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Ibadullayeva Yelvira Serikkyzy, doctoral student
The National Pedagogical University named after Abai

Ismatullayeva Nurgul Nurlanovna, doctoral student
The National Pedagogical University named after Abai

IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF NATION-BUILDING IN POST-SOVIET STATES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE RUSSIAN AND KAZAKHSTANI MODELS

Abstract. This article examines the ideological foundations of nation-building in Russia and Kazakhstan following the collapse of the Soviet Union. It explores the specific features of the formation of national and civic identity within the context of multiethnic societies. Particular attention is paid to official concepts, state strategies, and mechanisms of social consolidation. Russia emphasizes civilizational unity, historical continuity, and state sovereignty, whereas Kazakhstan has developed a model of civic identity based on interethnic harmony and the principle of “unity in diversity”. The comparative analysis demonstrates that both models share common features related to the Soviet legacy and the pursuit of stability; however, they differ significantly in their ideological priorities and mechanisms of societal integration.

Keywords: Nation-building, national identity, civic identity, ideology, Russia, Kazakhstan, post-Soviet space, interethnic harmony.

Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 became not only one of the most significant geopolitical events of the twentieth century, but also a serious challenge for the newly independent states. These countries faced the urgent necessity of establishing new political institutions, economic systems, and most importantly, fostering a sense of belonging among citizens to the new state. It was during this period that the process of nation-building acquired particular importance, being closely connected with the search for new ideological foundations of national unity. Nation-building represents a complex and long-term process aimed at constructing a common political and cultural identity. In multiethnic states, this task becomes especially complicated, since governments must simultaneously strengthen state unity while preserving the ethnocultural diversity of the population. Under such conditions, ideology performs a consolidating function by shaping a system of values, historical symbols, and collective visions of the country's future.

Russia and Kazakhstan serve as illustrative examples of post-Soviet states which, despite their shared historical background, adopted different models of national development. Both countries possess ethnically diverse populations, a significant Soviet legacy, and a strong aspiration for political stability. Nevertheless, their approaches to the formation of national identity differ substantially.

Following the dissolution of the USSR, Russia began to develop a model based on the idea of state-civilizational unity of the multinational people. Kazakhstan, in contrast, placed greater emphasis on the formation of civic identity and interethnic harmony as the foundation of state stability. These differences are of considerable interest for political science and comparative studies of the post-Soviet space.

It should also be noted that in the twenty-first century, nation-building processes have acquired new characteristics. Globalization, digital technologies, migration processes, and information competition exert a significant influence on the formation of identity among younger generations. As a result, states are compelled to continuously adapt their ideological mechanisms to changing social realities.

The purpose of this article is to conduct a comparative analysis of the ideological foundations of nation-building in Russia and Kazakhstan, to identify the common features and differences between their models, and to determine the major challenges facing their further development.



Theoretical Foundations of Nation-Building

In contemporary political science, nation-building is understood as the process of constructing a unified national community based on shared values, historical memory, and political institutions. One of the most influential scholars of nationalism, Benedict Anderson, defines the nation as an “imagined community”, whose members perceive themselves as belonging to a single collective despite never personally knowing most of its members [1].

Anthony Smith emphasized that modern nations are formed not only through state institutions, but also through historical myths, symbols, and ethnocultural memory [2]. Ernest Gellner, in turn, associated the emergence of nationalism with social modernization and the development of the industrial state [3].

Contemporary researchers generally distinguish several major models of nation-building: ethnic, civic, and civilizational. The ethnic model is centered on common ancestry, language, and culture. The civic model is based on political belonging to the state regardless of ethnic origin. The civilizational model presupposes the unification of society around a shared historical destiny and the cultural-historical mission of the state.

In the post-Soviet context, nation-building acquired a distinct specificity. Following the collapse of the USSR, the newly independent states were compelled not only to overcome the crisis of Soviet identity, but also to create new symbolic foundations for social unity. At the same time, many countries faced the challenge of balancing the ethnic revival of the titular nation with the preservation of interethnic stability.

Russian scholar V.A. Tishkov argues that, for multiethnic states, the most sustainable model is that of a civic nation grounded in the equality of citizens and the integration of cultural diversity into a unified political space [4]. In practice, however, most post-Soviet states employ hybrid models combining elements of both civic and ethnocultural approaches.

Foreign scholars have likewise emphasized the distinctive nature of the post-Soviet space. Rogers Brubaker characterizes it as a territory of “unfinished nation-building,” where states continue searching for an optimal model of identity even decades after the dissolution of the Soviet Union [5].

The Russian Model: Civilizational Unity of the Multinational People

The Russian model of nation-building is based on the perception of Russia as a unique multinational civilization united by a common history, statehood, and cultural space. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian leadership sought to preserve historical continuity and strengthen the unity of the state.

A key document in this sphere is the *Strategy of the State National Policy of the Russian Federation through 2036*, approved by Presidential Decree No. 858 of November 25, 2025. The document emphasizes the necessity of strengthening an all-Russian civic identity while preserving the ethnocultural diversity of the peoples of Russia [6].

The principal values of the Russian model include:

- patriotism;
- historical continuity;
- state sovereignty;
- protection of traditional spiritual and moral values;
- unity of the multinational people of Russia.

Historical memory occupies a central place within Russian ideology. The victory in the Great Patriotic War remains one of the most significant symbols of national unity. Through state holidays, educational policy, and the media, the state promotes the idea of the continuity of Russian statehood and the shared historical destiny of the country's peoples.

L.M. Drobizheva notes that contemporary Russian identity is constructed simultaneously through civic belonging and the symbolic unity of historical memory [7]. Russian culture and the Russian language function as the primary integrative foundation of society, while official policy continues to emphasize the equality of all peoples of the Russian Federation.

In recent years, greater emphasis has been placed on the concept of the “Russian World” (*Russkiy Mir*) as a cultural and civilizational space. Consequently, the Russian model is increasingly



interpreted by scholars as civilizational in nature, since the state is presented not merely as a political institution, but also as the bearer of a distinct historical mission.

An important role is played by instruments of patriotic education targeting younger generations. The state actively employs educational programs, youth organizations, commemorative events, and cultural initiatives to strengthen all-Russian identity. Particular attention is devoted to issues of information security and the protection of traditional values in the context of globalization.

At the same time, the Russian model faces several significant challenges. Among them are the necessity of maintaining a balance between political centralization and ethnocultural diversity, the integration of migrants, and the growing influence of the digital environment on the values and identities of younger generations.

The Kazakhstani Model: Civic Identity and Interethnic Harmony

Following the attainment of independence, Kazakhstan adopted a nation-building model grounded in civic identity and interethnic harmony. This approach was largely determined by the country's demographic composition, as in the early 1990s Kazakhstan was one of the most multiethnic states in the post-Soviet space.

The foundational documents of this policy became the *Doctrine of National Unity of Kazakhstan* (2010) and the *Concept for Strengthening and Developing Kazakhstani Identity and Unity* (2015) [8]. The central idea of these documents is the formation of a unified Kazakhstani nation based on civic affiliation with the state.

The principal elements of the Kazakhstani model include:

- interethnic harmony;
- civic identity;
- political stability;
- the gradual strengthening of the role of the Kazakh language;
- respect for cultural diversity.

One of the most significant institutions established in this sphere was the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, created to promote dialogue among ethnic groups. The Assembly functions as a platform for discussing issues of interethnic relations and fostering an atmosphere of trust within society [9].

A distinctive feature of the Kazakhstani model is its combination of a civic approach with elements of cultural national revival. The state actively supports the development of the Kazakh language, historical memory, and national traditions. At the same time, official discourse avoids rigid forms of ethnic nationalism.

According to Marlene Laruelle, Kazakhstan has developed a “soft model of nationalism,” in which the strengthening of the titular nation is combined with the preservation of the inclusive character of the state [10]. This approach contributes both to domestic stability and to the country's positive international image.

Particular importance is attached to the historical legacy of the Great Steppe, Turkic civilization, and the traditional statehood of the Kazakh people. These elements have become part of a new national narrative aimed at reinforcing the legitimacy of independent Kazakhstan.

In his public speeches, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has repeatedly emphasized the importance of the concept of a “Just Kazakhstan,” in which civic solidarity is viewed as the foundation for modernization and national development [11].

Comparative Analysis of the Models

The Russian and Kazakhstani models of nation-building demonstrate both significant similarities and substantial differences.

Among their common features are:

1. the aspiration to preserve interethnic stability;
2. the use of the Soviet historical legacy;
3. the active role of the state in shaping identity;
4. the use of education, mass media, and symbolic politics as instruments of social consolidation.



Both countries regard multiethnicity not as a threat, but as an important characteristic of national development. In both cases, the state plays a leading role in establishing the ideological orientation of society.

At the same time, the differences between the two models are fundamental. The Russian model is primarily based on the idea of civilizational unity and strong statehood. At its core lies the perception of Russia as an independent historical and cultural civilization with a distinct geopolitical and cultural mission.

The Kazakhstani model, by contrast, possesses a more explicitly civic character. Its primary emphasis is placed on interethnic harmony and the integration of the population around a shared civic affiliation with the state.

Language policy also differs considerably between the two countries. In Russia, the Russian language functions as a natural integrative factor and a key element of national cohesion. In Kazakhstan, however, the state pursues a gradual policy of strengthening the role of the Kazakh language while simultaneously seeking to preserve a comfortable linguistic environment for the Russian-speaking population.

The international dimension of ideology also varies significantly. The Russian model is closely connected with the country's foreign policy positioning as one of the major centers of global politics. The Kazakhstani model, on the other hand, is more strongly oriented toward internal stability and the promotion of an image of Kazakhstan as a peaceful and multiethnic state committed to interethnic dialogue and cooperation.

Practical Significance and Contemporary Challenges

Both models of nation-building have demonstrated the capacity to maintain relative political stability and interethnic harmony. Nevertheless, under contemporary conditions they face a number of new challenges.

One of the key factors is the growing influence of digital technologies and social media. Younger generations increasingly shape their identities under the influence of the global information environment, which gradually weakens the role of traditional state institutions in the construction of collective identity.

Migration processes also play a significant role. In Russia, major concerns include the integration of migrants and the maintenance of interethnic balance in large urban centers. Kazakhstan, in turn, faces the challenge of combining the strengthening of Kazakh culture and language with the preservation of interethnic harmony and social cohesion.

Another important challenge is globalization, which contributes to the spread of universal cultural values and the weakening of traditional forms of collective identity. Under these conditions, states seek to reinforce national values through education, cultural policy, and information strategies.

Researchers additionally emphasize the connection between successful nation-building and the level of social justice within society. Economic inequality and social problems may reduce citizens' trust in the state and weaken the sense of national unity [12].

Conclusion

Nation-building in Russia and Kazakhstan represents a complex and ongoing process of constructing national unity within multiethnic societies. Despite their shared Soviet past and similar historical conditions, the two states have developed distinct models of national consolidation.

The Russian model places greater emphasis on civilizational unity, historical continuity, and strong statehood. The Kazakhstani model is primarily based on the principles of civic identity, interethnic harmony, and political stability.

Both models demonstrate an aspiration to unite society around shared values while preserving cultural diversity. At the same time, contemporary challenges – including globalization, digitalization, migration processes, and changing values among younger generations – require the continuous adaptation of ideological mechanisms.

The experiences of Russia and Kazakhstan are of considerable importance for comparative studies of the post-Soviet space. They demonstrate that successful nation-building is impossible without a combination of historical memory, civic solidarity, and effective state policy



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