

THE JOURNAL OF CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES

Volume: 31 2024 ISSN: 0975-086X



Centre of Central Asian Studies
University of Kashmir
Srinagar, J&K, India

THE JOURNAL OF CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES

Volume: 31 2024 ISSN: 0975-086X

Chief Editor

Prof. Tabasum Firdous

Editors

Dr. Ajmal Shah

Dr. Abid Gulzar

Associate Editors

Prof. Tareak A. Rather

Prof. Wahid Nasaru

Dr. Mumtaz A. Yattoo



Centre of Central Asian Studies
University of Kashmir
Srinagar, J&K, India

© Publisher: Centre of Central Asian Studies, University of Kashmir

No part of this Journal may be reprinted in original or translated without the explicit permission of the Publisher.

The views expressed in this volume of the Journal are opinions of contributors and can not be associated with the Publisher or Editorial Board.

The Journal is peer reviewed, refereed and indexed in EBSCOhost and ProQuest. The Journal is also available online through EBSCOhost Database: Political Science Complete on web.ebscohost.com; and on the University of Kashmir web page <http://ccas.uok.edu.in>.

Scope of the Journal: The Journal welcomes original papers on all aspects of Central Asia, preferably, contemporary problems and emerging regional issues.



ISSN:0975-086X

Price: Rs. 1000 / \$ 25

Design
Discover Srinagar
8716 892 892

Published by
Centre of Central Asian Studies
University of Kashmir
2024-25

Contents

Turkmenistan's Pragmatic Diplomacy: Navigating Engagements with the Taliban-Led Afghanistan Since 2021

Abdul Wasi Popalzay

1-23

Geopolitical Chessboard of Central Asia

Saurabh Dalal

24-33

Poetic Discourse of Naqeeb Khan Taghral Ahrari in the Literary Legacy of 19th Century Central Asia

Prof. G.N. Khaki

34-46

State-Building and Nation Formation in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan: Independence, Institutional Development, and Societal Transformation

Inderjeet Inderjeet

47-62

Understanding the Status of Capitalism in Central Asia

Dr. Raj Yadav

63-78

Iran and Central Asia: Navigating Strategic Partnerships and Regional Challenges

Dr. Altaf ul Rehman

Dr. Hamid Rasool

79-95

Convergence and Divergence of Growth in Commonwealth of Independent States Countries

Prof. R V Ramana Murthy

Mohammad Orfan Abdullah

96-112

Multiculturalism and Inter-Ethnic Relation in Kazakhstan

Dr. Amit Kumar

113-125

Fostering Sustainable Economic Growth in Tajikistan through Entrepreneurship: Policy Implications and Future Directions

Dr Chittaranjan Senapati

126-142

India's Strategic Outreach to Central Asian Republics under the Narendra Modi Government

Imran Khurshid

143-162

HUVIṢKA'S GAMBIT: On the Ganesho-type Coin and Kuṣāṇa Cultural-Numismatic Complexities

Arindam Chaturvedi

163-186

The Centuries old Legacy of Kakaz Manufacturing in Srinagar, Kashmir

Sanah Khan

Dr. Mohammad Ajmal Shah

Dr. Mumtaz Yattoo

187-197

State-Building and Nation Formation in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan: Independence, Institutional Development, and Societal Transformation

*Inderjeet Inderjeet**

Abstract

This article examines the state-building and nation formation processes in Kazakhstan from its independence in 1991 to the present. It explores the key dimensions of Kazakhstan's societal evolution, including political, economic, and social changes, as well as the challenges and opportunities that have emerged in the post-independence era. The article provides an analysis of economic reforms, urbanization, demographic shifts, and changes in social structures, highlighting the country's transition from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented system. It also explores Kazakhstan's diverse ethnic landscape, the government's efforts to promote a multi-ethnic national identity, and the rise of civil society in response to evolving social and political dynamics. Kazakhstan's transition to a market economy has been driven by its vast natural resources, particularly in the oil and gas sectors, attracting significant foreign investment. This economic transformation has fostered growth and urbanization, particularly in major cities such as Almaty and Nur-Sultan, while also exacerbating regional disparities. Social welfare reforms, including improvements in healthcare, education, and the pension system, have sought to modernize the Soviet-era social safety net, yet challenges remain in achieving equitable service provision across the country. The article posits that Kazakhstan's post-Soviet experience offers valuable insights into the process of state-building and nation formation in a complex, diverse, and transitional context.

Keywords: *Urbanization, Demographic shifts, Ethnic diversity, Civil society.*

Introduction

Kazakhstan declared its independence from the Soviet Union on December 16, 1991, emerging as a sovereign state in a region marked by ethnic diversity and geopolitical complexities. The process of state-building and nation formation in Kazakhstan has been characterized by significant institutional development, societal transformation, and efforts to forge a cohesive national identity. This article investigates the key developments in Kazakhstan's state-building efforts, focusing on three main dimensions: the establishment of political institutions, the

*Research Scholar, Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

evolution of national identity, and the socio-economic transformations that have shaped the country's trajectory from 1991.

Kazakhstan, the world's largest landlocked country and the ninth-largest by land area, emerged from the shadows of the Soviet Union to declare its independence. This momentous occasion marked the beginning of a profound transformation for the nation, which had been significantly influenced by Soviet policies that emphasized centralized governance and ethnic homogenization. With over 130 ethnic groups cohabiting its vast territory (Sajjanhar, 2013), Kazakhstan faced the dual challenge of building a cohesive nation while managing a diverse demographic landscape. Kazakhstan's nomadic past, which includes elements from the historic Silk Road as well as a combination of Turkic, Persian, Mongol, and Russian customs, is fundamental to the country's cultural identity. The majority of Kazakhs were nomadic prior to the Soviet era. Traditional instruments like the dombra, oral poetry in Kazakh, and unusual customs like yurt dwelling continue to represent nomadic culture (Yelzhas & Aktorgyn, 2024). The legacy of the Soviet era, characterized by policies of industrialization and forced migration, created a unique context for the state-building and nation formation processes in the post-Soviet period.

From the outset, Kazakhstan's leaders recognized the importance of establishing a stable political framework that could facilitate economic development and social cohesion. It is the most rich country in Central Asia due to its enormous gas, oil, and mineral resources, as well as its expanding economic significance, future plan, development outlook, and stable politics and economy (YILMAZ, 2017). Nursultan Nazarbayev, the country's first president, played a crucial role in shaping the political landscape, adopting a pragmatic approach that balanced the need for strong centralized governance with efforts to foster democratic institutions. The Constitution adopted in 1995 laid the groundwork for these institutions, promoting principles such as democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights (Nakispekova). However, the realization of these principles has often been marred by accusations of authoritarianism and limited political pluralism, leading to ongoing debates about the nature of governance in Kazakhstan.

The process of nation formation in Kazakhstan has also been profoundly influenced by the interplay between ethnic identity and state policies. The government has sought to promote a singular Kazakh identity, emphasizing the Kazakh language, culture, and historical narratives, while also recognizing the rights of minority populations. This endeavor reflects the complexities of creating a unified national identity in a country characterized by its ethnic diversity

(Brown, 2024). The challenge lies in balancing the promotion of a dominant national identity with the need to integrate the various ethnic groups that contribute to the nation's cultural richness.

Economically, Kazakhstan has undergone a significant transformation since independence, shifting from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented model. The country's abundant natural resources, particularly in the oil and gas sectors, have played a pivotal role in driving economic growth and attracting foreign investment (Cornell, et al., 2021). However, this reliance on resource extraction has also raised concerns about economic diversification and sustainability. As the country navigates these economic challenges, social transformations have accompanied the shifts in political and economic spheres, impacting the lives of ordinary citizens and reshaping societal values.

Kazakhstan's geopolitical position further complicates its state-building efforts. Straddling the borders of both Europe and Asia, Kazakhstan has pursued a multi-vector foreign policy aimed at fostering relationships with major powers, including Russia, China, and Western nations (Gaur, 2024). This strategy has been instrumental in promoting national security and economic cooperation, but it also poses challenges as the country seeks to assert its independence and navigate regional dynamics.

In light of these factors, this article aims to provide or contribute to a deeper understanding of state-building and nation formation in Kazakhstan from 1991 to 2024. By exploring the historical context, institutional development, and societal transformations, this research seeks to illuminate the complexities and nuances of Kazakhstan's unique path toward nationhood. It will also examine the ongoing challenges and opportunities that lie ahead as the country strives to strengthen its state institutions, promote national unity, and ensure sustainable development in the years to come.

Historical Context: Foundations of State-Building and Nation Formation in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan's territory was significantly shaped during the Soviet era, where it was established as an autonomous republic and later as a union republic within the USSR. The borders that define Kazakhstan today were largely drawn during this period, with ethnic considerations influencing territorial demarcations. The legacy of Soviet governance created a unique backdrop for nation-building efforts post-independence, as Kazakhstan emerged as one of the fifteen republics following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Kadyrzhanov, 2023). Kazakhstan's historical context is deeply rooted in its experiences under Soviet

rule, which significantly shaped its national identity and institutional framework. The evolution of Kazakhstan from a Soviet republic to an independent nation is marked by key events and policies that influenced its demographic, political, and cultural landscape.

Soviet Legacy and the Path to Kazakhstan's Independence

Kazakhstan's incorporation into the Soviet Union began with the establishment of the Kirghiz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) in 1920, which was later renamed the Kazakh ASSR in 1925. It was elevated to the status of a union republic on December 5, 1936, becoming the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (Kazakh SSR). This period saw significant demographic changes due to policies of forced collectivization and settlement, which aimed to transform the largely nomadic Kazakh population into a settled agricultural society. These policies led to catastrophic consequences, including the Kazakh famine of 1930-1933, which resulted in the deaths of between one and two million people (Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, 2008).

It is difficult to determine the exact percentage of Kazakhstanis who have a nostalgic perspective of the Soviet era, considering it to be very different from Russian colonial authority. Although there are undoubtedly Kazakhs who share this opinion, it appears to be more prevalent among non-Kazakhs (and not only ethnic Russians) than among ethnic Kazakhs. These Kazakhs are typically those who grew up on state or collective farms that did not successfully transition to commercial agriculture, were close to or at pension age at the time of the Soviet Union's collapse, and struggled to adjust to the end of the social welfare state. This group also occasionally includes former military personnel, doctors, and teachers, who lament the loss of the respect and comparatively higher pay they once had as members of these professions, as well as the social mobility they perceived as a characteristic of Soviet authority. Former members and activists of the Communist Party are also frequently included in this group. They believe that Kazakhstan's political philosophy should incorporate more of the traditional socialist principles, and for non-Kazakhs, more of the traditional internationalist doctrine (Olcott, 2011).

The Kazakh ruling class was closely integrated into the top echelons of the Soviet hierarchy throughout the Soviet era. Dinmuhamed Kunayev, a long-time full member of the Politburo (the inner political circle of the Kremlin) and a close colleague of the former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, was actually the sole representative of the CARs. The 'Kazakhstan Affairs', Gorbachev's anti-corruption campaign, was the only time Almaty's relations with Moscow

deteriorated. However, during the second phase of Gorbachev's rule, Kazakhstan's leaders were heavily involved in Moscow politics and backed Gorbachev's efforts to maintain the USSR's integrity. When three Slavic republics—Russia, Belorussia, and Ukraine—excluded them from a discussion on the future of the Soviet Union and even failed to consult them on the decision to dissolve the USSR unconditionally, they were taken aback. Following independence, Kazakhstan's old Soviet name has been essential to overseeing a peaceful political and economic transition, where the president's character was paramount. President Nazarbaev, who served as Prime Minister from 1984 to 1989, was elected in 1989 on behalf of the pragmatic and somewhat patriotic Kazakh elite. His generation was raised under the unique conditions of Kazakhstan and was a direct result of Soviet social engineering (Abazov, 1998). The majority of the President's staff came from the Soviet nomenclatura's industrial managerial class. Even though it was the Soviet command economy, the President and his high-ranking appointees had the training and experience to manage the economy, unlike the professional Party officials. Nazarbaev's predecessor left him with a respectable rapport with President Yeltsin and the conservative elite in Russia. However, there has been a very bad relationship with the young reformers and the group of Russian nationalists.

The complex political climate in the republic has made Kazakhstan's political and socioeconomic circumstances especially challenging. The relations between the various ethnic groups were of special significance to the Kazakh government. In the northern oblasts of Kazakhstan, where ethnic Russians made up the majority, separatist sentiments were on the rise. A vigorous public dispute about the status of Russian and Kazakh languages further exacerbated the issue (BINICI, 2022). The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 presented Kazakhstan with a critical juncture. Amidst the political turmoil and economic decline of the late 1980s, the Kazakhstani leadership, spearheaded by Nazarbayev, moved swiftly to assert the nation's independence. On December 1, 1991, Kazakhstan held its first presidential elections, with Nazarbayev emerging as the clear winner (NOHLEN et al., 2004). The formal declaration of independence followed on December 16, marking a pivotal moment in Kazakhstan's history and the beginning of its journey as a sovereign nation.

Institutional Development in Independent Kazakhstan

In the aftermath of independence, Kazakhstan faced the urgent task of establishing a functioning political system and state institutions. The 1995 Constitution was a significant milestone in this endeavor, outlining the framework

for governance and asserting the principles of democracy and human rights (The Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana, «Akorda» Presidential Palace). However, the actual implementation of these principles has often been challenged by a prevailing authoritarian governance model. The initial years of independence were marked by economic turmoil, hyperinflation, and social unrest. The government recognized that effective state institutions were essential for maintaining stability and promoting economic growth. As a result, the Kazakhstani leadership focused on strengthening executive power, centralizing authority, and creating a coherent administrative structure (Abazov, 1998). This included the establishment of a bicameral parliament, the Senate and Mazhilis, which were designed to represent various interests within society.

The early years of independence were marked by the consolidation of power under President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who emphasized a strong presidential system to ensure stability in a nation characterized by ethnic diversity. The establishment of a new constitution and legislative framework aimed to unify various ethnic groups under a singular Kazakh identity while promoting civic nationalism. This approach laid the groundwork for institutional development that would evolve further under subsequent leadership, particularly during Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's presidency starting in 2019. Tokayev's administration has sought to address calls for reform and greater civic engagement, responding to societal demands for transparency and accountability (Aigul & Adibayeva, 2013; Narottum, 2006).

Constitutional Framework

Kazakhstan's first post-independence constitution was adopted in 1993, marking a significant departure from the Soviet-era legal framework. This constitution established the foundations of a unitary republic with a strong executive branch. However, it was the 1995 constitution that solidified the presidential system, granting extensive powers to the president while outlining the roles of the legislative and judicial branches (Nurakhmet, 2019). Over time, amendments have been introduced to mitigate executive dominance and enhance legislative authority. Notably, constitutional amendments in 2017 (Pistan, 2017) and 2022 aimed to reduce presidential powers and increase checks on executive authority, including the reestablishment of a constitutional court (Satubaldina, 2022), and greater autonomy for local leaders.

Legislative Structure

Kazakhstan operates under a bicameral legislature consisting of the Senate and the Mazhilis (Assembly). The Senate comprises members elected indirectly by regional assemblies and those appointed by the president, while the Mazhilis includes representatives elected through both proportional representation and single-seat constituencies. This structure allows for a degree of representation across various demographics, although concerns about the effectiveness and independence of these bodies persist (United Nations Development Programme). The legislative process is designed to facilitate checks and balances; however, historically, it has often aligned closely with presidential initiatives, limiting its role as an independent actor in governance (United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, 1994).

Local Governance

The local governance framework in Kazakhstan has undergone significant changes since independence. Initially, local governments retained some decision-making powers inherited from the Soviet system. However, subsequent reforms have aimed at centralizing authority within the executive branch. The akims (local governors) serve as representatives of the president at local levels, which has often resulted in diminished local autonomy (OECD, 2017). Recent efforts have focused on decentralization, aiming to enhance accountability and responsiveness of local governments to their constituents. These reforms are crucial for addressing regional disparities and fostering civic engagement.

Political Dynamics

The political landscape in Kazakhstan has been shaped by its leadership transitions and responses to public demands for reform. Under Nursultan Nazarbayev's presidency, political power was concentrated at the top, with limited space for opposition parties. However, following Tokayev's ascent to presidency in 2019, there has been a visible shift towards reforming political institutions. Tokayev's administration has initiated constitutional amendments aimed at reducing nepotism and enhancing legislative power, reflecting an acknowledgment of public discontent following protests in early 2022 (Chatham House report, 2023). This transition represents a critical juncture for Kazakhstan as it seeks to balance stability with democratic aspirations.

Nation Formation in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan

The process of nation formation in Kazakhstan since its independence in 1991 has been a multifaceted endeavor, shaped by historical legacies, ethnic diversity, and the aspirations of its leadership. This section examines the key

elements of Kazakhstan's nation-building efforts, focusing on the roles of territory, identity, and governance in shaping a cohesive national narrative. Nation formation in Kazakhstan has involved navigating the complexities of ethnic diversity while promoting a cohesive national identity. The concept of a "state-forming nation" has emerged to emphasize the role of Kazakhs as central to national identity while recognizing the contributions of other ethnic groups. This dual focus is critical for fostering social cohesion in a multi-ethnic society where historical grievances and economic disparities persist (Aitymbetov et al., 2015).

Kazakhstan's territorial identity was largely established during the Soviet era, when the borders of the Kazakh SSR were delineated based on ethnic considerations. Upon gaining independence, Kazakhstan inherited these borders, which became the foundation for its national identity. The geographical expanse of Kazakhstan is not only significant for its economic potential but also plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of belonging among its diverse population. The recognition of Kazakhstan as the homeland for ethnic Kazakhs is reflected in its official name and national symbols, emphasizing the core nation's historical connection to the land (Kadyrzhanov, 2023).

The quest for a national identity has been a central theme in Kazakhstan's post-Soviet state-building process. The diverse ethnic composition of the country presented both opportunities and challenges in forging a cohesive national identity. The government initiated several policies aimed at promoting a unified Kazakh identity while recognizing the rights of minority groups (Brown, 2024). These policies included the promotion of the Kazakh language in education and public life, the revival of traditional cultural practices, and the celebration of national holidays.

The concept of a "core nation" is pivotal in understanding Kazakhstan's nation formation. Ethnic Kazakhs are recognized as the titular nation, forming a demographic majority and holding a significant place in the political and cultural landscape. This status has been reinforced through various state policies aimed at promoting Kazakh language and culture while also acknowledging the contributions of other ethnic groups within the country. The government's emphasis on Kazakhization reflects an effort to solidify national identity while navigating the complexities of a multi-ethnic society (Melich & Adibayeva, 2013). Cultural policies, including the promotion of Kazakh history and the establishment of cultural institutions, played a vital role in shaping national consciousness. The government's focus on reviving Kazakh traditions and promoting national pride contributed to a growing sense of belonging among citizens.

The establishment of institutions such as the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan in 1995 was instrumental in addressing ethnic diversity and fostering interethnic dialogue. This body aimed to promote tolerance and understanding among the various ethnic groups residing in Kazakhstan. In addition to guaranteeing equal rights and freedoms for all of the nation's people, one of the body's objectives was to preserve social harmony and stability between different ethnic and religious groups. In addition to guaranteeing equal rights and freedoms for all of the nation's people, the organisation sought to preserve interethnic and interfaith harmony and stability in society (Shormanbayeva et al., 2024). However, the challenge of balancing a dominant Kazakh identity with the integration of other ethnic communities remained a contentious issue, particularly as some minority groups expressed concerns over potential marginalization.

In the immediate aftermath of independence, Kazakhstan undertook several initiatives to establish itself as a sovereign state. These included creating state symbols, establishing citizenship laws, and forming independent institutions. The relocation of the capital from Almaty to Nur-Sultan (formerly Akmolinsk) was a strategic decision aimed at fostering national unity and enhancing geopolitical stability. This move symbolized a new beginning for Kazakhstan, allowing it to position itself as a modern state capable of integrating its diverse regions (Vasiliev, 2021).

Kazakhstan's approach to governance has evolved from an elite-driven model towards a more inclusive civic identity. While initial nation-building efforts were largely top-down, recent administrations have increasingly recognized the importance of civic engagement in fostering national unity. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's vision for "New Kazakhstan" emphasizes democratic reforms and greater public participation in governance, reflecting an acknowledgment of societal demands for accountability and transparency (Narottum, 2006). This shift is crucial for building a progressive national identity that resonates with all citizens.

Societal Transformation in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan

Since gaining independence in 1991, Kazakhstan has undergone profound societal transformations that reflect its complex historical legacy, economic shifts, and evolving cultural dynamics. This section explores the key aspects of these transformations, including demographic changes, economic development, social welfare reforms, and the interplay of ethnic identities (Yelzhas et al., 2024). The societal transformation in post-Soviet Kazakhstan has been a complex and multifaceted process, shaped by rapid economic changes, demographic shifts,

evolving social values, and the quest for a cohesive national identity. This section explores the key dimensions of societal transformation, including economic reforms, urbanization, changes in social structures, and the emergence of civil society.

Urbanization and Demographic Shift

The post-independence period has witnessed significant demographic changes in Kazakhstan, particularly in urbanization patterns. The influx of rural populations into urban areas has transformed the social landscape, creating new challenges related to housing, infrastructure, and public services.

Kazakhstan, like the majority of the world's countries, is thought to be becoming more urbanised. In Kazakhstan as well as most other regions of the world, the migration of people from rural to urban areas has long been a significant global trend. Nearly fifty-eight percent of Kazakhstan's population presently resides in urban areas, according to UN projections. This is in line with the fifty-six percent global average rate of urbanisation. Nevertheless, rather than being a typical nation with moderate rates of urbanisation, Kazakhstan seems to be an anomaly when it comes to the dynamics of urbanisation. It is surprising to learn that, despite having a relatively average proportion of the population living in cities, Kazakhstan has become much more urbanised over the past few decades than other developing nations. However, because of its slower rate of urbanisation than most other nations, Kazakhstan has finally become an average nation (EURASIAN RESEARCH INSTITUTE). Cities like Almaty and Nur-Sultan (formerly Astana) have experienced rapid growth, becoming hubs of economic activity, cultural exchange, and political engagement. Kazakhstan welcomed a substantial influx of ethnic Kazakh immigrants (oralmans) from neighboring countries, which helped to reshape the demographic landscape and reinforce the Kazakh identity within the nation (Olcott, 2011). The urbanization process has also resulted in a shift in societal values and lifestyles. As urban centers become more cosmopolitan, the traditional norms and customs of rural communities are being challenged.

Economic Development

The country's rich natural resources, particularly in oil and gas, have been pivotal in driving economic development. Kazakhstan has become one of the leading oil producers in the region, with significant foreign investment in the energy sector (Asian Development Bank and the Islamic Development Bank, 2024). This influx of capital has facilitated infrastructural development,

technological advancements, and the expansion of various industries, contributing to overall economic growth. However, the over-reliance on natural resources has raised concerns about economic diversification and vulnerability to global market fluctuations.

Kazakhstan's transition from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented system has been one of its most significant societal transformations. The country initially faced severe economic challenges following independence, including hyperinflation and unemployment due to its integration with the collapsing Soviet economy. However, Kazakhstan quickly implemented economic reforms that attracted foreign investment, particularly in the oil and gas sectors (Olcott, 2011; Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2024). The discovery of major oil reserves, such as the Kashagan field in 2000, marked a turning point for the economy. By diversifying its economy and establishing a national oil fund to manage revenues effectively, Kazakhstan transitioned into a middle-income country with a growing GDP. The share of industry in value added increased significantly during this time, reflecting a shift away from agriculture towards extractive industries and services (Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2024).

Kazakhstan's economic transformation has been a crucial aspect of its state-building efforts. In the early years following independence, the government faced the daunting task of transitioning from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented system. The privatization of state-owned enterprises, coupled with the liberalization of trade, aimed to stimulate economic growth and attract foreign investment. The government strategically positioned the oil and gas sectors as key drivers of economic development, capitalizing on Kazakhstan's vast natural resources. The nation has seen substantial foreign investment and market-oriented reforms. However, political reform in Kazakhstan remains behind, despite the adage that many prosperous nations in Southeast Asia have adopted: "First the economy and then politics." (Wandel & Kozbagarova, 2009). Despite the initial challenges of economic instability, including inflation and unemployment, Kazakhstan emerged as one of the fastest-growing economies in the region by the late 1990s.

Changes in Social Structures

Inheriting a Soviet-era social welfare system on the brink of collapse posed significant challenges for Kazakhstan. In response, the government undertook extensive reforms to modernize its social safety nets. These included overhauling the pension system to offer citizens choices between private and public plans and

improving healthcare and education systems by allowing private sector participation alongside public services (Olcott, 2011; Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2024). Despite these efforts, disparities in service quality across different regions remain a concern. While access to social services has improved overall, there are still significant gaps that need addressing to ensure equitable access for all citizens (Olcott, 2011)

Kazakhstan's ethnic diversity is both a strength and a challenge in its nation-building efforts. The country is home to over 100 ethnic groups, with ethnic Kazakhs constituting the majority. The government has promoted a multi-ethnic identity while emphasizing Kazakh culture and language as central to national identity. This approach aims to foster social cohesion among various ethnic communities while acknowledging their contributions to the nation. (Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2024). The commitment to building a secular state that respects multiple confessions has also played a role in maintaining stability amid ethnic diversity. The government's policies have focused on creating an inclusive environment where all citizens can participate in national life regardless of their ethnic background (Chatham House report, 2023).

The Rise of Civil Society

The emergence of civil society has been a notable aspect of societal transformation in Kazakhstan. Following independence, there has been a gradual increase in civic engagement and activism, as citizens seek to participate in the political process and advocate for their rights. The establishment of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and grassroots movements has contributed to a more vibrant civil society, fostering discussions on issues such as human rights, environmental protection, and social justice. The customs of nomadic life are the foundation of Kazakhstan's civic society. In order to survive in the hostile Kazakh steppes, clan members needed to have strong familial ties and support one another. Tribal norms are still present today in the general preference for using family and community networks rather than institutional organisations to address issues and meet needs (Asian Development Bank). Nevertheless, civil society organizations continue to play a crucial role in raising awareness about social issues and mobilizing public support for various causes.

Conclusion

Kazakhstan's post-Soviet transformation illustrates a complex and dynamic process of state-building and nation formation. Since gaining independence in 1991, the country has made notable strides in economic

development, institutional evolution, and societal modernization. These achievements include the establishment of a stable political framework, economic reforms that have driven growth and urbanization, and the emergence of a new middle class alongside increased workforce participation by women. Yet, these developments exist alongside enduring challenges, highlighting the intricate balance between progress and obstacles in Kazakhstan's national journey.

The legacy of Soviet-era authoritarian governance and the diverse ethnic makeup of Kazakhstan have presented unique challenges in forging a cohesive national identity. While Kazakhstan has worked to develop democratic institutions, strengthen civil society, and uphold the rule of law, progress remains uneven. Centralized governance continues to dominate, and the need for political pluralism, accountability, and citizen participation is critical for genuine democratic advancement. Economic reforms have reshaped societal structures and relationships, fostering significant social change. Urbanization and modernization have brought about new opportunities, but they have also accentuated regional disparities and inequalities. The integration of diverse ethnic communities remains a sensitive and ongoing process, underscoring the importance of inclusive policies that promote cultural preservation and social cohesion.

Kazakhstan's geopolitical positioning, with its multi-vector foreign policy, has played a pivotal role in shaping its national identity and societal dynamics. By balancing relationships with major powers while asserting sovereignty and pursuing economic growth, Kazakhstan has carved out a strategic role in the region. This approach has been instrumental in maintaining stability and fostering development, but it also requires continued diplomatic agility and focus on national priorities. Looking ahead, Kazakhstan faces several critical priorities: addressing socio-economic inequalities, strengthening democratic governance, and fostering a shared sense of national unity amidst its diversity. These efforts will require sustained commitment from both the government and its citizens. Enhancing civic engagement, promoting inclusive development, and ensuring the representation of all societal groups will be essential to building a resilient and equitable nation.

Finally, Kazakhstan's post-Soviet experience offers a compelling case study of the challenges and achievements in state-building and nation formation. As the country moves forward, its ability to reconcile historical legacies with contemporary aspirations will define its trajectory. Through a focus on democratic governance, economic diversification, and social cohesion, Kazakhstan has the potential to emerge as a resilient and inclusive nation, poised to lead as a pivotal player in Central Asia's future.

References

- Abazov, R. (1998). Final report: Practice of foreign policy making: Formation of post-Soviet politics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. NATO. <https://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/96-98/abasov.pdf>
- Aitymbetov, N., Toktarov, Y., & Ormakhanova, Y. (2015). Nation-building in Kazakhstan: Kazakh and Kazakhstani identities controversy. *Bilig Journal of Social Sciences in Turkish World*, 74(74), 1–20. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292348237_Nation-Building_in_Kazakhstan_Kazakh_and_Kazakhstani_Identities_Controversy
- Asian Development Bank & Islamic Development Bank. (2024, October). Kazakhstan's resource economy diversification through global value chains (p. 2). Asian Development Bank. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/1000726/kazakhstan-resource-economy.pdf>
- Asian Development Bank. (n.d.). Civil society brief: Kazakhstan. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/932516/civil-society-brief-kazakhstan.pdf>
- Bertelsmann Stiftung. (2024). Kazakhstan country report 2024. Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index. <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/KAZ>
- Brown, M. T. (2024). 'Kazakh means freedom': Kazakh language policy and national identity before and during the Ukraine war. University of South Carolina. https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1689&context=senior_theses
- Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs. (2008, July). Background note: Kazakhstan. U.S. Department of State. <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5487.htm>
- Chatham House. (2023, July 20). Kazakhstan: Tested by transition. Chatham House. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2019/11/kazakhstan-tested-transition/about-authors>
- Cornell, S. E., Starr, S. F., & Barro, A. (2021). Political and economic reforms in Kazakhstan under President Tokayev (p. 19). *Silk Road Studies*. <https://silkroadstudies.org/resources/211201Kaz-Reforms.pdf>
- Gaur, P. (2024, July 9). Navigating Kazakhstan's 'multi-vector' foreign policy in an evolving geopolitical landscape. *Indian Council of World Affairs*. https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls_id=11092&lid=7037
- Kadyrzhanov, R. (2023). Territory as a factor of nation-building in New Kazakhstan. *Horizons*, 23(Spring), 52. <https://www.cirsd.org/files/000/000/010/52/7e8ad32fcfb752331ae553833eebc887582b28c8.pdf>
- Makhanov, K. (n.d.). Urbanization and spatial demographic trends in Kazakhstan. Eurasian Research Institute. <https://www.eurasian-research.org/publication/urbanization-and-spatial-demographic-trends-in-kazakhstan/>
- Melich, J., & Adibayeva, A. (2013). Nation-building and cultural policy in Kazakhstan. KIMEP University. <https://eujournal.org/index.php/esj/article/download/2360/2233>
- Nakispekova, A. (2023, August 30). Kazakhstan's Constitution Day: Upholding democracy, securing rights. *The Astana Times*. <https://astanatimes.com/2023/08/kazakhstans-constitution-day-upholding-democracy-securing-rights/>
- Narottum, S. K. (2006). Politics of nation-building and state-formation in Kazakhstan. *Pakistan Horizon*, 59(2), 49–71. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41394126>

- Nohlen, D., Grotz, F., & Hartmann, C. (Eds.). (2004). *Elections in Asia and the Pacific: A data handbook. Volume I: The Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia* (p. 408). Oxford University Press.
- Nurakhmet, A. A. (2019). *Laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan – Web-based resources*. GlobaLex, New York University School of Law. <https://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/kazakhstan1.html>
- OECD. (2017). *Decentralisation and multi-level governance in Kazakhstan [OECD Public Governance Reviews]*. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2017/12/decentralisation-and-multi-level-governance-in-kazakhstan_g1g80380/9789264280700-en.pdf
- Olcott, M. B. (2011, December 12). *Kazakhstan at 20*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2011/12/kazakhstan-at-20?lang=en>
- Olcott, M. B. (2011, November 30). *Kazakhstan's Soviet legacy*. Center of Asia. <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2011/11/kazakhstans-soviet-legacy?lang=en>
- Pistan, C. (2017, March 28). *2017 constitutional reform in Kazakhstan: Increasing democracy without political pluralism?*. ConstitutionNet. <https://constitutionnet.org/news/2017-constitutional-reform-kazakhstan-increasing-democracy-without-political-pluralism>
- Republic of Kazakhstan. (n.d.). *The Republic of Kazakhstan*. Akorda Presidential Palace. https://www.akorda.kz/en/republic_of_kazakhstan/kazakhstan
- Satubaldina, A. (2022, April 28). *In Kazakhstan, constitutional council to consider president's amendment proposals*. ConstitutionNet. <https://constitutionnet.org/news/kazakhstan-constitutional-council-consider-presidents-amendment-proposals>
- Shormanbayeva, D., Shebalina, O., Smirnova, G., Sharipova, R., & Gotting, V. (2024). *Formation of inter-ethnic solidarity of the Kazakhstani society based on the implementation of the multiculturalism concept in the student environment*. International Journal of Research. <https://ijor.co.uk/ijor/article/download/7605/4009/18813>
- The Department of Eurasian Studies. (2022). *The impact of rising Kazakh nationalism on minorities in the post-Soviet nation-building* (p. 59). <https://open.metu.edu.tr/bitstream/handle/11511/97837/Index.pdf>
- United Nations Development Programme. (n.d.). *Kazakhstan: Equal future*. <https://www.equalfuture-eurasia.org/womens-representation-in-politics-and-public-administration/kazakhstan>
- United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services. (1994, September 1). *Kazakhstan: Political conditions in the post-Soviet era*. Refworld. <https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/uscis/1994/en/94342>
- Vasiliev, O. (2021, December 13). *Kazakhstan's path to building a progressive nation*. The Astana Times. <https://astanatimes.com/2021/12/kazakhstans-path-to-building-a-progressive-nation/>
- Wandel, J., & Kozbagarova, B. (2009, July). *Kazakhstan: Economic transformation and autocratic power*. SSRN Electronic Journal. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228276925_Kazakhstan_Economic_Transformation_and_Autocratic_Power
- Yelzhas, T., Aktorgyn, T., & Alibek, D. (2024, October). *The cultural landscape of Kazakhstan in the context of globalization*. ResearchGate. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/384764317_The_Cultural_Landscape_of_Kazak

hstan_in_the_Context_of_Globalization_The_Cultural_Landscape_of_Kazakhstan_in_the_Context_of_Globalization

Yelzhas, T., Aktorgyn, T., & Alibek, D. (2024, October). The cultural landscape of Kazakhstan in the context of globalization. ResearchGate. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/384764317_The_Cultural_Landscape_of_Kazakhstan_in_the_Context_of_Globalization

Yilmaz, S. (2017). The role of the leadership of Nursultan Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan's stability. International Journal of Liberal Arts and Social Science. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316191541_The_Role_of_The_Leadership_of_Nursultan_Nazarbayev_in_Kazakhstan's_Stability

International Advisory Board

Prof. Nilofer Khan

Vice Chancellor
University of Kashmir
Srinagar, J&K, India

Prof. Shariefuddin Pirzada

Dean Academic Affairs
University of Kashmir
Srinagar, J&K, India

Prof. Gregory Gleason

Department of Political Science
University of New Mexico
USA

Prof. Valeria Piacentini

Universita Cattolica del Sacro Cuore /
Catholic University of the Sacred Heart
Milano, Italy

Prof. Valdimir Boyko

Centre for Regional Studies
Russia & Central Asia
Barnaul State Pedagogical University
Barnaul, Russia

Prof. Valeiry Khan

Institute of History
Academy of Sciences Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Prof. Bolat Tatibekov

Dept. of Employment & Labour Market
Institute of Economics
Ministry of Education and Science
Almaty, Kazakhstan

Prof. Sattar Mazhitov

Ch. Ch. Valikhanov Institute of
History and Ethnography
Almaty, Kazakhstan

Prof. Reuel Hanks

Department of Geography
Oklahoma University, USA

Prof. Ilhan Sahin

Institute of History & Turkic Civilization
Kyrgyzstan -Turkey Manas University
Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan