

TRANSFORMATION OF THE POLITICAL MENTALITY OF KAZAKHSTAN'S POPULATION: VECTORS AND PARADIGMS

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<https://doi.org/10.52536/2415-8216.2026.114.1.003>

Abstract. During the period of sovereign development, Kazakhstan has been undergoing an intensive process of transformation of political mentality, encompassing both consciousness and behavior. This process is driven by socio-economic and cultural factors, a targeted state policy aimed at the modernization of public consciousness, and broader global conditions. The article presents selected findings from a Kazakhstani study on value transformations in civic consciousness.

The research methodology, which combines a mass survey, expert assessments, and model-based reconstruction, was developed to evaluate the outcomes achieved through the implementation of state programs for modernization. A multi-dimensional analysis focuses on identifying changes in political mentality and on how these changes are perceived by Kazakhstani citizens. Particular attention

is paid to the formation of a matrix of civic values and to the perception of key state ideological concepts. The effectiveness of initiatives aimed at modernizing public consciousness, assessed in terms of the consolidation of value concepts in both mentality and social practice, correlates with the objectives of constitutional reform.

Keywords: *political mentality, civic culture, values, sovereignty, globalization, constitutional reform.*

ҚАЗАҚСТАНДЫҚТАРДЫҢ САЯСИ МЕНТАЛИТЕТІНІҢ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯСЫ: ВЕКТОРЛАР МЕН ПАРАДИГМАЛАР

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Аңдатпа. Егеменді даму кезеңінде қазақстандықтардың саяси ділі (санасы мен мінез-құлқы) қарқынды трансформация үдерісін бастан кешіруде. Бұл үдеріс әлеуметтік-экономикалық және мәдени факторлардың ықпалымен және қоғамдық сананы жаңғыртуға бағытталған мемлекеттік саясаттың және жаһандық үдерістердің әсерінен қалыптасуда. Мақалада азаматтық сананың құндылықтық трансформацияларына арналған қазақстандық зерттеудің бірқатар нәтижелері ұсынылады. Зерттеу әдіснамасы (жаппай сауалнама жүргізу, сараптамалық пікірлерді талдау және модельдік реконструкция) мемлекеттік сананы жаңғырту бағдарламаларын іске асыру барысында қол жеткізілген нәтижелерді бағалауға арналған. Көпқырлы талдау саяси ділдегі өзгерістерді және олардың қазақстандықтар тарапынан қабылдануы мен түсіндірілу ерекшеліктерін айқындауға мүмкіндік береді. Сонымен қатар, азаматтық құндылықтар матрицасының қалыптасу мәселелері мен мемлекеттік идеологиялар концептілерін қабылдау ерекшеліктері қарастырылады. Қоғамдық сананы жаңғырту міндеттерінің нәтижелілігі құндылықтық концептілердің қоғамдық ділі мен әлеуметтік практикада орнығуы тұрғысынан Конституциялық реформаның мақсат-міндеттерімен тығыз сабақтастықта талданады.

Түйін сөздер: *саяси діл, азаматтық мәдениет, құндылықтар, егемендік, жаһандану, конституциялық реформа.*

ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ МЕНТАЛЬНОСТИ КАЗАХСТАНЦЕВ: ВЕКТОРЫ И ПАРАДИГМЫ

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Аннотация. В период суверенного развития происходит интенсивный процесс трансформации политической ментальности (сознания и поведения) казахстанцев. Этому способствуют социально-экономические и культурные факторы, направленная государственная политика модернизации общественного сознания, глобальные условия. В статье представлены некоторые результаты казахстанского исследования ценностных трансформаций гражданского сознания. Методология изучения (массовый опрос и экспертные мнения, модельная реконструкция) разработана для оценивания достигнутых результатов реализации государственных программ модернизации. Многоаспектный анализ фокусируется на рассмотрении изменений в политической ментальности и их понимании казахстанцами. Рассматриваются вопросы формирования матрицы гражданских ценностей, восприятия концептов государственных идеологем. Результативность задач модернизации сознания с позиций утверждения ценностных концептов в менталитете и в практике коррелирует с задачами Конституционной реформы.

Ключевые слова: *политическая ментальность, гражданская культура, ценности, суверенитет, глобализация, конституционная реформа.*

Introduction

The sovereignization of Kazakhstan and other states has contributed to complex processes of re-evaluating values, transforming state and civic identity, and reconfiguring political culture. After a prolonged period under the influence of the former Soviet ideological system, newly sovereign states faced the necessity of constructing national narratives in connection with redefining value orientations and determining their place within the global development context.

A key factor in mental transformation was the emergence of a value and ideological vacuum, which necessitated the search for new paradigms and models [1].

The transformation of values in newly independent states has followed different trajectories. It depends on attitudes toward tradition, the culture of generational continuity, the objectives of state self-identification, and political development strategies. The issue of values in a transitional period is multidimensional. Political values function as markers indicating the vectors of transformation.

The transitional period of political value transformation unfolds unevenly across different states and reveals a significant influence of national contexts and historical traditions. Geopolitical factors have played a decisive role in the evolution of values, which are interpreted within the conceptual frameworks of the pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet historical periods [2].

The transition from a communist ideology that prioritized the collective good to a market economy oriented toward individual benefit significantly affected societal values and contributed to the spread of individualistic orientations. A major challenge has been the persistence of characteristics associated with “Homo Sovieticus” among older generations and their influence on contemporary values and development trajectories [3]. Neoliberal reforms further encouraged the prioritization of individual values over collective ones. One of the central themes of this transformation has been the erosion of collective values and the growth of individualism [4].

The influence of global norms and values, transmitted through mass media and migration processes, shapes and at times conflicts with existing value systems. Intergenerational gaps have become evident, with younger cohorts, including Generation Y, often adhering to value orientations that differ from those of their parents and grandparents [5]. In the Russian context, this specificity is manifested as an intergenerational divide in the understanding and acceptance of new worldviews, moral prescriptions, and ethical norms [6].

For many sovereign states, issues related to the observance of human rights and the rule of law have become particularly salient. Monitoring missions consistently emphasize that the specific features of post-Soviet political transitions have created obstacles to the full consolidation and protection of human rights.

Since the 1990s, a phase of competition has emerged between authoritarian-paternalistic orientations and newly introduced liberal values. Perceptions of democratic principles, civil liberties, and the roles of the state and the nation have evolved under the influence of both internal and external factors. A common characteristic of newly sovereign states has been the identification of key historical, economic, socio-cultural, and political factors that contributed to the dismantling of the normative frameworks of the former ideological system [7]. The impact of economic crises and social inequality on value systems should not be underestimated [8].

Political science offers its own analytical approaches to the study of value change. Research on the influence of political and economic transformations following the collapse of communism includes the examination of public perceptions and levels of satisfaction with these changes. Survey data reveal how citizens of post-Soviet countries assess these transformations and their consequences for various spheres of life [9].

Analyses of democratic transition and the development of political institutions in the post-Soviet space [10] demonstrate how political scientists investigate the uneven progress of democratization and the factors influencing it, including the role of value orientations. The significance of geopolitical orientation, framed as alignment with the West versus Russia, and the strength of civil society in shaping democratic development trajectories [11] is examined through the lens of interaction between external influences and internal social dynamics in political and value transformations.

The concept of “modern traditionalism” within the political institutions of post-Soviet states [12] illustrates how formal democratic institutions frequently intertwine with informal, traditional practices, reflecting a specific configuration of values.

The study tested the following hypothesis:

The period of sovereign development has exerted a significant influence on the transformation of value orientations within Kazakhstani society, contributing to the strengthening of identity and patriotism, as well as to the activation of civic consciousness. Global challenges and social upheavals have acted as mobilizing factors for political mentality and are shaping a new civic culture. A progressive model of civic culture is gaining increasing support among citizens of Kazakhstan.

Research Questions:

- Under the influence of which factors have political values among Kazakhstani citizens changed during the years of sovereign development?
- What is most significant in the formation of civic values among Kazakhstanis?
- Which state ideologemes are reflected and shared within the political mentality?
- Which civic values and qualities characterize the average Kazakhstani as a representative of an intellectual nation?
- What challenges does Kazakhstani society face at the stage of discussing constitutional reform?

Materials and Methods:

1) *A nationwide mass survey* covering 3,124 respondents aged 18 and older, based on a representative sample across 17 regions (Abai, Akmola, Aktobe, Almaty, Atyrau, East Kazakhstan, West Kazakhstan, Zhambyl, Zhetysu, Karaganda, Kostanay, Kyzylorda, Mangystau, Pavlodar, North Kazakhstan, Turkestan, Ulytau) and the cities of Astana, Almaty, and Shymkent.

2) *An expert survey conducted in the format of standardized semi-structured interviews* with 100 respondents, including school teachers and college instructors, university faculty, scholars and experts, research institute staff (philosophers, cultural scholars, psychologists, sociologists, political scientists), journalists, bloggers, and civil servants.

3) *In-depth interviews* with 20 experts representing analytical centers, bloggers, journalists, practicing sociologists (heads of research services), and members of the opposition.

4) *Theoretical reconstruction of a model* of political consciousness transformation.

Results

1. The assessment of value transformation was articulated by experts from multiple perspectives that take into account socio-economic, cultural, geopolitical, and technological conditions and factors.

In the in-depth interviews, respondents noted:

1) the staged nature of changes in mentality: “Kazakhstanis have gone through several stages of value transformation, ranging from a complete departure from Soviet ideological values to the acceptance of the norms of a market-capitalist society. In the 1990s, the core values were independence and, later, survival; in the 2000s, as prosperity increased, people gained greater opportunities to participate in market relations and engage in entrepreneurship, and the range of opportunities expanded” (political scientist);

2) the multifactorial character of these transformations: “Soviet ideology is being replaced; the search for identity is expanding through an appeal to history; social processes are being shaped by a new technological turn; and a shift from atheism to traditional Islam is noticeable” (Member of Parliament);

3) the expansion and consolidation of democratic norms: “There is more freedom in Kazakhstani society; the struggle for women’s rights is becoming more salient and feminism is expanding; youth and civil society are becoming more active. The growth of civic engagement is linked to opposition to state power structures and to digitalization, which enables rapid feedback from them” (blogger);

4) the formation of a shared identity grounded in civic unity: “Most of our population already recognizes a common value: that we are Kazakhstanis, that we are the people of Kazakhstan. I consider this very important and acceptable. Second, I think that today we have our own families, traditions, and customs—these remain and unite us. Shared respect for our culture, history, and language is what we have in common. Civic identity is what defines us and unequivocally unites us” (sociologist).

The hierarchy of factors and conditions that determined the need to modernize public consciousness was established on the basis of the standardized expert survey (Table 1).

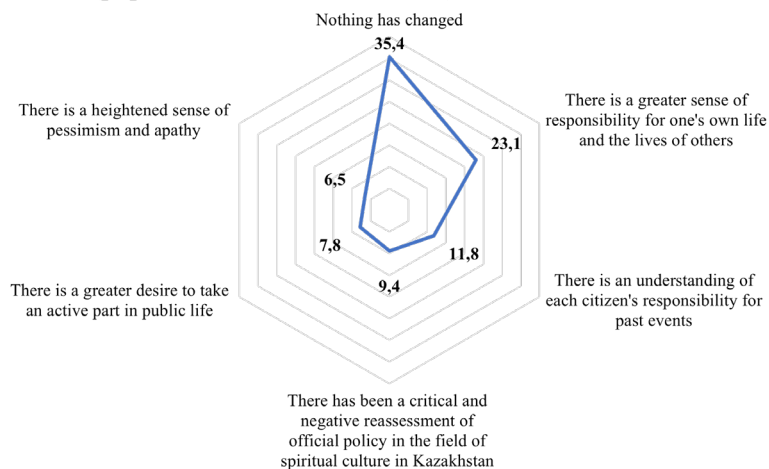
Table 1. Factors and conditions that determined the state policy of modernization of public consciousness (experts, N = 100, %, 2025)

<i>Internal factors and conditions</i>	<i>External factors and conditions</i>
Need to form a new worldview identity in accordance with economic, socio-cultural, and political realities (29%)	Spread of new information and communication technologies (Internet, social networks, messengers) with diverse value content (49%)
Need to consolidate state-national identity (27%)	Involvement of Kazakhstan in the globalization process with the dominance of specific values (24%)
Reform of the education system oriented toward Western standards (20%)	Need to integrate the state into the contemporary world order as a competitive political actor (23%)
Transition to sovereign development under market-based conditions (13%)	Implementation of foreign programs aimed at fostering a democratic mentality within education, science, the media, and through the activities of international and Kazakhstani non-governmental organizations (22%)
Importance of distancing from the previous historical stage within the USSR (10%)	Promotion of the values and identification frameworks of the Turkic world (20%)
Need for accelerated democratization and liberalization (10%)	Targeted efforts to promote the values of the so-called “Russian world” (3%)

2. The impact of globalization and the pressure of liberal values, including changes in interpersonal relations, gender identity, distancing from tradition, counter-normative behavior among youth, and the spread of youth subcultures, became the subject of assessment in the mass survey. The findings reveal the emergence of “fault lines” within public opinion: 35.1% of respondents perceive the outcomes of globalization and liberal values negatively, 33.1% maintain a neutral stance, and 27.9% evaluate them positively.

The January events of 2022 became a trigger for the reconsideration of the value context of life in Kazakhstan. In sociological and political science perspectives, these events exposed demarcations within civic mentality, revealed the subjectivity of protest movements, and manifested markers of civic activism. The most significant marker was respondents' acknowledgment of a reassessment of life itself. For nearly one quarter of the population, the events resulted in an existential catharsis, while approximately one fifth reported a reassessment of their civic position (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Distribution of responses to the question: “What has changed in Kazakhstani citizens’ perceptions of themselves and their values after the January 2022 events?” (population, N = 3124, %, 2025)



3. The discourse surrounding the evaluation of the positive and negative consequences of mental modernization reveals an ambivalence in expert assessments. A discernible line of division emerges with regard to the aspiration of youth toward Western standards of living in consumption patterns, fashion, and behavioral norms. From the standpoint of sovereign subjectivity, the following indicators are perceived as particularly alarming:

- the involvement of Kazakhstan in a globalist modernization project associated with the rejection of traditional values;
- the transfer or weakening of the role of state educational institutions and mass media in shaping mentality and values;
- the growth of social apathy as a precondition for political absenteeism;
- the increase in youth religiosity (Table 2).

Table 2. Assessment of the positive and negative consequences of mental modernization during the years of Independence (experts, N = 100, %, 2025)

<i>Consequences of modernization of consciousness</i>	<i>positive</i>	<i>negative</i>
Social and civic engagement among the population has increased	92	8
Ideological diversity has been achieved	90	10

The moral well-being of society is improving	85	15
The level of civic responsibility is growing in Kazakh society and the role of civil society in social processes has increased	82	18
The separation between the desire to archaize life and innovation has become clear	74	26
New value preferences have become a marker of everyday culture	66	34
Young people strive for Western lifestyle patterns, consumption standards, fashion, and habits	50	50
Young people have become more religious, following austerity, restrictions, and religious precepts in their lifestyle	48	52
Government institutions (education, mass media) they are inferior to non-governmental organizations in the process of forming mentality and values	47	53
Kazakhstan is becoming a part of the globalist modernization project of abandoning traditional values	44	56
Ideological pluralism does not allow the formation of Kazakh-wide values and increases conflict in society	44	56
The level of social apathy is increasing in Kazakh society	36	64
The conflict situation in society is increasing due to the rejection of certain values	34	66

4. The matrix of qualitative characteristics of a representative of the “intellectual nation,” as identified by experts, reflects an orientation toward the formation of a democratic-type citizen: educated, pragmatic, critically thinking, aware of his or her rights and responsibilities, oriented toward life in a competitive environment, adaptive, and socially active (Diagram 1).

Diagram 1. Matrix of social and political characteristics of a Kazakhstani citizen as a representative of the “intellectual nation” (experts, N = 100, %, 2025)



The profile of Kazakhstani mentality, based on the results of a mass survey of the population (N = 3123, 2025), is multidimensional and represents a constellation of values of different orders, ranging from philosophical and existential to moral values that regulate behavior in specific social situations. The following elements occupy a fundamental and highly significant place in the value matrix of Kazakhstani mentality (identified by respondents as “very important”):

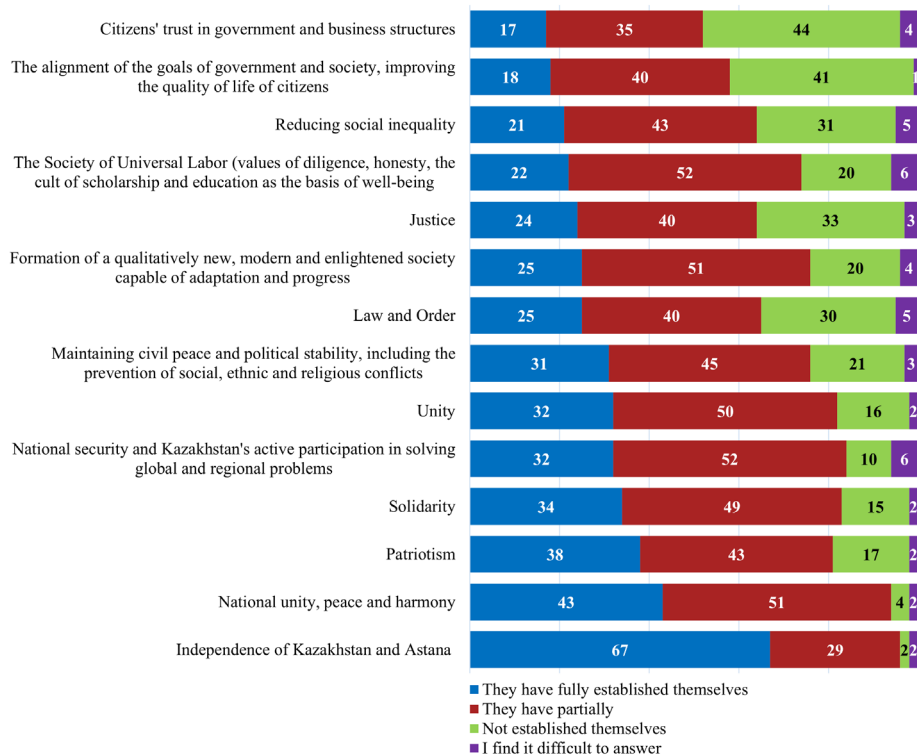
- perceptions of the infrastructure of the political landscape: state independence (87.1%) and the absence of ideological restrictions (60.8%);
- critically important civic qualities: patriotism (76.7%) and civic engagement (73.3%);
- individual freedoms of the person and the citizen: freedom of choice and self-development (87.3%), freedom of expression and democratic principles (74.5%);
- the overall atmosphere and conditions of development in Kazakhstani society: social justice (84.1%) and stability and a calm, orderly life (88%).

5. From the proclamation of Independence to the present, the following transformations have occurred in the mass consciousness of Kazakhstanis, according to expert assessments, listed in descending order of significance:

- the Kazakh language has been consolidated as the principal value attribute of sovereignty (59%);
- an understanding of the civic nation has been formed as the unity of ethnic groups committed to nationwide Kazakhstani values (47%);
- critical thinking has increased across different social groups (46%);
- value polarization has emerged among different generations, reflecting a confrontation between competing value paradigms (36%);
- ideological value orientations have weakened, accompanied by a marked shift toward material values (30%);
- new values and behavioral models have emerged (29%);
- worldview pluralism has become institutionalized, and fault lines have appeared within the mentality of various social groups, including divisions between the wealthy and the poor, and between generations (28%);
- renewed meanings of national unity have been formed, and societal consensus has expanded (25%).

6. According to experts, the concepts of societal modernization are incorporated into public consciousness to varying degrees. In assessing the outcomes of transformations in political mentality, experts emphasize the substantial scope of unresolved issues that, overall, contribute to alienation between citizens and authorities and foreground the issue of justice as a focal point for practical action. The most problematic areas include: public trust in state governance structures and business (44%); alignment between the goals of the authorities and those of society, and improvement in citizens' quality of life (41%); justice (33%); reduction of social inequality (31%); and law and order (30%) (Diagram 2).

Diagram 2. Assessment of the Population’s Acceptance and Entrenchment of the Concepts of Political Consciousness in Public Mentality (experts, N = 100, %, 2025)



7. The discussion of the text of the new Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan revealed several distinctive features in the transformation of the political mentality of Kazakhstani society, including:

- *an increased interest in the contemporary political process* not only within the expert community but also in mass public consciousness;
- *the discursive nature of the proposed changes* from the perspective of the legal content of the concepts under discussion;
- *the multidimensional interpretation of the proposed transformations*, including:

a) the justification of the logic of the current political stage of sovereign development;

b) the reconsideration of the existential challenges facing Kazakhstani society;

c) the moral evaluation and proportionality of the vectors of transformation under the influence of global trends, while maintaining the priority of national state development.

Engagement in the discussions involved various actors within the political process – pro-government, independent, and opposition groups – reflecting, on the one hand, the presence of ideological pluralism and, on the other, the search for consensus.

The openness of public debates became possible due to the genuinely achieved level of societal digitalization, access to information, the practical digital competencies of ordinary citizens, and their active expression of civic positions. The discussion of the constitutional reform confirmed the growth of civic engagement and the development of political culture.

Discussion of the Results

The hypothesis advanced in the study has been confirmed. Kazakhstan, like other sovereign states, demonstrates a process of value transformation: from a crisis of orientations in the 1990s to the formation of new hybrid systems of values that combine elements of the former collectivist-oriented legacy, national traditions, liberal aspirations, and global ideals.

Changes in the value orientations of Kazakhstani society correlate with key political and economic events in the country during the period from 1995 to 2025. The rethinking of values and the formation of a new mental culture among Kazakhstanis reveal the prolonged nature of this process, its connection with experiences of social upheavals and adaptation to them, as well as the necessity of self-identification within the space of the global world. External and internal triggers of change contribute to the dynamic transition from a traditional subject-oriented civic culture to a culture of civic participation and activism.

Sociological measurements reconstruct the general features of civic self-identification that serve as markers of political mentality. They reproduce generalized portraits of Kazakhstanis as representatives of an emerging democratic culture based on the synthesis of traditional national values and democratic standards.

The conducted research correlates with the conclusion regarding the need to establish a balance between a strong state and a strong society under conditions of increasing “internal challenges and global stresses” [13].

The study is commensurate with the conclusions of foreign researchers that the reassessment of the historical past and attitudes toward it shape contemporary political values and national identities [14].

The findings of the Kazakhstani study resonate with discussions regarding the extent to which personality traits formed during the Soviet era, such as conformism, obedience, and limited capacity for independent choice, persist in contemporary societies and influence socio-political development. Kazakhstan, like other sovereign and post-Soviet states, faces “cultural wars” between traditionalists and progressives, which frequently unfold around issues of religion, social norms, and political behavior [15].

The conclusions concerning the necessity of fostering a culture of civic engagement among the population for the dynamic development of civil society are consonant with the research conducted by colleagues from KISI [16].

The results of this study correlate with findings obtained in other research projects, confirming the growth of political and civic engagement among the population, as well as a growing aspiration to search for a renewed identity.

Within the civic mentality of different social groups, a complex choice is emerging between new democratic (neoliberal) ideological narratives and nationally oriented approaches to political modernization. The reactivation of cultural codes and identity transformations under conditions of global turbulence reveals the problem of diverging interests among the actors involved in political reform.

The intensive public discussion of the text and conceptual foundations of the new Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan has become evidence of increased political culture, public awareness, and civic engagement. Constitutional reform is aimed at establishing a clear policy framework that prioritizes national interests while ensuring political stability, predictability, and the evolutionary and sustainable development of society. These intentions can be realized under conditions of achieving broad social consensus and an appropriate level of civic culture.

Thus, the results of the study receive reliable verification and possess heuristic value for application in scholarly thematic discourses.

Conclusion

Kazakhstan's course toward democratic transformation, alongside the development of an effective system of state institutions and a functioning market economy, presupposes, as a necessary condition, the existence and dynamic advancement of a civic culture and a corresponding political mentality.

The discussions surrounding the new Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan have demonstrated the level of political culture achieved in society, the specific features of civic participation, the influence of information and communication technologies on the value-based perception of the political process, and a growing aspiration toward consensus regarding unity and stability.

The value orientations of various social groups in Kazakhstan are undergoing significant transformation under the influence of globalization processes and the national policy of modernization. Civic identity is developing dynamically, and a positive trend toward the consolidation of national values is becoming increasingly evident.

Efforts aimed at shaping and influencing value-based mental orientations in Kazakhstani society should be continued and intensified within state institutions of education, science, culture, and public enlightenment. There is a need to elaborate a comprehensive methodological framework for state social policy focused on the formation, promotion, and consolidation of a modernization-oriented system of values.

At the present stage of political reform, the tasks of civil society development are more relevant than ever. This process encompasses not only the institutional organization and formation of civic structures; it is impossible without the emergence of democratic citizenship, in which civic self-determination and civic behavior constitute normative forms of constructive personal activity. This, in turn, predetermines the prioritization of cultivating a political culture adequate to the new societal condition as a central objective of state ideology.

Source of Research Funding

This research has been/was/is funded by the Committee of Science of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Grant No. BR24993269 «Evolution and Transformation of Value Orientations in Kazakhstani Society During the Independence Period»)

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Материал поступил в редакцию 24.02.2026

Утвержден к публикации 19.03.2026