

Problems of Post-Communism 50, 2, March/April 2003

Stability in the Caucasus: The Perspective from Dagestan

Dr. Robert Bruce Ware
Department of Philosophical Studies
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
Edwardsville, IL 62026-1433 USA
rware@siue.edu

Dr. Enver Kisriev
Department of Sociology
Dagestan Scientific Center
Russian Academy of Science
Mahachkala, Dagestan, Russia
enver@datacom.ru

Prof. Dr. Werner J. Patzelt
Department of Political Science
Technische Universität Dresden
01062 Dresden, Germany
werner_j.patzelt@mailbox.tu-dresden.de

Ms. Ute Roericht
Department of Political Science
Technische Universität Dresden
01062 Dresden, Germany
roericht@spwnw1.phil.tu-dresden.de

For centuries the strategic significance of the Caucasus region has been equaled only by its instability. Home to more than a hundred ethno-linguistic groups, the area has seen frequent conflict. Political stability remains at a premium for this region wedged between Russia, Iran and Turkey, between Europe and Asia, between Muslim and Christian confessions, and between a multitude of national and multinational interests competing for its rich resources.

Traditionally, commentators have focused upon the instability of Dagestan. The region's most ethnically heterogeneous republic attracts attention, in part, because of its strategic location at the juncture of the Caucasus mountains and the Caspian Sea. Dagestan has been described as intrinsically unstable due to tensions among its 34 ethnolinguistic groups, and as extrinsically unstable in its relations with the rest of the Russian Federation. For example, in an article titled "Moscow's Dagestan Dilemma -- Prelude To The Breakup Of An Empire", Thomas Goltz has written

...commentators predict Russia will ultimately lose Dagestan and eventually the entire mainly Muslim, multi-ethnic North Caucasus ... The question Western policy makers and real friends of Russia should be asking is how to assist Moscow to gradually divest itself of provinces and regions it has for all intents and purposes already lost. ...We are looking at the termination of an empire: not the Soviet, but the Russian one.¹

According to an article titled “If Dagestan Islam Spreads It Could Bring Down Russia” by Franz Schurmann, professor emeritus of history and sociology at UC Berkeley, “Dagestan could be the tremor that brings down the Russian Federation... The worry is that Dagestan could be their third "Vietnam" (after Afghanistan and Chechnya)... That will end Russian democracy and possibly the R(ussian)F(ederation) itself.”²

On the other hand, there are those who argue that Dagestan is at risk of fragmentation because it's ethnic diversity interferes with an overarching sense of Dagestani identity. Peter Heinlein, Moscow Bureau Chief for the Voice of America writes that Dagestan is so fragmented ethnically that it is impossible to make general comments about a Dagestani identity and viewpoint.³ Commentaries such as the following have portrayed Dagestan as an ethnically segregated society:

The main factor dividing ethnic groups in Dagestan is the distribution of power, wealth and land along ethnic lines..... This contributes to a situation whereby the peoples of Dagestan live ethnically segregated from each other, particularly in the rural areas. Daughters are generally not allowed to marry outside their own ethnic group. Mountain people who have settled in the plains tend to stick together.⁴

Taken together, such claims about Dagestan's intrinsic and extrinsic instabilities might be described as the conventional view of Western commentary. At times they are extrapolated in support of broader claims about regional, even Russian, instability. Yet claims about Dagestan's instability are generally advanced on the basis of evidence that is anecdotal when it is not absent entirely. Often the authors have never visited Dagestan. To what extent are such claims true?

I. An Ethnically Diverse Country

Certainly ethnic diversity is Dagestan's most distinctive feature, but to what extent is it a potential source of instability? Does ethnic identity supercede broader attachments to Dagestan and to Russia?⁵

Dagestan's 2,143,000 people are divided among 34 ethno-linguistic groups of either Caucasian or Turkik origin, ranging in population from 1000 to more than 500,000. Some of these belong to a single Dagestan branch of the Ibero-Caucasian languages. These include Andis, Botliks, Karatints, Akhvakhs, Bagulals, Tindints, Chamalints, Godoberints, Tsezs or Didoyts, Khvarshints, Ghinukhts, Beshtints or Kaputchins, Gunzibts, and Archins. All of these groups identify themselves as Avars, which is consequently Dagestan's largest ethnic group. Avars total 577,100 persons, or 28% of Dagestan's population.

The second largest group is the Dargins, including Kubachins and Kaitags, who comprise 16% of the population, with 333,000 persons. Living near to the Dargins, in the central regions of the Dagestani highlands, are approximately 100,000 Laks, constituting

5% of the total. The Lezgins occupy the southernmost tip of Dagestan, traditionally inhabiting an area that extends from the Caucasian highlands to the shores of the Caspian Sea and into neighboring Azerbaijan. Unlike the Avars, members of this group are registered officially as separate nationalities. These are proper Lezgins, with 250,000 people or 12.5%; Tabasarans, with 95,000 or 4.5% of the population; Rutuls comprising 17,000 or 0.8%; 16,000 Aguls with 0.75%; and 6,500 Tsakhurs, for 0.3% of the total.

On the Caspian lowland to the north of Derbent, back to the foothills and north on the Tersko-Sulack plain live an Altaic people known as the Kumyks, whose language belongs to the Turkik branch. Kumyks number 268,000 people, or 12.5%. In the same region, and predominantly in the Khasavyurt district, live Chechen-Akkins, or Aukov Chechens, a Veinakh people; 95,000 Dagestanis, or 4.5%, are of Chechen ethnicity. North of these groups, along the Terek River, in the Kizliar and Trumovsky districts, and including the town of Kizliar are concentrated 150,000 Russian nationals comprising 7% of Dagestan's population. In the semi-arid region further to the north live 35,000 members of another Turkik group. These Nogais make up only 1.6% of Dagestan's population, but there are another 37,000 Nogais nearby in Chechnya and the Stavropol region of Russia.

Though Sunni Muslims predominate, Dagestan also contains 90,000 Shiite Azeris constituting 4.2% of the population, and significant populations of Christians and Jews. In the southern part of the Caspian lowland, in the town of Derbent and in the nearby foothills, live 12,000 mountain Jews, known as Tats whose language belongs to the Iranian group. Together with another 6,000 Jews residing in Dagestan they comprise 0.8% of the population. Dagestan is a highly diverse country in nearly every respect:

ethnically, religiously, and – as a consequences of system transformation after the fall of communism – economically.

III. Research Questions and Hypotheses

To what extent is Dagestan's ethnic diversity a destabilizing factor? With what do Dagestanis identify, and what do they regard as threatening their security? Do Dagestanis resent Moscow and desire greater independence, as many commentators have insisted? Or do their fears about forces in Chechnya push Dagestanis toward closer relations with Russia? Since some of those forces are associated with Islamist extremism, are Dagestanis concerned about influences from Eastern countries? Or are they more concerned about the impact of Western influences upon Islamic traditions? Contrary to conventional answers to these questions, our preliminary research suggested the following simple hypotheses:

- H1 Centrifugal ethnic and religious cleavages are effectively counterbalanced by centripetal identifications with Dagestan and with Russia.
- H2 Dagestanis wish to maintain their place in the Russian Federation.
- H3 Dagestanis view Chechnya as the greatest threat to their stability.

In order to test these and other hypotheses, the authors received funding in the spring of 1999.⁶ Unfortunately, invasions of Dagestan by Chechnya-based militants in August and September of that year, along with subsequent warfare on Dagestan's western frontier,

made it necessary to postpone the start of the survey until 30 March 2000, after which it was conducted throughout Dagestan continuously until 13 April.

The central part of this study, a formalized closed survey of 1001 respondents from across the Republic, involved the administration of a twenty-seven-question instrument. In accord with authoritative demographic data available in *Natsional'nosti Dagestana*,⁷ 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.⁸ In order to provide a qualitative supplement to the quantitative survey data, as the second part of our study 40 open-ended interviews were conducted from 3 April to 22 May 2000, with members of Dagestan's professional, scientific, and creative intelligentsia. This sample was necessarily based upon the accessibility and cooperation of prospective respondents. Hence its results rather complement than exhaustively confirm the findings from the survey. The interviews were conducted according to a prepared list of 28 questions, and were recorded on tape with permission or otherwise stenographed.

Of course, empirical research is difficult in a place like Dagestan. Western survey methodologies are challenged by the extremity of the given cultural and infrastructural obstacles. Telephone interviewing is impossible, travelling for face-to-face interviews is difficult if not dangerous, there is no tradition of scientific interrogation on political issues. Therefore, 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. This sometimes raises conceptual and contextual, as well as linguistic, issues.

Discouraging as these difficulties may be, it proved possible to surmount them to a great extent. However, the price was a rather inelaborate set of variables for which survey and interview data could presumably be obtained. In this article, we concentrate on the data collected on the issue of Dagestan's political stability and civic coherence in light of its ethnic diversity.⁹ They and their analysis are largely descriptive in nature, because any more sophisticated set of theoretical concepts and theory-driven hypotheses would have required much more elaborate interview questionnaires than feasibly could be administered. The results, in any case, are the best available data on Dagestani attitudes toward political issues, and the exception to other reports, which are both rare and anecdotal in their nature. Indeed, much of the available literature on Dagestan has been contributed by two of the authors,¹⁰ and is outlined in the notes.

III. Patterns of Identification

Dagestan is divided internally along the lines of ethnicity and religion, but it also has been affected by cleavages of an external nature. Since the demise of the Soviet Union, Dagestan's neighbors in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Chechnya either have separated or have sought to separate from Moscow. Historically, Dagestanis have sympathized with their Muslim brethren in Chechnya. In the nineteenth century, a Dagestani ethnic Avar, called Imam Shamil, led Dagestanis and Chechens in a lengthy war against Russian imperialism. During the Russo-Chechen conflict from 1994-1996, Dagestan sought to

prevent Russian attacks upon Chechnya from Dagestani territory, and Dagestanis took nearly 130,000 Chechen refugees into their homes.

With what groups do Dagestanis identify today? We decided to examine five possible referents for Dagestani identity: Dagestan as such, Russia, the respondent's own ethnic group, his or her community or *djamaat*,¹¹ and finally religion. The question was: "If you had to choose from among these categories those that are most important to you personally, what would you choose?" Up to two entities of reference were accepted and coded. The results are displayed in table 1.

	n	percentages of entity mentioned, based on whole sample resp. ethnic group				
		Dagestan	Russia	Ethnic group	Religion	Community
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/Cossacks	(71)	59.2	88.7	12.7	0.0	0.0
Chechens	(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

Three quarters of the population saw themselves first of all as Dagestanis, and nearly two-thirds identified themselves as belonging to Russia. Only 14.5 percent founded their

identity principally upon their ethnicity, even less on religion or on local community. Thus, in accord with H1 and H2, a component of Dagestan's stability is this sense of integration as Dagestanis *and* as members of the Russian Federation.

Moreover, the significance of ethnic identification is surprisingly weak. Western observers traditionally have conceived ethnicity in Dagestan as trumping identification with both Dagestan and Russia. Yet for all but Chechen-Akhins, the former is relatively insignificant in relation to the latter two. Clearly this helps to explain why Dagestan has shown signs of neither separating from Russia nor of shattering among sustained ethnic conflicts.

Still 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, and – to a much lesser degree – village identification are also of striking importance. This is Dagestan's least integrated ethnic group.

The weakness of ethnic identity, and the relative strength of identification with Dagestan and with Russia support H1 and H2 and defy conventional wisdom about the region. Yet events that transpired in the course of the fieldwork gave the inquiry a new sense of urgency. Following the Russian presidential election in March 2000, the

Kremlin embarked with renewed vigor upon the centralization of power in Russia's regions. This process of centralization arrived in Dagestan in the spring of 2000 when federal officials requested that the Attorney General of Dagestan identify all articles of the Dagestani Constitution that did not match the Constitution of the Russian Federation. As federal pressures would subsequently issue in the alteration of Dagestan's electoral system and several articles of its constitution,¹² they placed a new focus on issues of Russian leadership, and lent an unexpected immediacy to another question that we put to survey respondents: "In whom would you place your trust or hope in the event of an acute crisis in Dagestan?" Respondents were permitted to select two referents from a list of alternatives, as displayed in table 2.

Table 2: Trust in case of an acute crisis; up to two answers accepted

	percentages of entity mentioned, based on whole sample resp. ethnic group				
	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
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/Cossacks	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

Given the history of the Caucasus, it is remarkable that in case of an acute crisis most Dagestanis would trust in Russian Federal leadership. During the invasions of 1999, this came a surprise even to the Kremlin.¹³ While this result is consistent with H2, we had not anticipated the strength of the response. It is placed in context by the fact that, on balance, ‘Dagestani leadership’ is a distant second, ranking together with ‘Myself, my relatives and friends’. On the one hand, this is evidence of the significance of informal structures such as family, clan, and *djamaat* that appear as ‘background’ sources of stability throughout our study.¹⁴ On the other hand, this result 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 latter group is surprising in this regard, since, in other respects, the Lezgin response shows signs of political alienation. Dargin confidence might be explained by the fact that the two most powerful positions in the Republic are currently held by Dargins.¹⁵ Chechens have unrivaled trust in their *Ethnic* and *Religious leaders*. This is consistent with previous claims by two of the authors that kinship structures trump political structures in Chechen society.¹⁶ Traditionally, relations among Chechens are organized within a complex seven-level hierarchy of kinship connections, in which the *teip*, or clan, is the predominant structure. In Chechnya, these kinship structures often have superseded political organization, whereas in Dagestan

during the past five centuries the opposite has been the case. Dagestani villages, or *djamaats*, are political structures that successfully encompass several clans or *tuhums*. The traditional precedence of political structures over kinship structures in Dagestani society may help to explain why identification with Dagestan and with Russia is so much stronger than ethnic identity.

These results defy the conventional wisdom that generally depicts Caucasian nationalities as pulling away from Russian leadership and placing their trust in ethnic and religious leaders. It is especially surprising that Tabasarans and Azeris trust in Russian leadership even more than do Russian ethnics. On the other hand, it is no surprise to find Chechens far lower than any other group in this regard. Chechens also are predictably short on confidence in Dagestani leaders, but no more so than Avars and Laks.

Avar dissatisfaction in Dagestani leadership may be negatively connected to the fact that the two most powerful offices in the Republic are held by Dargins. Since Avars are the largest ethnicity, many feel that they should control these posts. It may also be attributed to the fact that many Avars live in villages in Dagestan's isolated and impoverished western regions, where their neighbors are often Chechen-Akhins and Laks. Isolated from the republic's capital, and bereft of economic benefits, political alienation is predictable among these groups. However, other groups, such as Lezgins, are equally isolated and impoverished without here displaying the same shortage of faith in Dagestani leaders.

For more than a decade, Chechen-Akhins and Laks (and to a lesser degree, Avars) have been locked in a territorial dispute that resulted from Stalin's brutal deportation of the entire Chechen population in 1944, and from the subsequent forcible relocation of

Laks and Avars onto Chechen lands. In 1991, the Laks generously agreed to a further relocation, but malfeasance on the part of Dagestani officials combined with fiscal shortfalls to delay their move, and the opportunity has been lost, at least for the foreseeable future, as a consequence of the 1999 invasions. Many Chechens, Laks and Avars hold the Dagestani leadership accountable.

Dargins may have relative confidence in the Republic's leadership because its two most powerful positions are held by Dargins, but the authors are unable to explain why Tabasarans, Azeris, and Lezgins also rate Dagestani leaders relatively highly. All three groups are located southern Dagestan, and Lezgins, in particular, would appear to have numerous historical and political reasons for dissatisfaction.¹⁷ In the view of many Lezgins, their people have been divided not only by the recently internationalized border between Dagestan and Azerbaijan, but also the Soviet ethnography of the 1920s, which distinguished Lezgins from Aguls, Rutuls, Tabasarans, and Tsakhurs despite historic affiliations among these groups. Thus from a once-powerful people at the crossroads of the Samur Valley and West Caspian trade routes the Lezgins have now been marginalized in the economic and political backwaters of two Caucasian republics. Yet anecdotal reports of Lezgin alienation are not fully supported by survey data, as indicated by their relative confidence in Dagestani leaders.

After Russian federal leadership, several groups place most faith in informal networks of friends and relations. The only surprise is that these groups were not the primary focus of confidence. The fact that they are not may signify a recognition on the part of many Dagestanis that their fundamental problems are related to economic and security issues that cannot be privately resolved.

Ethnic movements and their leaders played an important role in Dagestani politics in the early 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet system left people looking for a new basis for social organization, and the residue of information and impressions from this period may have contributed to predictions of Dagestan's fragmentation along ethnic lines. However, these movements have sharply declined since 1994, when Dagestan adopted a constitutional framework that provided ethnic cleavages with extensive, sometimes ingenious, institutional mediation.¹⁸ For example, Dagestan's collegial executive (*Gosudarstvenny Sovet*) has one representative from each of the republic's 14 principal ethnic groups, while Dagestan's unique ethnic electoral system provides each of these ethnic groups with representation in the People's Assembly (*Narodnoye Sobraniye*) that is often within a percentage point of its representation in the general population. The fact that Dagestan's constitution provides ethnic divisions with effective institutional expression may be one reason why ethnicity a weaker concern for most Dagestanis today.

Indeed one is struck by the weakness of ethnic, religious, and organizational dependence in times of crisis. The consistency of the weakness of these connections at critical junctures (table 2) and the weakness of their role as referents of identification (table 1) not only provides corroboration for H1 and H2, but suggests further implications. Whereas the conflicting loyalties of Russia's Muslims are a perennial source of speculation it appears unlikely that religion will give rise to separatism in Dagestan, particularly in times of crisis such as that of August 1999.¹⁹

Nevertheless, Islam has undergone a dramatic revival during the last decade in Dagestan. Low figures in this column also may indicate that the, often elderly and half-

educated, religious leadership that survived Soviet repression may be lagging behind the trend. If so there are important opportunities for new Islamic leaders, and thus potential for the growth of religious radicalism.

However, these results are especially significant in the case of ethnic connections. According to conventional wisdom, ethnicity is paramount in Dagestan and loyalty to the Russian Federation is weak. Yet tables 1 and 2 suggest that precisely the opposite relations hold. At the very least, these tables indicate that the role of ethnicity in Dagestan has been overstated, and the role of the Federation has been under-appreciated.

Moreover, table 2 indicates, once again, the gulf that separates Chechen-Akhins from most other ethnicities in Dagestan. Informal private groups, ethnic, and religious leaders are equally important for them. Relative to these referents, confidence in Dagestani leaders and Russian federal leadership declines in tidy increments of 33.3 percent. This is more or less the outlook that conventional wisdom might attribute to all of Dagestan's ethnic groups. Table 2 demonstrates how far wrong that conventional view would be. With the exception of Chechen-Akhins, table 2 bodes well for the integration of Dagestani ethnicities in Dagestan itself, and in the Russian Federation, but it also shows why the Chechen-Akhins are likely to face continuing problems.

IV. Threats to Dagestan's Stability

If internal factors such as ethnicity and religion do not threaten Dagestan's stability, then what external factors might pose threats? Dagestan has frequently been depicted as threatened, on the one hand, by its connections with Russia, and on the other hand by its

proximity to Chechnya. Meanwhile, much of our preceding research on the role of Islam in Dagestan²⁰ has examined the tensions between modernizing tendencies from the West and traditional Islamic influences from the East. In our survey, we focused upon these ostensibly orthogonal tensions between North and South, East and West in order to examine perceptions of external threats to Dagestan.

Respondents were asked to say whether they viewed a threat from each of these referents as very ‘very serious’ (1), ‘not very serious’ (2), or ‘not serious at all’ (3). Corresponding to the trust invested in the Federation, Russia is seen – according to table 3 – as the least threatening of the four possibilities (mean: 2.6). Chechnya, on the other hand, is perceived as much more threatening (mean: 1.23). These results are consistent with H1, H2, and H3.

Perceptions of threats from Western and Eastern countries (means: 1.7 respectively 1.9) ranked in strength between threats perceived from Russia and from Chechnya. Some elite interviewees considered 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. By contrast, those who saw a threat from Eastern countries were most concerned about foreign support for Islamist extremism in Dagestan.

Table 3: Threat to Dagestan...

	n	Russia		Chechnya		Western Countries		Eastern Countries	
		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
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

*Calculation of means based on cases without missing values.

**One case missing in calculation of the mean.

Of course, 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. Russians are understandably least concerned about a threat from Russia, followed by Lezgins, Tabasarans, and Azeris. Since Azeris are Shiite Muslims they may view Russian influence as a secularist counterweight to Dagestan's Sunni majority. Lezgins and Tabasarans are among Dagestan's more cosmopolitan and Westernized groups, having been exposed to an earlier cosmopolitanism in Baku at the turn of the twentieth century.

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, Laks, and Tabasarans in particular perceive a serious threat to Dagestan from Eastern countries, sometimes associated with Islamist influences. Lak villages are

in Western Dagestan, close the Chechen border, and to areas in which Wahhabite Islamist extremism has been most aggressive.²¹ Yet unlike Avars and Chechen-Akhins, who live nearby, the more Western oriented Laks generally have not been attracted to Wahhabism. Since Wahhabis receive funding and support from individuals and organizations in Islamic countries, Laks are more likely to view Eastern countries as a threat.

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.²²

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, in accord with H3. An additional respondent described the principal threat as “attempts to separate Dagestan from Russia.” Only six 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.” Given the history of the region it is interesting that only one interviewee 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. Four interviewees were most concerned about threats that have come to Dagestan from Eastern countries. Three of these discussed “foreign

Wahhabism,”²³ while one focused upon “foreign terrorism.” Only 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. Six of these focused upon “poverty”, “economic backwardness”, “unemployment” and a growing “economic crisis”. Another 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. They cited “corruption”, “theft of power”, “bad leaders”; “monopolization of power”, the “struggle for power”, and the imperfection of the electoral system. Another ten respondents attributed the main problems to ethnic or kinship ties. They mentioned “confrontation of clans”, “ethnic nationalism”, “ethnic separatism”, and one saw a threat in the “dominance of one ethnic group”.

In one sense, table 3 provides corroboration for some of the more striking data in tables 1 and 2. Whereas the latter tables indicate strong connections between Dagestan and Russia, table 3 shows that Russia is less threatening. Since these results are contrary to most expectations about the people of the Northeast Caucasus, it is significant that all three lines of interrogation, plus elite interviews, should provide similar results. Equally striking, in view of the historical alliance between Dagestanis and Chechens against Russian imperialism, is the strength of the threat perceived from Chechnya by both ordinary Dagestanis and by Dagestani opinion leaders. Clearly, there has been a substantial realignment in the Northeast Caucasus.

The reasons for this are clear from the interviews as well as from informal conversations with Dagestanis occurring throughout the study. Many Dagestanis feel that

they supported Chechens during the first conflict when they took more than 100,000 Chechen refugees into their homes. Yet they felt betrayed in January 1996, when Chechen field commander Salman Raduyev herded 3,000 Dagestani hostages into a hospital in the Dagestani town of Kizlyar. Dozens of the hostages later died when federal artillery pounded the fleeing rebels and demolished the Dagestani village of Pervomaiskoye. Dagestani officials helped to mediate the peace accord between Russia and Chechnya that was signed in the Dagestani city of Khasavyurt in August 1996. Yet the years of Chechnya's *de facto* independence, from 1996 to 1999, were catastrophic for the people of Dagestan. Daily raids by Chechen gangs confiscated Dagestani property and led to the captivity of hundreds of Dagestani citizens in Chechnya. There they were tortured and mutilated on videotapes that were sent to their impoverished families in order to extort exorbitant ransoms. Fleeing hostages were returned to captivity by Chechens from whom they sought help, and many ransomed hostages returned to Dagestan with claims that "everyone in Chechnya" was involved in the hostage industry. By 1998 the hostage industry had generated widespread terror in Dagestani society. Then, in 1999, Dagestan was twice invaded from Chechnya. People were killed and 32,000 refugees were displaced from their homes. Many Dagestanis do not understand why the people of Chechnya did not help them to repel the invaders, and why Chechen officials did not repudiate and apologize for the invasions. Neither did Chechen officials arrest Salman Raduyev, nor those who led the 1999 invasions, nor did they prevent Chechen gangs from preying upon the people of Dagestan. This is why Dagestanis see Chechnya as the principal threat to their security, and one reason why many are prepared to rely upon Russian federal leadership.

While Dagestanis are torn between their fears of the East and their fears of the West, current military activity by Western countries in Muslim regions of Central Asia and the Middle East is likely to tip the balance toward the latter. Overall, the study seems to suggest that the greatest internal threats to Dagestan's stability are not ethnic and religious cleavages, as generally believed, but economic depression and political corruption.

V. Dagestan and Russia

Dagestan's invasion by Chechnya-based separatists, the subsequent federal military buildup, and Moscow's current efforts at recentralization all 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? Respondents were asked whether Dagestan 'should become even closer with Russia' (-1), whether 'the present system of relation should continue' (0), or whether Dagestan should become more independent (+1). 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 results are displayed in table 4, where the percentages for each answer are also shown.

Table 4: Future Relation between Dagestan and Russia

	n	even closer overall	status quo overall	Dagestan 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
Kумыks	(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/Cossacks	(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

Of those surveyed, 62.6 percent want Dagestan to have "closer relations with Russia", 22 percent want to preserve the status quo, 14.8 percent want more independence from Russia. While broadly supporting H1, these results are strictly inconsistent with H2, which anticipated that Dagestanis would prefer to maintain relations with Russia at the current level. Concordant with their trust in the Russian federal government, all ethnic groups prefer closer relations between Dagestan and 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 Chechen-Akhins do not want greater independence from Russia. Predictably, ethnic Russians are most in favor of closer ties with Russia. Clearly, Dagestanis will remain voluntarily within the Federation, and are likely to accept the current trend toward recentralization and closer control from Moscow.

Yet there is a minority of Dagestanis who want greater independence. What are the characteristics of this group? To answer this question, we did a logistic regression

analysis in which the desire for a more independent Dagestan was treated as the dependent variable.²⁴ Answers of persons in favor of increased independence for Dagestan were coded one, and then compared with those of all other respondents whose answers on the relations with Russia were coded zero. Table 5 summarizes the results.

Table 5: Logistic regression for 'Dagestan should move toward greater independence'		
	Odd ratio	Significance
Principles for the Dagestanis state: (reference c.= socialist state)		
Islamic state	6.012 ⁾	0.000
Western democracy	1.662	0.051
Trust in religious leaders (reference c.= not mentioned)		
	2.598	0.008
Threat for Dagestan: Chechnya (reference c.= very serious)		
not so serious	1.960	0.016
not serious at all	1.889	0.127
Age in years		
	0.974	0.000
Educational attainment (reference c.= incomplete high school)		
high school, prof., techni.	0.942	0.827
higher education, university student	0.868	0.675
Place of residence (reference c.= village)		
	0.838	0.451
Gender (reference c.= male)		
	0.832	0.428
Threat for Dagestan: Russia (reference c.= very serious)		
not so serious	0.645	0.186
not serious at all	0.332	0.001
Wahhabis are extremists (reference c.= no)		
	0.488	0.003
Cox and Snell R –Quadrate		
	0.527	n=826

⁾ Read: Those who want Dagestan to become an Islamic state, are 6.0 times as probable to argue in favor of a more independent Dagestan than those who want Dagestan to be a socialist state.

Clearly those who favor greater independence are also those who prefer an Islamic state (and to a much lesser degree those who support western democracy), who trust in religious leaders, and who do not see Chechnya as a threat to Dagestan. On balance,

religion and ethnic identification with Chechnya are correlated most strongly with the desire for a more independent Dagestan. These points are most popular among Chechen-Akhins themselves, and apart from Chechen-Akhins, few Dagestanis favor greater independence. On the other hand, those who are less likely to favor greater independence are also those who consider Wahhabis as extremists and do not see Russia as at threat to Dagestan. While this picture indicates little threat to the status quo, it suggests that, contrary to H1, dissension may play along existing ethnic and religious cleavages in Dagestan, and that dissenters remain somewhat undeterred by Chechnya's fate. Still the principal finding is the strength of Dagestan's adherence to the Federation, and the desire of many Dagestanis for closer relations with Moscow.

VI. Conclusion

Survey results confirm H3: Dagestanis view Chechnya as the greatest threat to their stability. This result receives further support from elite interviews, in which Chechnya was identified far more than any other referent as a potential threat. Data also confirm H1 and are consistent with H2, but they suggest significant caveats in each case. Survey results show that Dagestanis strongly identify with Dagestan and with Russia and that the strengths of each of these referents is far greater than that of ethnic or religious identification. This confirms the hypothesis (H1) that centrifugal ethnic and religious cleavages are effectively counterbalanced by centripetal identifications with Dagestan and with Russia. Yet while identification with Dagestan and with Russia is strong, and while most Dagestanis display remarkable confidence in Russian federal leadership, faith in Dagestani leaders is not high. Moreover, a small minority of Dagestanis favor greater

independence from Russia, and this cleavage cuts along both ethnic and religious lines. Thus identification with Russia appears to be ineffective in counterbalancing this particular ethno-religious cleavage, which is associated most frequently with Chechen-Akhins. Whereas Dagestan and Russia are powerful foci for the unification of most of Dagestan's ethnic groups they provide less effectively for the integration of Chechen-Akhins. Indeed Chechen-Akhin attitudes are sharply distinguished on other points, including the relative strength of their identification along ethno-religious lines. Without question they are Dagestan's least integrated group, and are a potential source of instability.

Dagestanis display a surprising confidence in Russian federal leadership, and clearly, most Dagestanis do not seek greater independence from Russia. In this sense, H2 is correct in hypothesizing that Dagestanis wish to maintain their place in the Russian Federation. However, survey results reveal that H2 is unnecessarily weak, since most Dagestanis would prefer to have closer relations with Russia.

The study suggests that many Dagestanis changed their views of Chechnya, and, perhaps to a lesser extent, the Russian Federation, between the end of the first Chechen war in 1996, when many Dagestanis sympathized with Chechnya,²⁵ and the beginning of the second war in 1999. During these intervening years Dagestan was invaded three times by Chechnya-based militants displacing 32,000 refugees. During the same years, Dagestan was also overwhelmed by criminal gangs based in Chechnya.

The upshot is that most Dagestanis are no more interested in following Chechnya out of the Russian Federation than they are in pursuing nationalist and separtist agendas. On the contrary, they strongly identify with Russia and look to Moscow for assistance.

This point has been overlooked by many Western commentators. Dagestan is likely to remain the pillar of Russian influence in the strategic regions of the Caspian and the Caucasus, and Moscow's strongest claim to viable accommodation with the Koran. It is therefore likely to remain a focus of increasing Russian investment and economic development, with an enduring role in regional hydrocarbon transfers. These are points that cannot be overlooked by any realistic approach to the region.

¹ Pacifica News Service, *Jinn Magazine*, September 14, 1999, <http://www.pacificnews.org/jinn/stories/5.19/990914-russia.html>. Thomsa Goltz is the author of *Azerbaijan Diary* (M.E. Sharpe, 1999)

² Pacifica New Service, *Jinn Magazine*, August 19, 1999, (<http://www.pacificnews.org/jinn/stories/5.17/990819-dagestan.html>)

³ *Johnson's Russia List*, no.4170, March 15, 2000

⁴ Dagestan (Daghestan): Comprehensive Report, <http://caspian.hypermart.net/daginfo.html>)

⁵ See Ware and Kisriev, "Ethnic Parity and Democratic Pluralism in Dagestan: a Consociational Approach". *Europe-Asia Studies*, January 2001, 53, 1; Ware, Kisriev, Patzelt, Roericht, "Ethnicity and Identity in Dagestan", under consideration by *Nations and Nationalisms*

⁶ The authors are grateful for the support of the National Council for Eurasian and Eastern European Research and the National Research Council. Preliminary survey research was funded in 1998 by Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. For details on approach, methodology and results see "Democratization in Dagestan", paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, 1 September 2001.

⁷ Or *Ethnicities of Dagestan*, (Mahachkala: Statsbornik, 1996).

⁸ 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.

⁹ In the tables, data will be broken down for Dagestan's most important ethnic groups, since issues of ethnicity are central for every understanding of Dagestan and its cultural features. Because of extraordinarily many missing cases, valid numbers usually do not add up to the sample size of 1001; usual case numbers for the different ethnic groups are shown in table 1. Interpretations of survey data are based on comparisons of percentages and means, sometimes on correlation coefficients. 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.

¹⁰ Ware and Kisriev, "Political Stability in Dagestan: Ethnic Parity and Religious Polarization", *Problems of Post-Communism*, 47, 2, March/April 2000; Ware and Kisriev, "The Islamic Factor in Dagestan", *Central Asian Survey*, 19, 2, June 2000; Kisriev and Ware, "Conflict and Catharsis: A Report on Developments in Dagestan following the Incursion of August and September 1999", *Nationalities Papers*, 28, 3, September 2000; Ware and Kisriev, "Ethnic Parity and Democratic Pluralism in Dagestan: a Consociational Approach". *Europe-Asia Studies*, January 2001, 53, 1; Ware and Kisriev, "Russian Recentralization Arrives in the Republic of Dagestan: Implications for Institutional Integrity and Political Stability", *Eastern European Constitutional Review*, 10, 1, Winter 2001; Kisriev and Ware, "Democracy and Security in Dagestan", presented at the Association for the Study of Nationalities World Conference, New York, 6 April 2001; Kisriev and Ware, "A Summer of Innuendo: Growing Competition among Dagestan's Political Elite," *Central Asian Survey*, 20, 2, June 2000; Kisriev and Ware, "The Selection of Dagestan's Second People's Assembly", *Electoral Studies* 20, 3; Kisriev and Ware, "Irony and Political Islam", *Nationalities Papers* (forthcoming).

¹¹ A *djamaat* is a village or a historically connected group of villages, each of which contains several clans, known as *tuhmums*. The *djamaat* is Dagestan's traditional political unit.

¹² Ware and Kisriev, "Russian Recentralization Arrives in the Republic of Dagestan: Implications for Institutional Integrity and Political Stability", with Kisriev, E., *Eastern European Constitutional Review*, 10, 1, Winter, 2001.

¹³ Working in Russia at the time of the invasions, two of the authors had an opportunity to observe the Dagestani government's requests for federal assistance in responding to the incursions, and the initial stunned and fumbling appearance of that response.

¹⁴ See Ware, Kisriev, Patzelt, Roericht, "Ethnicity and Identity in Dagestan", under consideration by *Nations and Nationalisms*, and "Does Dagestan's Democracy Work", under consideration by *Comparative Politics*.

¹⁵ Magomedali Magomedov is Chair of Dagestan's State Council, and Said Amirov is Mayor of Mahachkala.

¹⁶ Ware and Kisriev, "Political Stability in Dagestan: Ethnic Parity and Religious Polarization", *Problems of Post-Communism*, 47, 2, March/April 2000.

¹⁷ See Kisriev and Ware, "Conflict and Catharsis: A Report on Developments in Dagestan following the Incursion of August and September 1999", *Nationalities Papers*, 28, 3, September 2000; Ware, Kisriev, Patzelt, Roericht, "Ethnicity and Identity in Dagestan" under consideration by *Nations and Nationalisms*.

¹⁸ Ware and Kisriev, "Ethnic Parity and Democratic Pluralism in Dagestan: a Consociational Approach". *Europe-Asia Studies*, January 2001, 53, 1; "The Selection of Dagestan's Second People's Assembly", *Electoral Studies* 20, 3; Ware and Kisriev, "Political Stability in Dagestan: Ethnic Parity and Religious Polarization", *Problems of Post-Communism*, 47, 2, March/April 2000.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ware and Kisriev, "The Islamic Factor in Dagestan", *Central Asian Survey*, 19, 2, June 2000; Ware and Kisriev, "Political Stability in Dagestan: Ethnic Parity and Religious Polarization", *Problems of Post-Communism*, 47, 2, March/April 2000; Kisriev and Ware, "Conflict and Catharsis: A Report on Developments in Dagestan following the Incursion of August and September 1999", *Nationalities Papers*, 28, 3, September 2000; Ware, Kisriev, Patzelt, Roericht, "Political Islam in Dagestan" under consideration by *Europe and Asia Studies*.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ The dependent variable in a logistic regression is coded 0 and 1. A logistic regression defines the relation between dependent and independent variables in totally different way than a 'regular' regression, where one unit change in the independent variable is connected with a certain change in the dependent variable. Logistic regression uses 'odd ratios' instead, which show the probability for the value one (in the dependent variable) compared to a reference group. The significance column in table 2 indicates statistically significant differences, the standard limit being $p \leq 0.05$. The Cox and Snell R-Quadrate is an indicator for the amount of explained variance in the model, comparable to R-Square in the linear regression.

²⁵ As suggested by the policies of Dagestani officials, by the accommodation of over 100,000 Chechen refugees, and by anecdotal evidence.