities of Dagestani society are such that the law effectively threatened viable institutions and established political processes upon which these groups depend.

The law defines “small ethnic groups” as those whose membership does not exceed 50,000. In Dagestan, only four ethnic groups officially meet this definition: Aguls, Rutuls, Tsakhurs, and Tats. Yet other groups have bases for claiming on ethno-cultural, and more importantly, on linguistic grounds that they qualify for consideration as “small ethnic groups”.

For example, in addition to those “proper” Avars, who speak the Avar language, 14 other linguistically independent ethnic groups are also considered administratively as “Avars”. These groups, which tend to be compactly accommodated in high mountain villages, are as follows: (1) Andis, (2) Archins, (3) Akhvakhs, (4) Bagulals, (5) Bezhtins, (6) Botlikhs, (7) Genukhs, (8) Godaberins, (9) Gunzibs, (10) Didoys, (11) Karatins, (12) Tindins, (13) Hvarshins, (14) Chamadins. Similarly, two small and linguistically distinct groups have been counted administratively as ethnic Dargins. These are: (15) Kubachins, (16) Kaitags.

Several of these groups, especially those living along Dagestan’s rugged southwestern border, find themselves economically, politically, culturally, and infrastructurally isolated. Having lost the material benefits and ideological assurances of socialist society they are also entirely without the opportunities that have accompanied socio-economic transition and sometimes lent encouragement to residents of Dagestan’s larger towns. In the face of this plight, some of them also believe that they lack adequate political representation since, in their eyes, they are not genuinely Avars or Dargins.

While their classification as such stems in part from traditional affiliations among ethno-linguistic groups, it is also results from peculiarities of Soviet ethnography in the 1920s. On the one hand, the first 14 of these groups were classified as Avars. On the other hand, Lezgins were distinguished administratively from Aguls, Rutuls, Tsakhurs, and Tabasarans, all of whom had

traditional affiliations with Lezgins that resemble the affiliations between groups like the Andis and the Avars. Yet while Andis were counted as Avars, Aguls were distinguished from Lezgins.

The law of the Russian Federation "Guaranteeing the Rights of Small Minorities" aggravates nationalist sentiments among these Dagestani groups particularly because their recognition as independent ethnic groups would entitle their leaders to seats in the cabinets of power. Hence, questions arise concerning changes in the number of seats in the State Council of the Republic of Dagestan and ethnic quotas in the legislative Assembly. For example, the law precipitated demands for an expansion of the State Council from its current membership of 14 ethnic representatives to include sixteen new representatives from Dagestan's smaller groups. Some of these demands are credible. For example, the Tsakhurs, who are currently represented in the State Council, have a population of 3,000, while the 30,000 Andis, who are currently classified as Avars, do not have a separate representative. Any consistent policy for the determination of independent ethnicity would expand the State Council to 30 members. Yet since exactly half of these would be representing groups that are currently regarded as Avars, and that do in fact have affiliations with Avars, Dagestan's other ethnic groups would find this result difficult to accept.

Many of these problems arise from the fact that the true ethnic structure of Dagestani society is constituted, not by ethnicities, but by smaller structures known as *djamaats* (Ware and Kisriev, 199b, 2000a; Ware, 2002). A *djamaat* is a village, or an historically connected group of villages, each of which is composed of several *tuhums*, or clans. The *djamaat* has territorial, ethno-cultural, and kinship bases. Historically, Dagestani *djamaats* were compact, densely populated, well-fortified hamlets that controlled their surrounding countryside. These separate

"city-states" had their own distinctive civil laws, know as *djamaat adati*. In the nineteenth century there were approximately 350 to 400 *djamaats.*

The traditional "free societies", "principalities", and "khanates" that were described by Russians when they first arrived in the region were generally "molecular" aggregations of Dagestan's "atomic" socio-political units, or *djamaats.* In some cases these unions among *djamaats* were voluntary, and in some cases they were forced. The form of local government often varied with the geography. In the mountains "federal republics" or "unions of free societies" were the norm, whereas the plains and foothills were often home to more authoritarian regimes.

Today, in several cases, such traditional aggregations of *djamaats*, could make credible claims for independent ethnic status. They display various degrees of linguistic differentiation, from dialects to genuinely separate languages. Additionally, the members of each occupy a compact, well-delineated territory. They share a common political history and distinctive cultural traditions of both a material and spiritual nature. Most importantly, they share an explicit identification with their society or community, which members retain even when they depart their *djamaat* for the life of the cities.

In light of these considerations, the law on small ethnicities appears as a throwback to the traditionally minute, pre-revolutionary fragmentation of Dagestani society. For instance, if, according to the law, *djamaats* of Rutuls and Tsakhurs are granted certain privileges, then what will be the reaction of their neighbors, living under corresponding circumstances in Lezgin, Lak, and Azeri *djamaats*? Though they live in the same rayon (county) under similarly deprived highland conditions, the latter groups would not be extended the special privileges of small groups. If Andis and Botlikhs acquire the special cultural and economic privileges of small

ethnic groups then what will happen in the neighboring Avar *djamaats*? Dagestan's three or four thousand Tats, almost ninety percent of whom enjoy the relative ease of Dagestan's urban areas, would be granted special privileges that would be denied to the hundred thousand Laks, twenty-eight thousand of whom subsist on the rocky and barren land of Laksky and Kulinsky rayons.

The legislation gives rise to numerous comparisons of a similar nature, all of which create problems for Dagestani society. If the law goes into effect it is likely to reorganize the ethnic self-identification of Dagestanis. Rather than the fourteen principal ethnic categories that serve as a basis for representation and proportionality in Dagestan's political institutions, and rather than the 34 Dagestani ethnic groups that are identified by ethnographers, there would be sixty or seventy *djamaat*-based ethnic identities.

Dagestani leaders recognized the problem early on and therefore actively objected to the law from the earliest stages of its preparation. Initially, the resistance of Dagestani representatives in the Russian State Duma appealed to the fact that such legislation is not applicable in the Caucasus, and can serve only to help Russia's northern ethnicities. At each successive reading in the Duma, Dagestani deputies tried to block the legislation by explaining the potentially disastrous implications for Dagestan.

From the beginning Moscow was cognizant of such concerns. On two occasions (25 August and 15 October 1995), and with President Yeltsin's support, the Duma rejected a law on "The Basis of the Legal Status of Small Ethnicities of Russia". On each of these occasions, it was determined that certain articles of the proposed law failed to comply with the Constitution of the Russian Federation. A year later, on the 22nd of May 1996, the State Duma accepted the law after the third reading. But on 5 June it was rejected again, this time by the Council of the Federation, ostensibly on the ground that it granted special privileges to small minorities, which

effectively established ethnic discrimination, and thereby contradicted general rights that were guaranteed by the Federal Constitution. Dagestani leaders such as Magomedali Magomedov and Mukhu Aliev, who are members of the Council of the Federation, had worked behind the scenes to defeat the law.

Despite these difficulties, work on the law continued. The law was backed by members of the Committee on the North, a powerful and effective group that is generously supported by corporations interested in northern resources. On 5 March 1999, the State Duma finally accepted the law under title of "Guarantees of Rights of Indigenous Small Ethnicities of the Russian Federation." On the 30th of April it was ratified by the Council of the Federation, and was signed by President Yeltsin with an attachment titled "The Comprehensive List of Indigenous Small Ethnicities of the Russian Federation." The law is intended to apply only to those ethnicities on this list.

The final version of the law recognized its implications for Dagestan. The first article of the Law states that "in view of Dagestan's unique ethnic diversity, and with regard to the number of ethnicities accommodated therein, the State Council of the Republic of Dagestan shall determine the quantitative requirements and other details of its indigenous small ethnicities, as well as establishing the list of such ethnicities for inclusion in the "Comprehensive List of the Indigenous Small Ethnicities of the Russian Federation."

In light of this mandate, Dagestan's State Council issued an executive protocol on 18 October 2000, announcing the only policy that seemed viable under these circumstances. It established that the indigenous small ethnicities of Dagestan are Aguls, Avars, Azeris, Chechen-Akhins, Dargins, Kumyks, Laks, Lezgins, Nogais, Russians, Rutuls, Tats, Tabasarans, and Tsakhurs. In short, they are the same fourteen principal ethnicities that are currently represented

by seats in the State Council and by ethnic electoral districts in the People's Assembly. This means that the classification of the ethnicities is unchanged, and that the list of "the small ethnicities" includes not only some of those with populations of less than 50 thousand (such as Tats, Aguls, Tsakhurs, and Rutuls), but also those Dagestani ethnicities that have significantly greater populations (such as Avars, Dargins, Kumyks, Lezgins, Laks). Indeed the list includes groups that defy classification as "small ethnicities" such as those Azeris, Chechens, and Russians who reside in Dagestan. In this way, the State Council exploited a loophole in the Federal law in order to preserve the Republic's status quo and to avoid the potentially destabilizing inconsistencies and inequities that might have resulted from other interpretations of the law.

Yet clearly this interpretation involved inconsistencies of its own. The State Council had flagrantly violated quantitative restrictions on the determination of small ethnicities, and had not offered any sort of gesture toward the general spirit of the law. Moscow sought to achieve a compromise solution through the offices of The Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Science, under the leadership of Valery Tishkov. On the one hand, Tishkov insisted that Avars, Dargins, Kumyks and Lezgins should be excluded from the list. Yet at the same time he accepted that relatively small ethnicities, such as Laks, Tabasarans and Nogais, could be included, even though their populations exceed fifty thousand. Institute representatives were adamant that Russians should be excluded from the list because of the "total absurdity" of presenting them as a small, indigenous ethnicity. Yet they allowed that Dagestani Azeris and Dagestan's indigenous Chechen-Akhins could be included on the list "if they decide to declare themselves ethnic groups independent from other Azeris and Chechens."

Nevertheless, following numerous protests in Dagestan, and following Magomedov's visit to Putin in the spring of 2001, Moscow finally accepted Dagestan's principal fourteen ethnic groups on the official list of small indigenous ethnicities. Through their sheer persistence, Dagestani officials successfully evaded central pressures that threatened to undermine their chief executive body. The fact that the threat was posed by a law intended to protect small indigenous ethnicities is a measure of the complexities posed by Dagestan's position in the Russian Federation.

Ethnic rights and electoral practices are but two of the ways in which Russian recentralization has recently affected Dagestan's political practices. Elsewhere we have discussed amendments to Dagestan's constitution and the institution of the federal inspector (Ware and Kisriev, 2001b). The imposition of these federal reforms could produce substantial changes in Dagestan's political system. Would they be likely to encounter popular resistance? How do Dagestani citizens view their political system? What are their attitudes toward Dagestan, toward Russia, and toward federal leadership? Are they likely to regard Moscow's growing control as a threat to their hard-won stability?

Field Research

Our fieldwork was underway at the time that these reforms began and the results provide a snapshot of relevant Dagestani attitudes at the commencement of the recentralization process. Because recentralization was not a key issue in 1998, when the project was designed the topic was not a focus of formal hypotheses. Yet preliminary fieldwork by two of the authors had led to the realization that many Dagestanis regarded themselves as being more closely affiliated with the Russian Federation than some observers in the West, or in Moscow, had recongnized. By the

beginning of the survey it would not have been difficult to predict that this relationship would grow even closer.

It appeared, at the outset of this study, that there were essentially three reasons for Dagestan's increasing closeness to Moscow. First, in contrast with some other Caucasian republics, the Dagestani outlook is characterized by attitudes of pragmatism, toleration, moderation, and a multiethnic identity (Ware and Kisriev, 2000a, 2001a). These traditional attitudes led most Dagestanis to react strongly against pressures from political and religious extremists that sought to separate Dagestan from Moscow during the period from 1996 to 1999. Increasing closeness between Dagestan and Moscow is a result of that reaction. Second, the conflict of 1999 forced Moscow and Mahachkala to acknowledge their mutual dependence. In 1999, Dagestanis stood at the edge of a social and economic abyss, and many recognized that without military and economic assistance from Moscow Dagestan might soon resemble Chechnya or Afghanistan. At the same time, Moscow recognized that Dagestani propensities toward moderation were all that prevented a viable and militant Islamist state stretching from the shores of the Caspian to the outskirts of Vladikavkaz and reducing Moscow's Caspian role. By the spring of 2000 this mutual recognition had already issued in a state of economic, political, and military symbiosis between Moscow and Mahachkala (Kisriev and Ware, 2000). Third, in the autumn of 1999, the newly installed Prime Minister Putin gained stature from his response to the invasions of Dagestan, and gained affirmation, perhaps even inspiration, for his view that the key to Russia's problems was not existing conditions of regional pluralism but a coordinated central response. After he was elected to the presidency in March 2000, he began to impose a more centralized structure upon the pluralistic Russian Federation. Thus there is a sense in which the situation in Dagtestan is not only a consequence, but also a cause, of Russian recentralization.

Still the long history of antipathy and suspicion between North Caucasians and Russians, and the traditional sympathy of Dagestanis toward Chechnya had led some commentators to predict that Dagestan was poised to follow Chechnya out of the Federation (Goltz).[4] Would traditions of highland indepencence prove resistant to recentralization? Was Putin overreaching in this strategic region at a crucial moment in its history? In the end the data surprised us.

The central component of this study, a formalized closed survey of 1001 respondents from throughout Dagestan, involved the administration of a twenty-seven-item questionnaire. In accord with authoritative demographic data available in *Natsional'nosti Dagestana*, the sample was stratified, in the first phase of selection, with respect to ethnic groups, urbanites and villagers. Villagers were further stratified among categories of lowlands, foothills, and highlands. In the second phase of selection, individual respondents were selected from voter registration lists in the sites that were chosen in the first phase.[5]

In order to provide a qualitative supplement to the quantitative survey data, the study involved 40 open-ended interviews with members of Dagestan's professional, scientific, and creative intelligentsia.[6] Due to issues of infrastructure and security, the accessibility and cooperation of the respondents were critical factors in the selection of the sample. Hence, while

---

[4] Evangelista provides a critical survey of such claims.

[5] The lists are compiled by electoral commissions and include all people 18 years and older who are who officially are registered as residing in each area. Random selection from these lists was accomplished according to a "step method". The size of the "step" was determined by dividing the total number of names on any given list by the number of respondents required from that area. As a consequence, the size of the "step" varied, but generally it was greater than 12. In a case, for example, where the "step" was 14, we contacted every 14th person on the list. In the event of the unavailability of, or refusal by, one of these selectees, the next person on the list was contacted. Randomizing features of this method generally yielded samples that were proportionate to demographic data with respect to age and gender. However, random sampling in many Dagestani villages, conducted at virtually any time, is likely to lead to over-representation of women, as many men go to cities for purposes of employment. Therefore it was necessary to compensate by sampling in urban areas that was further stratified with respect to gender, so as to balance the number of men in the survey in accord with demographic data. When interpreting the tabular data that follow it must be borne in mind that data for villages are disproportionately female, and data for towns are disproportionately male. While the overall response rate was 71 percent, some items from completed surveys contain missing values, which are not always randomly distributed.

the interviews add interpretive depth to the survey, their results rather complement than unequivocally confirm its results.

Ironically, the invasions of Dagestan on 2 August and 5 September 1999, were responsible for the fortuitious timing of this study, which originally was scheduled to begin in September, six months prior to Putin's ascendence to the Presidency and the push toward recentralization. However, warfare on Dagestan's western frontier postponed the start of the survey until 30 March 2000, after which it was conducted throughout Dagestan continuously until 13 April. Interviews were conducted from 3 April to 22 May 2000. To round off, event data was collected continuously over twenty-one months from July 15, 1999 through April 15, 2001, and was compiled in a series of articles and papers (Kisriev and Ware, 1999, 2001a,b; Ware and Kisriev, 1999b, 2000a,b, 2001a,b, 2002a,b).

In a place like Dagestan, there are a great many impediments to empirical research. Western survey methodologies are challenged by the extremity of cultural and infrastructural obstacles. Telephone interviewing is impossible as many Dagestanis, and most villagers, lack telephones, traveling for face-to-face interviews is difficult and often dangerous. Any tradition of being interrogated on political issues solely for scientific purposes is lacking, and political inquiry in Dagestan invariably encounters reticence on the part of some respondents to speak openly on issues of controversy. In addition, local cultures must be given consideration if responses are to be elicited at all. These difficulties were surmounted at the cost of a somewhat inelaborate set of variables for which survey and interview data could be obtained. As a consequence, data analysis had to be broadly descriptive in nature.[7] Though the data do not meet

---

[6] Those interviews were conducted orally according to a prepared list of 28 questions, and were recorded on tape with permission or otherwise stenographed.

[7] In the tables, data will be broken down for Dagestan's most important ethnic groups. Because of extraordinarily many missing cases, valid numbers usually do not add up to the sample size of 1001; usual case numbers for the

all the criteria commonly employed in Western empirical research, their limitations are not without reason. In any case, they are the best available data on Dagestani opinion, and an exception to other reports, which are both rare and anecdotal in their nature.

Survey respondents were offered a list of entities of reference that included Dagestan, Russia, the respondent's ethnic group, his or her religion, and his or her *djamaat*. They were asked: "If you had to choose from among these categories those that are most important to you personally, what would you choose? Please choose no more than two." Table 1 shows how often referents were chosen. The central finding is that three quarters of the population identify themselves with Dagestan, and nearly two-thirds with Russia. Contrary to the conventional view that ethnicity is of paramount concern to Dagestanis, only 14.5 percent anchored their identity principally upon their ethnic group, even less on religion or *djamaats*.[8] Thus it appears that one component of Dagestan's stability is this sense of integration as Dagestanis and as members of the Russian Federation.

Table 1: Most important entities of reference; overall percentages based on multiple answers

	N	Dagestan	Russia	Ethnic group	Religion	Djamaat
Overall	(1001)	73.6	63.6	14.5	10.5	5.9
Avars	(279)	73.7	52.7	14.3	12.9	8.2
Dargins	(172)	77.9	63.4	9.3	6.4	5.2
Kumyks	(134)	73.1	68.7	12.7	10.4	6.0
Lezgins	(130)	83.1	73.8	15.4	4.6	3.1
Laks	(50)	76.0	64.0	12.0	10.0	4.0
Russians	(71)	59.2	88.7	12.7	0.0	0.0

different ethnic groups are shown in table 1. Interpretations of the data are based on comparisons of percentages and means. Since missing values are not distributed randomly, we tried to avoid missing-sensible multivariate statistics and calculated percentages regularly on the constant base of the overall sample.

[8] Identification with the *djamaat* is so much weaker than we anticipated as to be inconsistent with anecdotal information that we received from numerous Dagestanis. It is possible that Dagestanis regard identification with *djamaati* as atavistic, and are therefore less inclined to indicate it in the formal framework of a survey. Conversely, it could also be the case that anecdotes tend to overplay Dagestani traditions, which are clearly a matter of pride for some individuals. While we regard this as a point for further study, the survey results speak for themselves.

Chechen-Akhins	(53)	47.2	22.6	39.6	50.9	11.3
Azeris	(39)	69.2	69.2	17.9	10.3	10.3
Tabasarans	(27)	96.3	85.2	0.0	7.4	0.0
Men	(486)	72.9	60.9	17.1	12.3	7.2
Women	(515)	74.2	66.2	12.0	8.7	4.7
Village	(496)	78.4	63.9	11.7	7.9	6.9
Town	(503)	68.7	63.4	17.1	13.1	5.0

Nevertheless, there are important differences in self-identification for members of different ethnic groups. The most notable exceptions are, on the one hand, Dagestan's ethnic Russians, for whom Russia is much more important than Dagestan, and, on the other hand, Dagestan's Chechen-Akhins, for whom Dagestan and Russia are weaker referents than for other Dagestanis. For these two groups, cross-border ethnic ties are of great importance. This is not as markedly the case for either Azeris or Lezgins, though both groups have large populations of ethnic kin in Azerbaijan. Yet, after Chechens, ethnic identification is most important to Azeris and Lezgins respectively. For Chechens, ethnic identity, religious identity, village identification are also of striking importance. This is Dagestan's least integrated ethnic group.

Recent changes in socio-cultural, political and economic life are considered to be critical by many Dagestanis. Table 2 shows that respondents regarded the worst changes to have occurred in the economy, followed by politics and socio-cultural life.[9] These results are not unique, and can be found in most of the successors of former socialist states.

Table 2: Perceptions of Changes in. . .

		economy		politics		cultural life	
	n	mean*	number of missing cases	mean	number of missing cases	mean	number of missing cases

[9] The question was:" Dagestan has significantly changed during the last 10 years. The changes have significantly effected Dagestani society, economy and politics. Looking back, what do you think of these changes? These changes turned out to be for [the better (1)/ no better, no worse (2)/ the worse(3)]?"

Overall	(1001)	2.56	45	2.45	136	2.26	73
Avars	(279)	2.41	17	2.40	26	2.13	11
Dargins	(172)	2.67	10	2.61	22	2.37	15
Kumyks	(134)	2.73	3	2.55	15	2.28	8
Lezgins	(130)	2.65	4	2.53	14	2.54	11
Laks	(50)	2.57	1	2.50	8	1.96	1
Russians	(71)	2.58	2	2.33	7	2.16	3
Chechens	(53)	2.55	4	2.47	14	2.33	10
Azeris	(39)	2.54	0	1.97	5	2.33	6
Tabasarans	(27)	2.42	1	2.27	1	2.54	3
Men	(486)	2.52	22	2.42	60	2.29	38
Women	(515)	2.60	23	2.49	76	2.23	35
Village	(496)	2.49	20	2.46	67	2.32	36
Town	(503)	2.63	25	2.45	69	2.20	37

*Calculation of means based on cases without missing values. Answers were coded as follows: Changes to the better 1, changes no better/no worse 2, changes to the worse 3. Displaying only median values would hide much of the variation, which actually is in the data. Therefore means are shown, although data have not been measured on a well-tested interval scale.

Among different groups, Dargins, Kumyks and Lezgins are more concerned than Avars and Tabasarans about the deterioration of the economy. Since life in many Dagestani villages was always impoverished, villagers are less concerned about recent changes than townspeople. The economic decline has hit women harder than men, as is often the case in transitional societies.

Dissatisfaction with recent economic and political changes are consistent with a preference for socialism displayed by most Dagestanis in table 3.[10] Predictably, those who see changes for the worse would favor a return to a socialist state. Less than a quarter of the population favors ‘Western democracy’, only one tenth would choose for Dagestan to become an ‘Islamic state’; and those, who would so choose also want to see Dagestan more independent (Spearman’s Rho: -0.34).

[10] The question was:“In your opinion, on what principles should the Dagestani state be built: a) on the principles of Islam and Shari’ah (1), b) on the principles of Western democracies (2), or c) on the principles of socialism (3)?”

Again, differences between ethnic groups are telling. Chechens are least in favor of a socialist state (28.3 percent) and are the strongest supporters of an Islamic state (35.8 percent), but they offer nearly as strong support for Western democracy (34.6%). This suggests that Chechens, more than any other group, are prepared to make a break with the Soviet past, but are divided on the choice of Eastern and Western paths. Comparatively low support for a socialist state can also be found among Laks (48.0 percent) and Avars (53.8 percent). An Islamic state is especially unattractive for Azeris (2.8 percent) and Lezgins (4.6 percent). As Dagestan's only Shiite Moslems, Azeris have reason to prefer a secular government, and the Lezgin emphasis upon education has brought many into contact with Western secular values, whether in liberal or in Marxist variants. Western democracy is most attractive for Laks (38.0 percent), though there is also significant support among Avars (30.1 percent). Kumyks are least interested in Western democracy (11.2 percent). Women favor a socialist state due to their disproportionate deprivation during the recent transition. Men are more likely to favor an Islamic state, as are villagers.

Table 3: Guiding principles for a Dagestani state

overall percentage	Islamic state	Western democracy	socialist state
Overall	10.9	22.5	63.4
Avars	13.7	30.1	53.8
Dargins	13.4	19.2	64.0
Kumyks	9.7	11.2	76.1
Lezgins	4.6	20.0	75.4
Laks	12.0	38.0	48.0
Russians	-	18.3	71.8
Chechens	35.8	34.0	28.3
Azeris	2.8	17.9	71.8
Tabasarans	11.1	18.5	70.4
Men	14.0	21.8	61.5
Women	8.0	23.1	65.2

Village	13.9	23.6	62.4
Town	8.0	21.3	64.6

What of the present regime? Survey respondents were asked to evaluate Dagestan's political institutions, as displayed by table 4.[11] Highest ranking among government institutions are the State Council and the Cabinet of Ministers (means 2.44). Next are the People's Assembly and the organs of law enforcement (means 2.46). Last is the Ministry of Economy (mean 2.59). This result, when compared with table 2, shows how transitional problems lead to low trust in local government institutions. Again, economic development proves to be of utmost importance.

Table 4: Evaluation of Institutions– Means

	State Council	People's Assembly	Government (Cabinet of Ministers)	Law-enforcement organs	Ministry of Economy	polit. parties, soc. movements	religious organizations
Overall	2.44	2.46	2.44	2.46	2.59	2.53	2.11
Avars	2.39	2.39	2.41	2.33	2.50	2.51	2.02
Dargins	2.45	2.52	2.44	2.45	2.63	2.58	2.12
Kumyks	2.45	2.46	2.40	2.64	2.66	2.52	2.07
Lezgins	2.64	2.59	2.62	2.65	2.73	2.61	2.40
Laks	2.52	2.43	2.55	2.40	2.60	2.72	2.02
Russians	2.39	2.48	2.38	2.47	2.62	2.58	2.21
Chechens	2.50	2.50	2.51	2.57	2.55	2.12	1.87
Azeris	2.21	2.30	2.22	2.29	2.47	2.54	2.12
Tabasarans	2.38	2.31	2.35	2.35	2.42	2.36	2.57
Men	2.44	2.42	2.44	2.45	2.59	2.55	2.07
Women	2.45	2.49	2.44	2.48	2.60	2.52	2.15
Village	2.40	2.46	2.40	2.48	2.57	2.45	2.11
Town	2.45	2.45	2.49	2.45	2.61	2.62	2.11

Answers were coded as follows: Performance of the institution is good (1), satisfactory (2), and bad (3). Displaying only median values would hide much of the variation, which actually is in the data. Therefore means are shown, although data have not been measured on a well-tested interval scale.

[11] The questions was " How would you evaluate the activity of the following state institutions in Dagestan ..... (good (1) – satisfactory (2) – bad (3)."

Of greater importance, however, is the fact that very large percentages of the population is dissatisfied with all political institutions. This suggests that in Dagestan state institutions are not creating stability so much as consuming stability generated elsewhere. Nor is satisfaction higher with political parties and social movements. On balance, they are ranked low with a mean of 2.53. This underscores the significance of religion. Religious organizations receive the highest evaluation with a mean of 2.11. Table 5 shows those ethnic groups that were either relatively high or relatively low in their rankings of these institutions.

Table 5: Evaluation of institutions – Differences between ethnic groups

Item (mean)	better than average	worse than average
Religious organizations (2.11)	Chechens (1.87) Avars (2.02) Laks (2.02)	Tabasarans (2.57) Lezgins (2.40) Russians/Cossacks (2.21)
Political parties, social movements (2.53)	Chechens (2.12) Tabasarans (2.36)	Laks (2.72) Lezgins (2.61) Russians/Cossacks (2.58) Dargins (2.58)
State Council (2.44)	Azeris (2.21) Tabasarans (2.38) Russians/Cossacks (2.39) Avars (2.39)	Lezgins (2.64) Laks (2.52) Chechens (2.50)
Cabinet (2.44)	Azeris (2.22) Tabasarans (2.35) Russians/Cossacks (2.38)	Lezgins (2.62) Laks (2.55) Chechens (2.51)
People's assembly (2.46)	Azeris (2.30) Tabasarans (2.31) Avars (2.39)	Lezgins (2.59) Dargins (2.52) Chechens (2.50)
Law enforcing organs (2.46)	Azeris (2.29) Avars (2.33) Tabasarans (2.35)	Lezgins (2.65) Kumyks (2.64) Chechens (2.57)
Ministry of economy (2.59)	Tabasarans (2.42) Azeris (2.47) Avars (2.50)	Lezgins (2.73) Kumyks (2.66) Dargins (2.63) Russians/Cossacks (2.62)

Table 5 shows that there are some ethnic groups who seem to be comparatively less dissatisfied with Dagestan's political institutions (from State Council to Ministry of Economy). These groups

include Tabasarans (noted 5 of 5 times), Azeris (5) and Avars (4). On the other hand, Lezgins are dissatisfied with the working of Dagestan's political institutions (noted 5 times of 5 times), and so are Chechens (4). Clearly, these groups are politically alienated. Unlike Lezgins, however, Chechens draw relative satisfaction from religious and social organizations.

What accounts for this alienation on the parts of Lezgins and Chechen-Akhins? In both cases there are complex cultural, historical, and political causes. Once again, many of Dagestan's Lezgins regard themselves as arbitrarily and disadvantageously distinguished from Aguls, Rutuls, and Tabasarans. They also regard themselves as unjustly separated from the Lezgin population of Azerbaijan. A combination of these culturally and historically affiliated groups would make Lezgins approximately as numerous as Avars with all the associated political strengths. Indeed, were the Avars distinguished from their 14 affiliated groups, the Lezgins would be Dagestan's largest, and perhaps most powerful ethnic group. Thus many Lezgins see themselves to have been unfairly marginalized politically and relegated to an economic and backwater in Dagestan's southernmost reaches.

At a time before the delineation of Dagestan from Azerbaijan, their villages in the hills and mountains around the Samur River valley constituted an independent Lezgistan, and before that the ancient Caucasian Albania, at an important crossroads, where the Samur River and the Caucasus Mountains met the West Caspian trade route. Moreover, with its emphasis upon education, Lezgin culture tends to produce more teachers, physicians, and engineers than political organizers and strong men. For all of these reasons, Lezgins tend to be dissatisfied with their lot. Nevertheless the ethnic repression confronting Lezgins in Azerbaijan leads Dagestan's Lezgins to a relatively strong identification with Dagestan and with Russia (table 1).

Some of the causes of Chechen alienation are well known, but it would be impossible to overstate the significance of their brutal deportation to Kazakhstan in February 1944. They were not officially rehabilitated until 1957 and most have still not been able to return to their historic villages in Dagestan. This is because Laks and Avars were forcibly resettled into those villages in March 1944, and they can no longer return to their remote and delapidated highland homes. The Laks had agreed to move to less desireable land northwest of Mahachkala, but ironically the invasions of 1999 interfered with their relocation, and it is now uncertain that they will move (Kisriev and Ware, 2000). Since some Dagestanis regard many Chechen-Akhins to have been complicit in those invasions, the latter are now an out group. For all of these reasons, Chechens are unlikely to be satisfied with their prospects in Dagestan or in Russia.

Moreover, Chechen social structure differs substanially from that of other Dagestani groups in the greater emphasis that it places upon kinship structures, and the relative weakness of political structures (Ware and Kisriev, 1999b, 2000a, 2001a; Ware). This helps to account for the greater emphasis that Chechens place upon ethnic and religious referents in table 1. Like Avars and Dargins, Chechens are also traditionally more likely to have deep attachments to Islam than are other of Dagestan's Islamic ethnicities.

There is no simple solution for the problems faced by either Lezgins or Chechen-Akhins, and in many respects the situations of both groups show signs of deterioration. For example, some young men in both groups are turning toward Islamist Wahhabism. Each group is likely to represent a potential source of instability for the foreseeable future.

The survey asked respondents to whom they would "trust in the event of an acute crisis", permitting more than one response.[12] For a majority of Dagestanis, Russia is the second most

[12] The question read as follows: "In whom would you place your trust (hope) in the event of an acute crisis in Dagestan (You might select more than one answer) ?" Possible answers were mentioned and not mentioned.

important source of identity. Yet given the history of the Caucasus, it nevertheless seems remarkable that in case of an acute crisis most Dagestanis would trust in Russian Federal leadership (table 6). Indeed, during the invasions of 1999 this point seemed to come as a surprise to the Kremlin.[13] Yet it is placed in context by the fact that, on balance, Dagestani leadership does not even rank second overall as a source of critical support, but only third, after ‘myself, my relatives and friends’. On the one hand, this is evidence of the significance of informal structures such as family, *tuhum*, and *djamaat.* On the other hand, it is indicative generally of the extent to which Dagestanis are alienated from their own leadership, and indicative particularly of the perceived weakness and the lack of resources of the Dagestani leadership in the case of an acute crisis.

Tabasarans, Azeris, Laks and Russians are most likely to rely on Russian Federal leadership; Chechens are least likely. Chechens, Laks, and Avars have least trust in Dagestani officials. Tabasarans, Azeris, Dargins, and Lezgins have comparatively greater trust in the government of Dagestan. The level of trust in the latter group is remarkable given their relative disdain of Dagestani institutions. Chechens have unrivaled trust in their ethnic and religious leaders.

Table 6: Trust in case of an acute crisis

valid = overall percent	Russian Federal leadership	Dagestan leadership	leader of pol. parties and ethnic movements	Religious leaders	myself, my relatives and friends
Overall	63.7	42.5	8.0	7.8	42.6
Avars	61.3	31.5	8.6	7.9	43.4
Dargins	64.5	54.1	5.8	3.5	41.9

[13] Two of the authors, who were present in Russia during the invasions, had opportunity to observe requests for assistance on the part of Dagestani officials, and the initially fumbling response of the federal government. The extremity of these events may partially account for the strength of this response; yet there is also considerable anecdotal evidence indicating that many Dagestanis look to Moscow to solve the Republic’s deeper problems.

Kumyks	61.2	37.3	8.2	9.7	50.7
Lezgins	66.9	60.8	3.1	3.1	28.5
Laks	72.0	30.0	6.0	10.0	50.0
Russians	70.4	38.0	1.4	-	56.3
Chechens	15.1	30.2	45.3	45.3	45.3
Azeris	74.4	56.4	-	7.7	46.2
Tabasarans	81.5	66.7	3.7	-	25.9
Men	63.0	45.1	9.1	8.6	43.6
Women	64.5	40.0	7.0	7.0	41.6
Village	66.7	48.6	8.5	6.9	34.1
Town	60.8	36.4	7.6	8.7	50.9

Whom do Dagestanis see as a major threat? Corresponding to the trust invested in the Federation, Russia is seen as the least threatening of four possibilities in table 7.[14] Chechnya is perceived as much more threatening, as the low mean of 1.27 suggests. Next in rank are the threats from Western and Eastern countries respectively. However, different ethnic groups tend to see these threats in different lights. Chechens understandably fear Russia, but Avars and Kumyks also have greater than average reservations. Russian are understandably least concerned about a threat from Russia, followed by Lezgins, Tabasarans, and Azeris.

Table 7: Threat to Dagestan...

		Russia		Chechnya		Western Countries		Eastern Countries	
	n	mean**	number of missing cases	mean	number of missing cases	mean	number of missing cases	mean	number of missing cases
Overall	(1001)	2.58	128	1.27	39	1.73	213	1.86	274
Avars	(279)	2.41	30	1.27	12	1.98	57	1.99	69
Dargins	(172)	2.68	26	1.23	10	1.61	45	1.76	49
Kumyks	(134)	2.46	13	1.13	2	1.69	34	1.90	45
Lezgins	(130)	2.85	18	1.23	9	1.40	21	1.80	36

[14] The question was: "What external factors, in your opinion, could threaten the stability of Dagestan? How serious are these threats? 1). From Russia. 2). From Chechnya. 3). From Western Countries. 4). From Eastern countries." (very serious (1)/not very serious (2)/not serious at all (3).

Laks	(50)	2.67	11	1.22	0	1.74	16	1.65	16
Russians/Cossacks	(71)	2.72	7	1.06	2	1.60	9	1.65	11
Chechens	(53)	1.94	5	2.25	2	2.15	7	2.23	10
Azeris	(39)	2.91	7	1.36	0	1.71	8	1.86	10
Tabasarans	(27)	2.80	2	1.37	0	1.14	6	1.56	18
Men	(486)	2.59	45	1.33	18	1.74	82	1.91	117
Women	(515)	2.56	83	1.22	21	1.71	131	1.80	157
Village	(496)	2.62	56	1.29	23	1.72	88*	1.96	135
Town	(503)	2.54	72	1.26	16	1.73	124*	1.77	139

*One case missing in calculation of the mean. **Calculation of means based on cases without missing values. Answers were coded as follows: Very serious threat (1), not very serious (2), and not serious at all (3). Displaying only median values would hide much of the variation, which actually is in the data. Therefore means are shown, although data have not been measured on a well-tested interval scale.

Especially Kumyks and Russians see Chechnya as the most important threat for Dagestan, whereas Chechens are the only group that sees significantly less threat from Chechnya. For Chechens, the only serious threat is Russia, against which both Eastern and Western countries may be seen as potential allies.

Russians and Laks are especially likely to see a serious threat to Dagestan from Eastern countries. Again, Chechens are at the other end of the scale: no other ethnic group – with the possible exception of Avars– has less fear of Eastern countries. A lesser threat from Eastern countries is seen by men and villagers, both of whom tend to be more involved with Islam than women and city folk.

The opinions of the interviewees, in many ways mirrored those of the survey. By far the greatest number of interviewees (15) saw the primary threat as coming from Chechnya. An additional respondent described the principal threat as "attempts to separate Dagestan from Russia."

Five interviewees identified problems with Russia as the primary threat, but one of these was most concerned about the "lack of coordination between the Federation and the Republic," suggesting the need for closer relations with Moscow. On the other hand, two respondents saw

"Russian instability" as the primary external threat; one focused upon the "politics of Russia"; one saw a threat in "Russia's mistrust of Dagestan's loyalty," and one saw the primary threat in "Russian chauvinism".

Three interviewees were most concerned about "Western influence", with one focusing upon "foreign culture, music, pornography", and another concerned about competition over Caspian oil. Some Dagestanis view Western culture and values as a threat to a traditional Islamic lifestyle. One interviewee was concerned that Western military or political adventures may destabilize the region by treating Chechnya like Kosovo.

Four interviewees were most concerned about threats that have come to Dagestan from Eastern countries. Three of these discussed "foreign Wahhabism," while one focused upon "foreign Terrorism."

Three respondents did not think there was any external threat to Dagestan.

Most interviewees thought that the greatest internal threat to Dagestan's stability was economic. Three of these focused upon "poverty in Dagestan", while another described Dagestan's "economic backwardness", and two more were alarmed by "unemployment" and a growing "economic crisis". Six were most concerned about the increasing polarization of rich and poor.

Eleven respondents saw internal political issues as the greatest threat to Dagestan's stability. Five interviewees mentioned "corruption", "theft of power", or "bad leaders"; one described the "monopolization of power"; two concentrated upon the "struggle for power" or "change of leadership"; and two thought that the main problem lay in the imperfection of the electoral system.

Another ten respondents attributed the main problems to ethnic or kinship ties. Three of these talked about the “confrontation of clans”; three were most concerned about “ethnic nationalism”; one focused upon “ethnic separatism”; and one saw a threat in the “dominance of one ethnic group”. Finally, one interviewee saw a threat in Dagestan's “lack of a national identity or concept”.

Dagestan’s invasion by Islamic separatists and the subsequent federal military buildup both raise questions about Dagestan’s relations with Russia. Should there be even closer relations between Dagestan and the Russian Federation or should Dagestan move toward greater independence? Table 8 presents the response to this question[15] coded to maximize clarity in the following way: opinions favoring closer relations with Russia are assigned a value of minus one, preservation of the status quo is assigned a value of zero, and opinions favoring a more independent Dagestan are assigned a value of one. Thus, every mean below zero indicates that a group wants a closer relationship between Russia and Dagestan; a group with a desire for a more independent Dagestan should have an mean above zero. The percentages for each answer are also shown.

Concordant with the their trust in the Federal government, all ethnic groups prefer closer relations to Russia, or at least the status quo, in place of a more independent Dagestan. Though their interest in closer Russian ties is dramatically less than any other group, even Chechens do not want greater independence. Predictably, Russians are most in favor of closer ties with Russia.

Table 8: Future Relation between Dagestan and Russia

[15] The question was, “In your opinion, how should the relationship of Dagestan and Russia develop? (Dagestan should become even closer with Russia (-1)/ the present system of relation should continue (0)/ Dagestan should become more independent (1)”

	n	even closer overall	status quo overall	more independent overall	mean	number of missing cases
Overall	(1001)	62.6	22.0	14.8	-.48	6
Avars	(279)	56.6	20.4	22.9	-.34	0
Dargins	(172)	56.4	27.3	14.0	-.43	4
Kumyks	(134)	76.1	15.7	8.2	-.68	0
Lezgins	(130)	66.2	26.9	6.9	-.59	0
Laks	(50)	64.0	18.0	14.0	-.52	2
Russians	(71)	84.5	12.7	2.8	-.82	0
Chechens	(53)	37.7	26.4	35.8	-.02	0
Azeris	(39)	64.1	17.9	17.9	-.46	0
Tabasarans	(27)	40.7	48.1	11.1	-.30	0
Men	(486)	63.2	18.9	17.5	-.46	2
Women	(515)	62.1	24.9	12.2	-.50	4
Village	(496)	60.3	23.6	16.1	-.44	0
Town	(503)	65.0	20.7	13.3	-.52	6

Answers were coded: closer (-1), status quo (0), and more independent (1). So a negative value of the mean stands for the wish of a closer relationship between Russia and Dagestan.

Northern Exposure

Clearly a key to the interpretation of this data is Dagestani perceptions of the current economic crisis combined with the remarkable trust that they are prepared to place in federal officials at critical junctures. These expectations are unlikely to have been disappointed by Moscow's recent economic support for the Republic.

Partly as a consequence of its role in the current Chechen conflict, Dagestan continues to receive substantial financial support from the center, accounting for more than 80 percent of the

Republic's budget. In 2000, Dagestan received 7.4 billion rubles from the federal budget, as contrasted with less than 3.6 billion rubles in 1999. Direct federal transfers doubled in 2001 to 8.5 billion rubles. Dagestan also has received substantial economic support from throughout Russia (including 17 million rubles from the city of Moscow).

Numerous small-scale industries and factories throughout Dagestan are gradually coming back to life. Soviet-era industries, including defense plants that were based in Dagestan, are receiving new orders. These plants are now rehiring from the local skilled labor force, which was idled during the transition period.

Reconstruction of the petroleum pipeline from Baku to the Russian port of Novorossiisk, bypassing Chechnya through Dagestani territory, has been completed. According to Transneft Vice President Sergey Grigor’ev the development includes a 17 kilometer link to Mahachkala’s seaport designed “in connection with the uncertainty of deliveries from Azerbaijan to provide opportunities for the transport Turkmen and Kazakh petroleum delivered from the sea.” (*Dagestanskaya Pravda*, 21 March 2000) This appears to be a step in a sustained effort on the part of the Russian government to turn Mahachkala into a major Northern Caspian oil terminal. Officials in Russia’s Transneft oil organization are strongly urging transfers of Turkmen and Kazakh crude to Mahachkala facilities.

Moscow’s development of Mahachkala as a petroleum port seems to require explanation since it is, in some ways, a less obvious choice than a city such as Astrakhan. Currently, there are two principal means of access through which industrial infrastructure may be introduced to the North Caspian: the Volga Don canal system and overland routes. Both of these are dependent upon the Volga River system. Clearly Russia intends to make the Volga cities such as Volgograd, Saratov, and Astrakhan major centers for energy-related transport, refining, freight

transfers, and subsidiary economic development associated with the exploitation of Caspian reserves.

As compared with Astrakhan, Mahachkala makes some geographical sense for Turkmen products, but it is more surprising to see tankers from Kazakhstan pulling into Mahachkala's docks. There appear to be at least three related reasons for Moscow's interest in Mahachkala's increasing hydrocarbon traffic.

First, it is clear that Moscow wants to support the Dagestani economy, and thereby contribute to the Republic's political stability. There can be no question that this is part of Moscow's strategy given substantial increases in budgetary transfers from Moscow to Mahachkala in the last three years. Moscow has correctly concluded that economic development is the key to Dagestan's political future. Second, Dagestan's political stability is particularly important to Moscow because the latter has now recognized that the former is the key to its presence in the North Caucasus. Third, the maintenance of this presence is particularly important to Moscow because historically the Western shore of the Caspian is the north/south route of connection in the region. If Moscow is to maintain its influence in the Caspian and South Caucasus regions then it must maintain a strong and vital presence in Dagestan. If Dagestan becomes an vestigial appendage, without real economic significance for the Russian Federation and without a role at the forefront of Russian strategy in these regions, then Russia has lost its historic connection to the South Caucasus and beyond.

Yet if the economic consequences of Moscow's interest in the region are clearly beneficial to Dagestan, what of the political consequences? Dagestan's unique political institutions have been successful in securing the rights and representation of its various ethnic groups, and in reducing ethnic conflict in the Republic. They have helped Dagestan to avoid

internal separatist movements, large-scale ethnic clashes, or ethnic cleansing; they have promoted political cohesion and prevented political disintegration among multiple ethnic territories. They have helped Dagestan to avoid potential border clashes with its neighbors, and when Dagestan was invaded from Chechnya in 1996 and 1999 they helped to orchestrate a unified Dagestani response. Despite the traditional importance of Islam in Dagestan, the Republic has avoided significant Islamist influence in its political system, and has overwhelmingly rebuffed the presence of a small "Wahhabite" extremist minority. With the exception of some members of the latter minority, there has been little interest in Dagestan's independence from the Russian Federation. Though Moscow's increased economic support for Dagestan is likely to have a stabilizing effect, its efforts to increase central control and to fit Dagestan into the federal mold have altered institutions that have proven uniquely effective in stabilizing the Republic's complex ethnic relations.

However, survey results show that Dagestanis are dissatisfied with the efficacy of their political institutions. While similar attitudes are common in transitional societies, interviews suggest that these attitudes have much to do with perceptions of political corruption and mismanagement along with an absence of economic opportunities. Though they have only a moderate interest in sustaining Western-style democracy, many Dagestanis would welcome a return to socialism. This suggests nostalgia for the Soviet era, and an openness to closer ties with Moscow. At the same time, Dagestanis eschew Islamist separatism, identify strongly with Dagestan and with Russia, and show remarkable confidence in federal officials to resolve crises. Indeed, in times of crisis they would trust in federal authorities more than in anyone else, including their personal circles.

These data provide tentative insights into questions raised by this study. Many Dagestanis may welcome increasing central control in so far as it efficacious in addressing current crises. That is, they may accept central control in so far as it is sufficiently comprehensive and consistent to stimulate economic development, reduce corruption, and institute the rule of law. In the absence of such improvements, an unceremonious, arbitrary, or partial alteration of political structures, including a cancellation of ethnic electoral districts, interference with Dagestan's collegial executive, or the forced implementation of a presidential system, will have at least a potentially destabilizing effect.

Thus far, Moscow has been well advised to proceed slowly in Dagestan, to demand no more than moderate changes, and to allow Dagestani leaders ample room for compromise solutions. While Dagestan is clearly moving closer to the federal center, its internal stability and its loyalty to Moscow are likely to depend upon the retention of its status as a distinct cultural and political entity. Dagestanis are unlikely to accept the wholesale amalgamation of Dagestan in a larger federal entity. It is important to most Dagestanis that they are members of a Republic that has voluntarily joined the Federation, that their Dagestani identity is retained, and that they are not simply swallowed up in a unified Russia. Whatever the merits of Russian recentralization, the heterogeneity of Dagestani society mandates a measure of autonomy. So far, Dagestani officials have displayed remarkable ingenuity, and federal officials have shown a modicum of flexibility, in the achievement of this result. All of this points to a new role for Dagestan as the pillar of Moscow's influence in the Caucasus and the buttress of its Caspian policy.

References

Evangelista, Matthew, "Russia's Fragile Union", *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists,* 55, 4, May/June 1999.

Thomas Goltz, "Moscow's Dagestan Dilemma -- Prelude To The Breakup Of An Empire" Pacifica News, *Jinn Magazine,* http://www.pacificnews.org/jinn/stories/5.19/990914-russia.html

Kisriev, E. and Ware, R., "Conflict and Catharsis: A Report on Developments in Dagestan following the Incursions of August and September 1999", with Kisriev, E., *Nationalities Papers*, 28, 3, 479-522, 2000

Kisriev, E. and Ware, R., "Dagestan's People's Assembly Election", with Kisriev, E., *Electoral Studies*, 20, 3, June 2001a

Kisriev, E., and Ware, R., "A Summer of Innuendo: Contraction and Competition Among Dagestan's Political Elite", *Central Asian Survey,* 20, 2, 141-154, 2001b.

Ware, R. and Kisriev, E., "Political Stability and Ethnic Parity in Dagestan", with Kisriev, E. in M. Alexseev ed., *Center-Periphery Conflict in Post-Soviet Russia: A Federation Imperiled* (St. Martins Press, 1999a), 95-130.

Ware, R. and Kisriev, E., "Why Dagestan Didn't Follow Chechnya", *Analysis of Current Events,* 11,12, 16-18, 1999b

Ware, R. and Kisriev, E., "Political Stability in Dagestan: Ethnic Parity and Religious Polarization", with Kisriev, E., *Problems of Post-Communism,* 47, 2, 23-33, 2000a

Ware, R. and Kisriev, E., "The Islamic Factor in Dagestan", with Kisriev, E., *Central Asian Survey,* 19, 2, 235-252, 2000b

Ware, R. and Kisriev, E., "Ethnic Parity and Political Stability in Dagestan: A Consociational Approach", *Europe and Asia Studies,* 53, 1, 105-131, 2001a

Ware, R. and Kisriev, E., "Russian Recentralization Arrives in the Republic of Dagestan: Implications for Institutional Integrity and Political Stability", with Kisriev, E., *Eastern European Constitutional Review*, 10, 1, 68-75, 2001b

Ware, R. and Kisriev, E., "Irony and Political Islam", *Nationalities Papers* (forthcoming, 2003a)

Ware, R., Kisriev, E., Patzelt, W., Roericht, U., "Political Islam in Dagestan", *Europe-Asia Studies* (forthcoming, 2003b)

Ware, R., "Kinship and Conflict in the Caucasus", *Analysis of Current Events*, 14, 1, 12-13, 2002