

## Explaining Kazakhstani identity: supraethnic identity, ethnicity, language, and citizenship

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The demographic composition of Kazakhstan after the fall of the Soviet Union presented a dilemma to the new Kazakhstani government: Should it advance a Kazakh identity as paramount, possibly alienating the large non-Kazakh population? Or should it advocate for a non-ethnicized national identity? How would those decisions be made in light of global norms of liberal multiculturalism? And, critically, would citizens respond to new frames of identity? This paper provides an empirical look at supraethnic identity-building in Kazakhstan – that is, at the development of a national identity that individuals place above or alongside their ethnic identification. We closely examine the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan to describe how Kazakhstani policies intersect with theories of nationalism and nation-building. We then use ordered probit models to analyze data from a 2014 survey to examine how citizens of Kazakhstan associate with a “Kazakhstani” supraethnic identity. Our findings suggest that despite the Assembly of People’s rhetoric, there are still significant barriers to citizen-level adoption of a supraethnic identity in Kazakhstan, particularly regarding language. However, many individuals do claim an association with Kazakhstani identity, especially those individuals who strongly value citizenship in the abstract.

**Keywords:** supraethnic identity; ethnicity; language; citizenship; Kazakhstan

A nation’s existence is, if you will pardon the metaphor, a daily plebiscite, just as an individual’s existence is a perpetual affirmation of life. [...] According to the ideas that I am outlining to you, a nation has no more right than a king does to say to a province: “You belong to me, I am seizing you.” A province, as far as I am concerned, is its inhabitants; if anyone has the right to be consulted in such an affair, it is the inhabitant. Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?” (1882, in Bhabha 1990, 19)

### Introduction

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the leadership of newly independent Kazakhstan faced the challenge of building a cohesive nation-state out of an inherited heterogeneous population. Unlike the populations of many of the other republics of the Soviet Union, at independence the population of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (KSSR) was not overwhelmingly composed of the titular ethnic group. The last Soviet census, from

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1989, found that ethnic Russians made up nearly the same proportion of the KSSR population as ethnic Kazakhs; each constituted about 40% of the republic's total population. The balance was made up of other ethnicities, including Ukrainians, Germans, Uzbeks, Tatars, and Uyghurs (cf. Bremmer 1994, 619; Smailov 2000). This demographic composition presented a challenge to the leaders of sovereign Kazakhstan. On the one hand, the concentration of ethnic Russians along Kazakhstan's lengthy border with Russia created an environment conducive to the formation of pro-Russian separatist movements. On the other hand, ethnic Kazakhs had an undeniable interest in seeing their own co-ethnics in power, as student protests in 1986 and *glasnost*-facilitated discussions in the later 1980s attest (Brown 1987; FBIS-SOV-89-064 1989).

Given the twin challenges of potential Russian separatism and rising Kazakh ethno-nationalism, Kazakhstan's political elite faced a dilemma: should the state promote an ethnically or ethnolinguistically determined Kazakh identity as paramount in the new state, possibly alienating the large non-Kazakh population? Or should it promote a more civic, citizenship-based nationalism, possibly alienating the large population of ethnic Kazakhs claiming Kazakhstan as their homeland? How should it respond to international norms of nationalism? Adding an additional layer to this dilemma was the question of language choice. What language or languages should define the Kazakhstani linguistic environment? Since 1991, the Kazakhstani state has pursued both policies of Kazakh ethnolinguistic centrism and accommodative policies of ethnolinguistic pluralism.<sup>1</sup> However, beginning in 2007, the efforts of the Kazakhstani state coalesced around the creation of a distinct, Kazakh-speaking, non-ethnically exclusive "Kazakhstani" nation. The Assembly of People of Kazakhstan<sup>2</sup> has simultaneously emerged as the primary instrument for conveying this state-framed nation-building message to the population of Kazakhstan.

Questions of Kazakhstani nation-building have been variously addressed from a top-down perspective by scholars including Laitin (1998), Bohr (1998), Kolstø (2000), Schatz (2000), Dave (2007), Kuscü Bonnenfant (2012), Ó Beacháin and Kevlihan (2013), and Laruelle (2015). These works, in general, focus on elaborating the nature and extent of group-differentiated rights extended to various ethno-national categories among the citizenry of Kazakhstan by the Kazakhstani state. Particularly salient divisions that have been examined in these prior works include those between ethnic Russians and ethnic Kazakhs, between Russian-speaking ethnic Kazakhs and Kazakh-speaking ethnic Kazakhs, and between indigenous ethnic Kazakhs and "repatriated" ethnic Kazakhs. However, until recently few scholars have explicitly examined how state-framed constructions of national identity affect how non-elite Kazakhstanis perceive themselves as members (or not) of a distinct political community.

This article follows this citizen-focused approach to understanding the attitude of Kazakhstan's citizens toward the official nation-building policies of the Kazakhstani state as examined by Smagulova (2008), Diener (2009), tangentially by Commercio (2010), and more explicitly by Isaacs and Polese (2015) and Isaacs (2015). We follow these authors in understanding nationalism from a constructivist perspective. In particular, we rely on the culturally grounded "nations maketh man" definition of the nation set forth by Gellner (1983) and the postmodern understanding of nationalism articulated by Benedict Anderson (1991), which rejects the assumption that some "memory" of a common past is essential to the development of a modern national consciousness. We also consider the instrumental value for an individual to claim a specific national identity, following Posner (2007) and Fearon and Laitin (2000), who note that national affinity can be a strategic choice, albeit one that is constrained by social structures. In this postmodern constructivist environment, where ethnicity is largely decoupled from nationality, and national

borders are relatively porous, citizens have some freedom to choose their degree of national affinity, and/or choose what aspects of their identity (such as ethnicity, nationality, language, etc.) have the greatest political salience. While we acknowledge that the concept of individuals choosing identities is fraught and theoretically unresolved (e.g. as eloquently outlined with reference to the Central Asian experience by Megoran 2007), we take from this line of literature the idea that material, social, and political interests matter in the individual adoption of a national moniker such as Kazakhstani.

The postmodern environment within which state and citizens operate and interact with one another presents challenges to state-centric, top-down definitions of nation-building. Rather than examine nation-building as solely grounded in policies as “imagined” by state leadership, we embrace the interactive and contingent twofold definition of nation-building as proposed by Isaacs and Polese (2015). We examine first “the efforts of the political elites to create, develop, and spread/popularize the idea of the nation and the national community,” as evidenced by political discourse, policy statements, etc. (Isaacs and Polese 2015, 372). We then examine “the agency of non-state actors such as *the people*, civil society, companies, and even civil servants when not acting on behalf of state institutions” (Isaacs and Polese 2015, 372, our emphasis).

This multidimensional, interactive approach is used to specifically examine the on-the-ground impact, and internalization, of the official policies of the state (which themselves have varied between ethnocentric and civic assertions of what it means to be Kazakh/Kazakhstani) by various non-elite population groups within Kazakhstan. In other words, we examine the familiar dilemmas of nation-building in the multinational and multi-ethnic Kazakhstani state. We have a particular interest in how the definition of “Kazakhstani,” and the production of “Kazakhstanness” by the state since 2007 have been embraced, appropriated, or otherwise internalized by the intended subjects of those policies: the citizens of Kazakhstan themselves.

We begin by reviewing treatments of these nation-building dilemmas by liberal theorists of multiculturalism to provide an analytical framework against which we can evaluate the efforts of the Kazakhstani state to create a civically defined Kazakhstani nation. We focus the bulk of our original research on investigating how the citizens of Kazakhstan have responded to the official policies of the state. The foundation of this empirical investigation is a discursive analysis of the Assembly of People. Over the last decade, the assembly has emerged as the institution central to presenting official formulations of Kazakhstani nationalities, language, and other identity-related policies.

We use original data from a multisite survey administered in March 2014 to support our analysis. This survey data specifically asked citizens of Kazakhstan to evaluate their familiarity with and attitude toward Kazakhstani nationality policies and include a number of indirect measures of the degree to which self-reported attitudes and behaviors align with policy expectations. These indirect measures, in particular, seek to identify which social groups within Kazakhstan leverage the terminology associated with the multicultural or supraethnic policies of “Kazakhstani nationhood.” For whom are supraethnic terms such as “Kazakhstani” salient, and for whom do ethno-national identities maintain primacy? Acknowledging that, as Nick Megoran aptly put it, “the way that we ask about ethnicity determines the results that we discover,” we nevertheless hope to identify patterns in how Kazakhstani citizens use non-ethnocentric categories of identification (2007, 260). With that goal in mind, we conclude with a discussion of the potential ramifications of the trends as revealed by the survey data. Our findings suggest that there are both state-framed and counter-state ways that the citizens of Kazakhstan relate to the Kazakhstani nation-building policies.

### *Literature review*

The nation-building dilemmas faced by Kazakhstan's leaders since independence reflect several theoretical concerns of political scientists beyond those interested in citizen–state relations in Kazakhstan, Central Asia, or the post-Soviet region more broadly. Chief among them is the question of how to balance the often competing claims to recognition, rights, and privileges of different ethno-national groups inhabiting a common state (in particular the cultural arguments in support of group-differentiated collective rights for minority groups outlined by Kymlicka 1995). It is also intriguing, from a philosophical perspective, to consider the utility of liberal-democratic theories as tools for examining and interpreting the policy decisions of decidedly non-liberal states. Even if the liberal-democratic institutional forms employed by the Kazakhstani state lack legitimate liberal-democratic content,<sup>3</sup> we argue that these forms provide the conceptual space for citizens to selectively embrace and interpret policies in ways that go beyond the role or roles envisioned by the state.

From a geopolitical perspective, the relationship of Kazakhstan to Russia, combined with the substantial (although declining) proportion of ethnic Russians claiming Kazakhstani citizenship and resident in Kazakhstan, presents the state with a unique set of policy challenges. Rogers Brubaker (1996) has written on the difficulty the state faces in managing ethnic and nationalist policies in an era when states must negotiate with both minority populations and external homelands. Brubaker articulates the tension in the nexus as between (1) “incipient national – and nationalizing – states; (2) the national minorities in the new states; and (3) the external ‘homeland states’ to which the minorities ‘belong’ by ethno-national affiliation but not legal citizenship” (Brubaker 1996, 44). In the Kazakhstani case, we suggest that as a nationalizing state that has specifically advanced a civic form of nationhood, it has created another important marker of a specific form of groupness differentiated from ethno-national groupings. By pursuing a Kazakhstani (as opposed to Kazakh) national identity, the Kazakhstani state has created a distinct category that either the state, or citizens, may choose to make politically salient: that of the “civic nation” in contrast to ethnically derived criteria for national belonging. In the Kazakhstani case, the ethnic Russian citizens of Kazakhstan are a minority population with a powerful and nearby homeland state. As such, consideration of this population is an important part of any set of identity policies formalized by the Kazakhstani state.

Brubaker, in a later work, recognizes the ambiguity of “civic nation” versus “ethnic nation” as analytical categories and proposes instead reframing the distinction as “state-framed” versus “counter-state” understandings of nationhood and nationalism (2004, 144). Thinking about nationalism from the perspective of these two analytical categories “enables us to talk about the way in which linguistic, cultural, and even (narrowly) ethnic aspects of nationhood and nationalism may be framed, mediated, and shaped by the state” (Brubaker 2004, 144–145). This idea of state-framed activity is central to understanding the identity-building process underway in Kazakhstan as an interactive process that manifests itself as the product of “state-framed” and “counter-state” interpretations of nationhood and belonging. In order to reduce conceptual complexity, we will use the terminology of “state-framed” and “counter-state” throughout our discussion.

The normative literature on multiculturalism and the approaches to acknowledging, accommodating, and legitimating cultural difference introduced in this literature provide an external yardstick that can be used to evaluate the Kazakhstani approach. Applying Western models of minority rights toward understanding citizen–state relations in non-Western, non-liberal-democratic countries<sup>4</sup> is not a new idea (e.g. Kymlicka and Opalski

2001). This article explores the question of whether “new Western models of liberal pluralism assist in the democratization and stabilization of post-Communist Europe” (Kymlicka and Opalski 2001, 1). Indeed, prior analyses of identity politics in Central Asia that apply a Western liberal-normative perspective toward understanding post-Soviet nation-building have offered insightful analyses of state-framed approaches to preserving political stability in multi-ethno-cultural societies and examined how state leadership in such societies can accommodate ethno-cultural pluralism (e.g. Djumaev 2001; Smith 2003; Sahadeo 2015).

The emphasis that multicultural approaches place on national difference, even in their assimilationist forms, renders multicultural policies, broadly speaking, insufficiently integrative and unifying for the post-Soviet context. In the Kazakhstani case, the demographic situation does not neatly conform to either of the two cases that Kymlicka presents. However, as discussed above, the Kazakhstani state uses concepts introduced by the multicultural approaches to lend its policy decisions an air of democratic accountability. Additionally, the introduction of citizenship as a viable container for political organization is important, since it becomes the de-ethnicized category around which a sense of Kazakhstani peoplehood can be built. Due to the nature of the asymmetrical interactions between the leaders of Kazakhstan and the Kazakhstani public, and the historical and demographic factors shaping those interactions, multiculturalism as such is not realistically achievable.

Following the quote from Ernest Renan that opens this article, we bring the normative-philosophical issues of nationalism into an empirical framework by highlighting the strategic decisions that political and everyday actors make in relation to their national identity. The choice of identity can be used to further individual goals. In other words, collective identity is a tool that the state and others can use to solve problems of social order, lower transaction costs of exchange, and advance political agendas (cf. Fearon and Laitin 1996, 2000; Laitin 1998; Posner 2004, 2007). We apply this perspective by examining how the assembly promoted policies to mitigate concerns about ethnic tensions; we also use this analytic angle to evaluate how individuals vary in their chosen degree of Kazakhstani affiliation.

While our understanding of “supraethnic” derives from discussions of integrative citizenship policies such as those seen in the EU, there are important distinctions that make the concept unsuitable for Kazakhstan. For example, while Marc Morje Howard situates the supranational concept as conceptually above or not attached to national identities associated with a sovereign state, we, following Soviet-era state-framed conceptualizations of national identity, situate the “supraethnic” concept as coterminous with the boundaries of a sovereign state (see Howard 2009 for further discussion). Nevertheless, we recognize that “whether in terms of politics and elections, welfare state benefits, public-sector employment, social integration, or demographics and pension systems, national citizenship remains an essential and enduring feature of modern life,” even in supranational and supraethnic contexts (Howard 2006, 446). By using the term supraethnic instead of supranational we avoid conceptual stretching, while acknowledging the influence of the supranational concept on framing our project.

### **Empirical framework**

Informed by the theoretical discussion above, the central goal of our analysis is to provide an empirical look at post-Soviet supraethnic identity-building in Kazakhstan – that is, at the development of a unifying national identity that individuals evaluate to be at least as politically salient as their ethnic identification. In this case, the state-framed supraethnic identity is termed “Kazakhstani” (*kazakhstanets/qazaqstandyq*). It implies a non-ethnically



determined civic pride in the state, as opposed to ethno-nationalism. A citizen of Kazakhstan might be Russian by ethnicity, for example, while identifying primarily as a Kazakhstani in order to de-emphasize their perceived connection to their “external homeland” of Russia. By the same token, ethnic Kazakh immigrants to Kazakhstan from the near abroad might find it of instrumental value to claim Kazakhstani identity, given the cultural and linguistic differences between indigenous and immigrant ethnic Kazakh communities. We begin by highlighting the role played by the assembly in articulating state nationality policy, and then turn to an individual-level analysis of survey data to see how average citizens have responded to the assembly’s framing of identity.

### *The assembly of the people: imagining the Kazakhstani nation*

As noted by Isaacs and Polese (2015), after independence from the Soviet Union, the political elite of Central Asia and Kazakhstan could hope to maintain their power and political stability only through forging a “common sense of belonging” and “groupness” (373), which is why the Assembly of People was created in 1995 in Kazakhstan. In 2007, the assembly took a central role as the formal institution through which the doctrinal statements presenting the state’s imagined version of a collective Kazakhstani identity deliberately and overtly decoupled from ethno-nationally derived identities. At the same time, the institution was renamed from the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan (*Assambleia narodov Kazakhstana/Qazaqstan halyktar Assambleiasy*) to the singular Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan (*Assambleia naroda Kazakhstana/Qazaqstan halyk Assambleiasy*). This renaming from the plural to the singular provides an indicator of the state’s commitment to advancing the idea of a single Kazakhstani people.

Referred to in the Western press as “little-known,” the assembly was formally established as an advisory body to the head of state, President Nursultan Nazarbayev (Pannier 2007). The assembly officially exists to achieve six goals:

- (1) promoting effective interaction between state structures and the institutions of civil society in the sphere of interethnic relations and creating favorable conditions for the further strengthening of interethnic consent and tolerance in society;
- (2) strengthening the unity of the people and the support and development of public consensus on basic values of Kazakhstani society;
- (3) rendering assistance to state structures that counteract extremism and radicalism in society and that counteract the infringement of the rights and freedom of persons and citizens;
- (4) forming a politico-legal culture of the citizens based on democratic standards;
- (5) developing and maintaining ethno-cultural and other public associations that further the goals of the assembly;
- (6) reviving, preserving, and developing the national cultures, languages, and traditions of the people of Kazakhstan (*Zakon Respubliki Kazakhstan ob Asamblee naroda Kazakhstana* 2008).<sup>5</sup>

In formal terms, these policy goals are, at a surface level, consistent with the accommodative and group-differentiated citizenship policies preferred by normative political theorists from the West (e.g. Kymlicka). They do not explicitly privilege ethnic Kazakhs, but by guaranteeing only some minority groups representation in the assembly, the organization itself is inevitably more preferential to some ethnicities than others. Moreover, while the assembly remains only a consultative body with no legislative power of its own, it is also the formal structure through which minority representation is guaranteed in the

Kazakhstani parliament (Pannier 2007). Thus, indirectly, the assembly has a minor legislative role.

According to official statistics, as of 2015, the assembly is comprised of 394 members who represent approximately 100 ethnic groups in Kazakhstan (assembly.kz 2015a). Representatives are appointed, not directly elected, from the ranks of members of the legally sanctioned ethno-cultural associations, other public associations, employees of government organizations, and other individuals based on their prestige or authority in society. All candidates for membership are confirmed by Kazakhstan's president in his role as chairman of the assembly.

In a 2007 interview with RFE/RL, then-Deputy Assembly Chairman Zhumatai Aliyev offered the following rationale for selecting parliamentary deputies from the Assembly of People:

Representatives of ethnic groups who are in the assembly will speak up for the interests of our government, of our people. They consider Kazakhstan their homeland, and this is their homeland. They will speak up for reforms; they and the chairman of the assembly, who is the president of our country. (Pannier 2007)

Underlining the state-framed nature of this quasi-representative body, his comments do not emphasize representation of minority interests, but rather the interests of the government. The extent to which the representative capacity of the assembly is consistent with earlier claims in policy documents is unclear, particularly with respect to the role of the assembly as a "constitutional method of presenting the interests of various ethnic groups to the state bodies" (Assembleiia Naroda Kazakhstana 2009).

At the time of writing, nine members from the assembly serve as deputies to Kazakhstan's parliament (Mazhilis) (assembly.kz 2015b). Based on the analysis of the available information,<sup>6</sup> representatives include two Slavs, two Uyghurs, one Korean, one Armenian, and one Chechen. Only one member is reported to be a Kazakh. Notably absent from the members of the assembly serving in the Mazhilis are any Uzbeks. According to official statistics, at the beginning of 2016, Uzbeks (the substantial majority of whom claim Uzbek as their mother tongue) constitute the third largest ethno-national group in the country after Kazakhs and Slavs. Uyghurs, on the other hand, are only the fourth largest ethno-national group, Koreans seventh, Chechens 14th, and Armenians so small as to be included in the "other nationalities" category (Kazakhstan Respublikasy Ul'tyik Ekonomika Ministrligi Statistika Komiteti 2016).

In other words, the parliamentary deputies drawn from the assembly are not proportionally representative of Kazakhstan's ethnolinguistic groups. This ethnic imbalance does not at first glance seem inappropriate given the aspirational claim by Gul'shara Abdykalikova, Kazakhstan's state secretary, that, in their roles as parliamentarians, the members of parliament drawn from the assembly "act not as representatives of their ethnic group, but rather as the voice of all of the people of Kazakhstan" (today.kz 2016). However, widely published photos of these deputies voting in the 2016 parliamentary elections shows them dressed in ethno-national costumes, suggesting that these parliamentarians do serve to descriptively represent their respective ethno-national groups (see, e.g. today.kz 2016; Zholdabayev 2016).

From a perspective external to Kazakhstan's domestic politics-in-practice, the institutional structure of the assembly can be interpreted as a way for the regime to superficially demonstrate alignment with internationally accepted normative ideals of multiculturalism and interethnic unity. In other words, the assembly is one of the soft-authoritarian institutions that is liberal-democratic in form. In support of this assertion, many of the

documents published addressing Kazakhstan's chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 2010 take care to specifically highlight the role of the assembly as a "unique" Kazakhstani approach to ensuring interethnic harmony.

A review of officially sanctioned documents and policy statements demonstrates the impact of Western theories on the formal articulation of Kazakhstani identity policies. The explicit linkages to Western normative theory supports our claim that the assembly, in part, serves to demonstrate (to an international audience) fulfillment of Nazarbayev's claim that "it is necessary that the principle of interethnic harmony be the fundamental theory of internal politics" (Nazarbayev 1992; in Tugzhanov 2010a, 8). Among the most prominent voices in the Kazakhstan-produced literature characterizing the assembly is that of Yerally Tugzhanov, deputy chairman of the assembly, who has published prolifically on the functions of the assembly and on Kazakhstani identity policy more generally.

For example, Tugzhanov authored the 2010 *Qazaqstan Khalkhy Assambleyası: Tarikhi ocherk*, which offers not only an overview of the history of the assembly, but also a theoretical-normative rationale for the institution. While the assembly is explained as a specifically "Kazakhstani model" for ensuring the equality of human rights among ethnicities, it is directly informed by Western theories of multiculturalism (Tugzhanov 2010a, 12). This is evident, for example, in the deployment of conceptual categories such as multiculturalism and in the civic forms of national identity expressed:

In the Republic of Kazakhstan, according to the direction of state construction and nationalities policy, Kazakhstani unity is not from an ethnic perspective, but rather formed on civic principles. Special attention is paid in Kazakhstan not to fragmented nationalities, but to the community of all people (*kulli halyk*). In a multinational society, national unity is based on historical fate, solidarity comes from: the regulation of social life from a state-political point of view, the organization of suitable work for the people, the formation of a culture of tolerance, and a restrained language policy" (*salikaly til sayasaty*). (Tugzhanov 2010a, 85)

The direct connection between Western normative theory and formal identity policy in Kazakhstan is made clear in an article published, also in 2010, by Tugzhanov, in his role as deputy chairman and head of the secretariat of the assembly. In this article, he explicitly describes the Kazakhstani model of nation-building as a "multicultural model," and compares it to the same Canadian experience that informs Kymlicka's writing (Tugzhanov 2010b). This article, like other contemporaneous discussions of Kazakhstani nation-building policy, explicitly uses the terminology of multiculturalism (*mul'tikul'turalizm*) to either characterize the normative-theoretical basis of official identity policy in Kazakhstan or provide a point of comparison to it (see also, e.g. Zhandagulova 2011; Nysanbaev 2012).

In addition to its role in projecting an international image of liberal norms, the Assembly of the People also serves an important policy role domestically. Since 2007, the assembly has been the official vehicle for the formulation and expression of policies related to citizenship, identity, and language in the republic. The Doctrine of National Unity (*yel birligi doktrinası* or *doktrina natsional'nogo edinstva*) which was announced by Nazarbayev at the 15th Congress of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan on 26 October 2009, exemplifies this through providing a framework of explicit nationalities policies. The doctrine proposed a reconceptualization of the various peoples of Kazakhstan into a single, non-ethnically defined nation – the Kazakhstani nation. The rationale for promulgating this sense of common Kazakhstani identity among the various ethnic groups that compose the citizens of Kazakhstan is couched in terms like economic growth, social progress, and democratic development, suggesting that the doctrine is designed to appeal (both internally and externally) to the sensibilities of "democracy" as the only broadly legitimate form of government today. Moreover, the concept of a state-created supraethnic community built out of



constituent ethnic groups has striking parallels to the Soviet claim in 1977 that “a new historical community of people has been formed – the Soviet people” (Konstitutsiia SSSR 1977, see also Heller, 1988). However, unlike in the Kazakhstani case, the collective Soviet identity, especially in its Brezhnev-era and later formations, did not seek exclusively to depoliticize ethnicity.

The state-framed ideal of a supraethnic, Kazakhstani identity that disregards (or at least minimizes) ethnic difference was clearly implied in earlier policy documents issued through the offices of the Assembly of the People. However, the Doctrine of National Unity was the first comprehensive articulation of the state vision for a supraethnic Kazakhstani collective identity and was intended to be “a blue-print for strengthening the interethnic harmony of Kazakhstan for years to come” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan 2011). The document also formally linked the Kazakh language to this supraethnic identity and explicitly privileges the status of Kazakh to be “developed” in the future, whereas the status of Russian will simply be “maintained” (Doktrina natsional’nogo edinstva Kazakhstana 2009, Article 4.2). Russian is also distinguished from the other non-Kazakh languages spoken in the republic, which are accorded no official status, but the study of which the government pledges to support (Doktrina natsional’nogo edinstva Kazakhstana 2009, Article 4.2).

As the institution through which state-framed nationalities policies are communicated to the Kazakhstani public, the assembly’s policy priorities provide important indicators of the intentions of the state. As described above, the explicit articulation of an intention to create a Kazakhstani people in the Doctrine of National Unity reveals the primary goal of the state’s identity policy. While ostensibly any citizen of Kazakhstan can claim membership in this supraethnic group, and in some ways the supranational category of “Kazakhstani,” the state has additionally identified several criteria that Kazakhstani citizens should strive for, in order to fully realize the integrative Kazakhstani ideal. Central among them is knowing the Kazakh language.

From an instrumentalist perspective, the goal of such a nation-building policy is, following Michael Hechter, to articulate and promote the culturally distinctive institutions that constitute the joint good that lies at the core of nation formation (2000, 23). However, reaching the goal requires that a state’s people understand and agree with it. With these assumptions in mind, we explore the relationship between the policy activity of the assembly and on-the-ground evidence of the development of either a state-framed Kazakhstani people or the emergence of a counter-state model of Kazakhstani identity.

### ***“Real” Kazakhstani nation-building: evidence from survey data***

While the preceding section characterized the state’s imagined Kazakhstani ideal, the following analysis evaluates the impact of the policies of the Kazakhstani state. In particular, it examines the success or failure of the collective identity policies and language policies symbolically articulated by the assembly. These policies, taken as a whole, promote Kazakhstani identity and devalue the political salience of ethno-national identities. Six years after the adoption of the Doctrine of National Unity, has a collective sense of Kazakhstani identity begun to emerge? If so, is it consistent with the state-framed model? In addition to addressing these questions, our data also suggest factors that continue to be barriers to widespread acceptance of Kazakhstani identity. What factors are associated with variation in affiliation with Kazakhstani identity? To address these questions, a quantitative analysis of survey data follows.

Several hypotheses motivated the analysis below. Informed by the theoretical arguments above and the policies themselves, we hypothesized that region, language,

ethnicity, and political awareness would influence Kazakhstani identity. In addition, we hypothesized that the importance of an individual's ethnic identity and the importance of an individual's citizenship would also strongly correlate with identifying as Kazakhstani instead of as a member of an ethno-nationally defined identity group. These hypotheses are presented below, with explanations for the theoretical direction of the hypotheses in brackets:

**H1:** *Non-Russian, Non-Kazakh* individuals are expected to have stronger Kazakhstani affiliation than ethnic Russians or ethnic Kazakhs.

[Per theories of Brubaker (1996) and Fearon and Laitin (2000), without influential homeland advocates, this is a safer political choice. For example, Kazakhstan's ethnic Uyghurs have no independent homeland of their own, and the sizable population of ethnic Koreans are linguistically and culturally distant from their "homeland." (see e.g. Kim 2011 for a discussion of Kazakhstan's ethnic Koreans.)]

**H2:** Individuals in *Almaty* are expected to have stronger Kazakhstani affiliation than individuals in other cities.

[This historically more cosmopolitan city is likely to have citizens already less committed or attached to their ethnic identity, especially since Almaty is a major center within the country for Kazakhstani culture. This hypothesis is further supported by qualitative interviews that took place in Almaty in 2014 (Rees 2015). Representative is the explanation of belonging offered by an ethnic Russian lifelong resident of Almaty: For her Kazakhstani citizenship tied her to Kazakhstan's territory, and she explained her attachment to Kazakhstani territory (and her particularly strong attachment to Almaty) by identifying it as her "homeland." This suggests that the Kazakhstani identity is salient as a *civic* identity, and thus decoupled from ethnic identity.]

**H3:** Individuals preferring the *Kazakh* language are expected to have stronger Kazakhstani affiliation than those preferring the Russian language.

[As policy statements from the assembly related to the state-framed Kazakhstani collective identity emphasize knowledge of Kazakh and multilingualism, already preferring the Kazakh language lowers the cost of being Kazakhstani. These individuals are also more likely to be Kazakh themselves. As discussed earlier, ethnic Kazakhs, since independence, have held a privileged position in most identity policy formulations]

**H4:** Individuals with *greater political engagement* are expected to have stronger Kazakhstani affiliation than those with lower political engagement.

[We expect that those individuals aware of the policies from the assembly are most likely to align themselves with Kazakhstaniness, as the assembly has worked to promote and frame the benefits of this collective identity.]

**H5:** Individuals who *rate their ethnic identity as important* will have weaker Kazakhstani affiliation than those who rate their ethnicity as important.

[This is due to potential tension between the supraethnic identity and a preference for ethnic identity; the continued preference for ethnic identity is explicitly a counter-state narrative.]

**H6:** Individuals who *rate their citizenship as important* will have stronger Kazakhstani affiliation than those who rate their citizenship as unimportant.

[These individuals will be more disposed toward valuing civic nationalism and may be more responsive to state supraethnic policy. The state-framed policies de-emphasize the importance of ethnic criteria for belonging and advance a more civic definition of Kazakhstani nationhood and national belonging.]

### Data

The above hypotheses were tested on survey data gathered in March 2014. We chose a survey format to maximize the number of respondents and the geographic distance covered in the study. See Figure 1<sup>7</sup> for a map of Kazakhstan with the three survey sites marked. The paper-based survey instrument consisted of closed-ended questions divided into four sections: demographic information, language use, identity, and attitudes toward language, and political engagement. The overall sample size was 460; all respondents were citizens of Kazakhstan. The survey was administered in three cities of Kazakhstan chosen as representative of the three principal ethnic population distributions regularly encountered in the context of urban Kazakhstan. These are majority Kazakh, majority Russian, and mixed ethnicity. Majority Kazakh is represented by Shymkent<sup>8</sup>; other demographically similar cities in Kazakhstan include Semey, Astana, and Kyzylorda. Majority Russian is represented by Oskemen; other demographically similar cities in terms of ethnic distribution include Petropavlovsk, Ridder, and Kostanai. Mixed cities are represented by Almaty; other demographically similar cities in terms of ethnic distribution include Pavlodar, Karaganda, and Oral. Thus, the survey should offer some degree of within-country applicability to demographically similar cities.

The survey was administered via face-to-face interviews with representatives from Public Opinion Research Institute, an established social science research consulting company based in Astana, Kazakhstan.<sup>9</sup> Using the Kish method to select one adult from



Figure 1. Map of Kazakhstan with survey sites marked. Map from Google Maps with author's annotations. Google Maps use permitted under guidelines available here: <https://www.google.com/permissions/geoguidelines.html>.

each household,<sup>10</sup> representatives from Public Opinion Research Institute performed door-to-door paper-based survey administration in each site.

### *Dependent variable*

The dependent variable is strength of Kazakhstani identity. The phrasing of the question on the survey was: "Tell me, please: to what degree do you consider yourself Kazakhstani?" Respondents could answer at one of the four levels: Very Strongly, Somewhat Strongly, Not Very Strongly, and Not at All. For this analysis, the last two response categories were grouped into one due to the low numbers of respondents in these two categories. Figure 2 below presents a histogram of this variable where 1 indicates the strongest Kazakhstani affiliation. As is obvious, the most common response was Very Strongly. Most individuals claimed the strongest level of Kazakhstani affiliation.

### *Independent variables*

Table 1 presents all the study variables with summary statistics. Independent variables used in the analysis are: Female, Almaty, Oskemen, Kazakh, Other, Education, Age, Income, Language Preference, Political Engagement,<sup>11</sup> Importance of Ethnicity, and Importance of Citizenship. Shymkent and Russian were left out of the models as reference categories but are included in Table 1. Female, the city, and the ethnicity variables are all dummies. Education, Age, and Income are each level variables. Language preference is an index constructed as the average of responses to questions regarding how much respondents preferred speaking, reading, listening, and otherwise interacting in Russian and Kazakh. We conceive of this variable as roughly continuous or ordinal. One might think of it as measuring strength of preference for Kazakh, where 3 indicates a full preference for Kazakh and 1 indicates a total lack of preference for Kazakh (or a full preference for Russian). A similarly constructed index is used for Political Engagement. The two

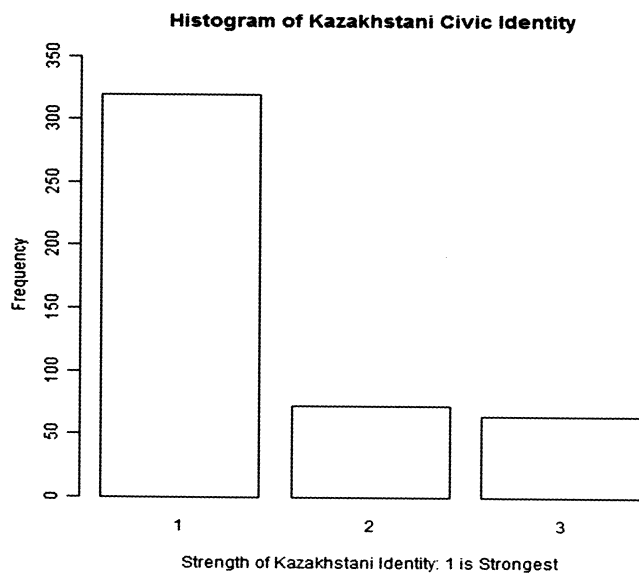


Figure 2. Frequency histogram of dependent variable, strength of Kazakhstani affiliation.

Table 1. Variable summary statistics.

Variable	Description	Mean	SD	Median	Min.	Max.	Missing
Kazakhstani identity	Dependent variable; strongest = 1	1.44	0.73	1	1	3	0
Female	Female = 1	0.51	0.50	1	0	1	0
Almaty	Almaty = 1	0.33	0.47	0	0	1	0
Shymkent	Shymkent = 1	0.33	0.47	0	0	1	0
Oskemen	Oskemen = 1	0.33	0.47	0	0	1	0
Kazakh	Kazakh = 1	0.44	0.50	0	0	1	0
Russian	Russian = 1	0.37	0.48	0	0	1	0
Other	Other = 1	0.18	0.39	0	0	1	0
Education	Highest level = 6	2.89	0.96	3	1	6	0
Age	Highest age bracket = 5	3.03	1.41	3	1	5	0
Income	Highest income level = 4	2.16	0.84	2	1	4	13
Language preference	Russian = 1, Kazakh = 3	1.58	0.77	1	1	3	12
Political engagement	Most engaged = 5	2.53	1.29	2	1	5	0
Importance of ethnicity	Most important = 1	1.62	0.64	2	1	3	5
Importance of citizenship	Most important = 1	1.65	0.70	2	1	3	10

importance variables have Likert scale responses with three levels: Agree, No Opinion, Disagree. These two questions were phrased as follows: “Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Citizenship in my country/Ethnic heritage is an important part of who I am.”

### *Crosstabs of dependent variable and key independent variables*

As a preliminary exploration of the data, we present a series of crosstabs between our dependent variable and select categorical independent variables of interest: respondent city (Table 2), degree of political engagement (Table 3), and importance of citizenship (Table 4). Additional crosstabs are available from the authors by request.

From these crosstabs, a few relationships (all statistically significant at the 0.001 level) become apparent. First, Shymkent reported a high degree of Kazakhstani affiliation (see Table 2), with 152 of 153 respondents placing themselves in the strongest category of affiliation. Oskemen and Almaty had more evenly distributed responses, though Almaty has a larger proportion of respondents in the highest category. Second, respondents tended toward the lower end of the political engagement scale. However, higher rates of engagement do appear to track with higher degree of Kazakhstani affiliation. Third, those who rate their citizenship as a very important part of their identity also reported higher degrees of Kazakhstani affiliation. In the following section, we confirm these relationships while controlling for possible confounding variables using regression analyses.

Table 2. Kazakhstani identity by city.

	Oskemen	Shymkent	Almaty	Total
Strongest Kazakhstani	61	152	106	319
Moderate Kazakhstani	42	1	30	73
Weakest Kazakhstani	48	0	17	65
Total	151	153	153	457

Note: Chi-squared test: chi-squared = 130.4, df = 4,  $p$ -value < .001.



Table 3. Kazakhstani identity by political engagement.

	1 is least politically engaged; 5 is most engaged					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongest Kazakhstani	82	69	81	51	36	319
Moderate Kazakhstani	15	21	23	8	6	73
Weakest Kazakhstani	35	11	14	4	1	65
Total	132	101	118	63	43	457

Note: Chi-squared test: chi-squared = 30.46, df = 8,  $p$ -value <.001.

### Regression analysis

We used an ordered probit model to further analyze the data. This is appropriate given the structure of the dependent variable, which has three ordered levels from feeling a strong affinity to Kazakhstani supraethnic identity to feeling a weak affinity. The latent variable of interest is strength of Kazakhstani affiliation – we impose cuts in the latent variable distribution into the three response categories.<sup>12</sup> The analysis allows us to control for confounding variables that might mitigate the relationships noted in the crosstabs above.

We tested three specifications of the model. The first included all of the independent variables as specified in Table 1. The second included two interaction terms: between Importance of Ethnicity and Ethnicity, and between Importance of Citizenship and Ethnicity. These interactions were highly insignificant in the model, so results from the specification without the interaction terms will be presented here. The first specification was robust to the inclusion of the interaction terms. The third specification, a robustness check, was simplified to only the variables of interest, excluding the controls, in deference to our relatively small sample size – we see similar signs, magnitudes, and significance of coefficients. Coefficients and goodness of fit measures for all specifications are included in Table 5. Results were generated using R software with additional packages *simcf* (Adolph 2013a), *tile* (Adolph 2013b), and *MASS* (Ripley et al. 2013).

### Results

In lieu of interpreting the ordered probit coefficients presented in Table 5, we present predicted probabilities from the model. This technique allows for a more intuitive analysis of the model results. Figure 3 provides an example. Here the results are presented as the predicted probability of a hypothetical individual being in each of the dependent variable categories. The first panel presents the predicted probability of a given individual feeling *strongly* that they are Kazakhstani. The second panel presents the predicted probability

Table 4. Kazakhstani identity by importance of citizenship.

	1 is most important; 3 is least important			Total
	1	2	3	
Strongest Kazakhstani	193	109	15	317
Moderate Kazakhstani	16	39	17	72
Weakest Kazakhstani	7	23	28	58
Total	216	171	60	447

Note: Chi-squared test: chi-squared = 118.21, df = 4,  $p$ -value <.001.

Table 5. Regression results.

Covariate	Model 1: Full		Model 2: With interactions		Model 3: Simplified		Model 4: Logit	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Female	-0.05	0.16	-0.04	0.16			0.07	0.30
Shymkent	-1.97	0.45	-1.92	0.46			-3.89	1.11
Oskemen	0.19	0.19	0.21	0.19			0.24	0.37
IsKazakh	-0.26	0.22	0.12	0.52	0.09	0.19	-0.54	0.41
IsOther	-0.09	0.31	-0.17	0.96			-0.56	0.62
Language preference	-0.56	0.19	-0.57	0.19	-0.82	0.16	-1.06	0.37
Political Engagement	-0.18	0.07	-0.18	0.07	-0.16	0.06	-0.23	0.13
Education	-0.07	0.09	-0.05	0.09			-0.31	0.18
Age	0.08	0.05	0.08	0.05			0.07	0.11
Income	-0.05	0.11	-0.06	0.11			-0.12	0.21
Ethnicity importance	-0.23	0.16	-0.17	0.19	-0.27	0.14	-0.27	0.31
Citizenship importance	0.70	0.15	0.70	0.15	0.97	0.13	1.17	0.30
Kazakh*			-0.22	0.27				
EthImport			0.03	0.44				
Other*								
EthImport								
Intercept	0.29	0.54	0.13	0.59	-0.26	0.32	1.09	1.02
Cutpoint	0.95	0.10	0.95	0.10	0.82	0.10		
N	420		420		433		420	
Log Likelihood	-220.2		-219.8		-263.8		-142.9	
BIC	524.9		536.3		570.0		364.2	
AIC	468.3		471.6		541.5		311.7	

\*Denotes interaction between the variables noted.

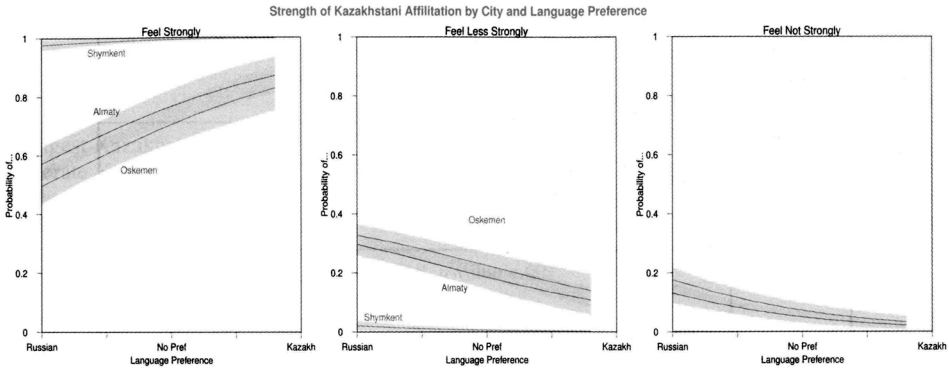


Figure 3. Predicted probabilities of strength of Kazakhstani affiliation by city and language preference.

of a given individual feeling *less strongly* that they are Kazakhstani, while the third panel depicts the feeling *not strongly* outcome. Each panel shows how the predicted probability of that outcome changes, given different hypothetical individuals. The shading indicates 95% confidence intervals. Thus, Figure 3 shows how predicted probabilities for each outcome change over a range of language preferences for the three cities in the sample, holding all other variables constant.

A clearer way to present the results in Figure 3 is to highlight the first panel, where we see the most substantial variation; the changes in predicted probabilities in the second and third panels can be intuited from the first. Figure 4 shows a rescaled first panel from Figure 3 – note the change in the y-axis range. Here we see that, regardless of city, preferring the Kazakh language has a slight positive effect on the probability of strongly feeling

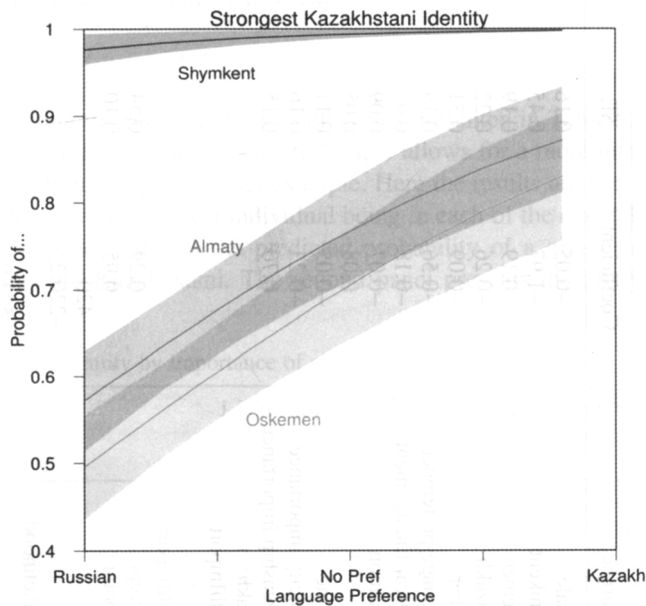


Figure 4. Predicted probability of strongest Kazakhstani identity by language preference and city.

oneself to be Kazakhstani, all else equal. This is in line with the tested hypothesis, but the relationship is not strong; the substantive effect is slight.

There appears to be no significant difference between predicted probabilities for Almaty and Oskemen – this is also demonstrated in Figure 5, a first difference plot, which shows no significant difference in Kazakhstani affiliation between Almaty and Oskemen across language preference, confirming the intuitive interpretation of Figure 4. According to Figure 4, the Shymkent probabilities do differ significantly, but this is likely an artifact of the data – in the sample, 144 of 145 respondents from Shymkent reported a very strong Kazakhstani affiliation.

Figure 6, similar to Figure 4, shows the predicted probability of the strongest Kazakhstani affiliation across changes in Political Engagement and Ethnicity, all else held equal. It demonstrates that there is no significant difference in the predicted probability across Russian, Kazakh, and other ethnicities. Changes in Political Engagement also appear to have no impact on the predicted probabilities. Neither of these findings allows for rejection of the null hypotheses implied by our project hypotheses above. We find no evidence of a relationship between ethnicity or political engagement and strength of support for the Kazakhstani identity.

While not presented graphically here, it is also worth noting that none of the control variables (Age, Income, or Education) was statistically or substantively significant in the model.

Figures 7 and 8 show changes in the predicted probability of the strongest Kazakhstani affiliation given changes in Importance of Ethnicity. Figure 7 compares ethnicities across Importance of Ethnicity, while Figure 8 collapses the ethnicities to show the overall change in predicted probability of strongest Kazakhstani affiliation solely over the Importance of Ethnicity, all else held equal. Neither figure indicates any significant relationship.

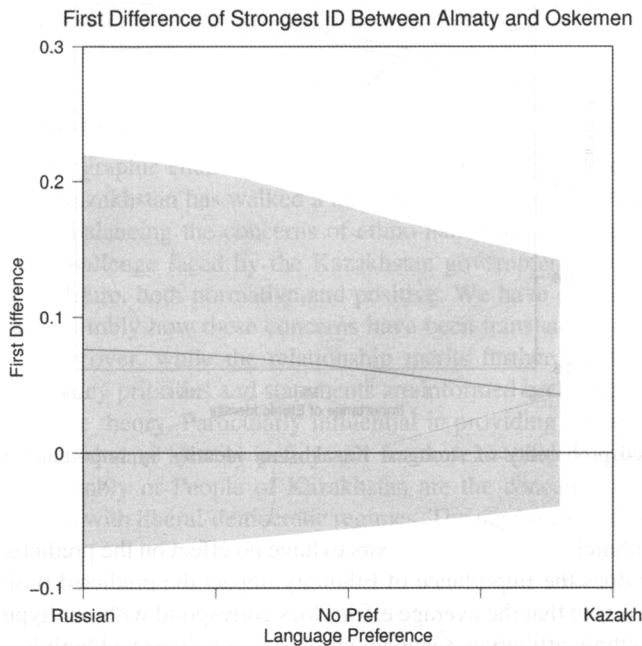


Figure 5. First difference in predicted strongest Kazakhstani identity between Almaty and Oskemen over language.

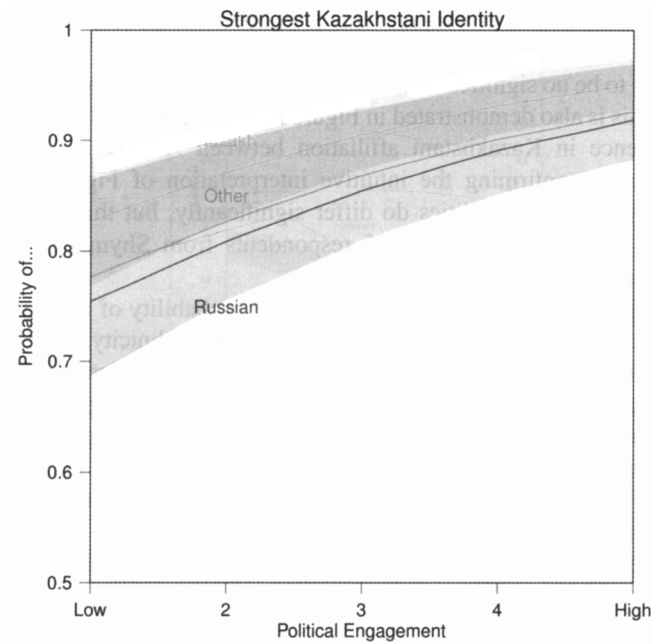


Figure 6. Predicted probability of strongest Kazakhstani identity by political engagement and ethnicity.

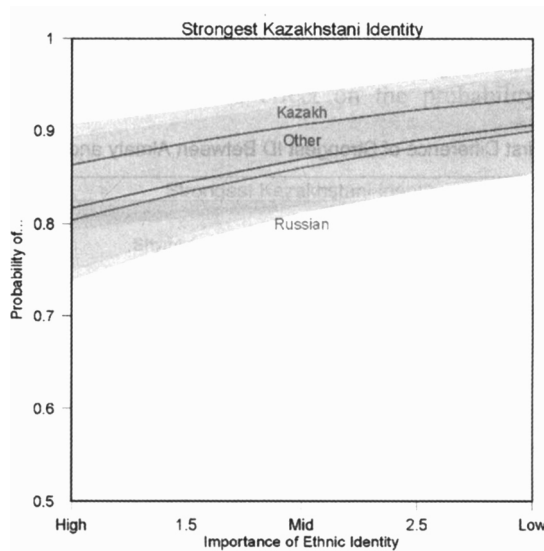


Figure 7. Predicted probability of strongest Kazakhstani identity by importance of ethnicity and ethnicity.

As in Figure 6, ethnicity in Figure 7 appears to have no effect on the predicted probabilities. In neither figure does the Importance of Ethnicity impact the predicted probability significantly, though we note that the average effect does correspond with our hypothesis (H5): at higher levels of ethnic affiliation, respondents are less likely to feel high levels of Kazakhstani affiliation.



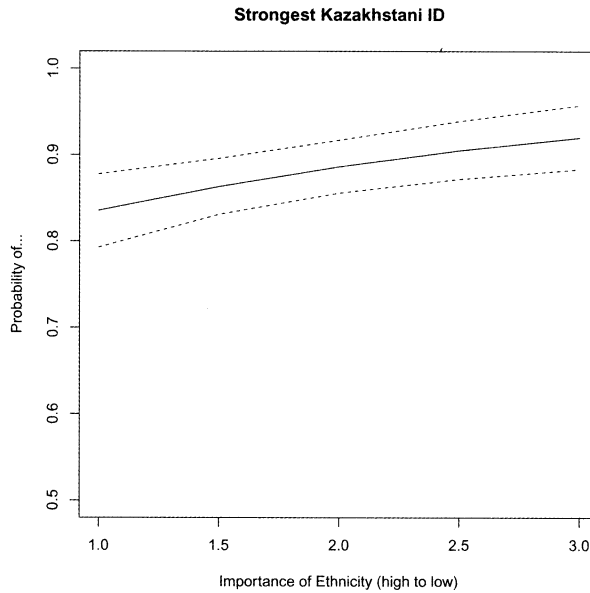


Figure 8. Predicted probability of strongest Kazakhstani identity by importance of ethnicity.

Finally, Figure 9 shows the changes in the predicted probability of strongest Kazakhstani affiliation across variation in Importance of Citizenship. Here there does appear to be a significant and substantive relationship. Those individuals who feel more strongly that their citizenship is important also are more likely to strongly affiliate themselves with the Kazakhstani identity. This is an entirely intuitive relationship – perhaps more surprising is that there is not a perfect relationship between these two variables. Not every respondent who thought that their citizenship was very important also indicated that they felt very strongly Kazakhstani.

### Discussion and conclusion

In the face of a demographic challenge to nation-building in the post-Soviet environment, the government of Kazakhstan has walked a fine line by promoting a supraethnic Kazakhstani identity while balancing the concerns of ethno-nationalist communities. This paper has connected the challenge faced by the Kazakhstan government to broader theoretical concerns in the literature, both normative and positive. We have demonstrated through a case study of the assembly how these concerns have been translated into policy priorities and statements. Moreover, while the relationship merits further investigation, we have shown how these policy priorities and statements are informed both directly and indirectly by Western normative theory. Particularly influential in providing a normative-theoretical justification for Kazakhstani identity policy and for the existence of quasi-representative bodies like the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan are the concepts of multiculturalism most often associated with liberal-democratic regimes. The mechanisms through which policies of multiculturalism are implemented in a state like Kazakhstan and the alignment of these policies with the liberal ideal warrant further investigation based on the preliminary linkages identified here. After tracing how these ideals are reflected in the policies promulgated by the Assembly of the People, we turn to a large-N survey to evaluate the empirical questions of how strongly citizens of Kazakhstan identify as Kazakhstani in the wake of

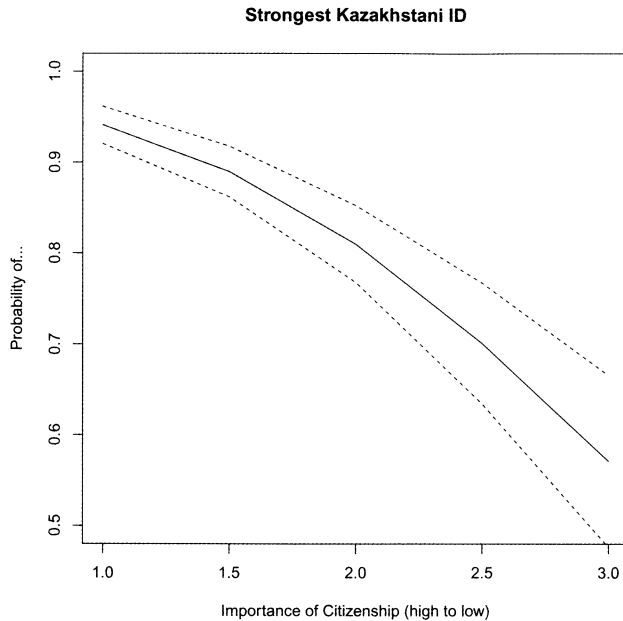


Figure 9. Predicted probability of strongest Kazakhstani identity by importance of citizenship.

these policy prescriptions and to what extent any identification as Kazakhstani is consistent with the state-framed model.

One very general finding from this study is that most individuals in Kazakhstan do identify as Kazakhstani to some degree. Relatively few survey respondents indicated that they did not identify as Kazakhstani at all. However, not every citizen of Kazakhstan embraced Kazakhstani identification, despite the policy efforts of the assembly. The quantitative elements of this study have thus attempted to illuminate the factors that contribute to the strength of Kazakhstani affiliation as a means of better understanding both theories of nation-building and the empirical challenges facing the Kazakhstani state as it attempts to build supraethnic unity.

Surprisingly, the ordered probit model of the survey data showed no significant difference in strength of Kazakhstani affiliation across political engagement or ethnicity (whether specific ethnicity or general affiliation with ethnic identity). Prior theories had suggested that these factors would influence Kazakhstani supraethnic identity. Which city the respondent was from also had a lower than expected impact on supraethnic affiliation. Residents of Shymkent were much more likely to have a strong Kazakhstani affiliation, but this is likely an artifact due to a lack of variation in survey responses. No differences were seen between Almaty and Oskemen.

As argued by Anderson (1991) and others, language is often seen as key to binding people into a common political-cultural unit through nationalizing that unit. The current research provides a foundation for further research into the impact of language, language choice, and language policy in shaping the supraethnic nation-building process. A slight positive relationship was indicated between a preference for the Kazakh language and strength of Kazakhstani supraethnic identity. This suggests that learning Kazakh may indeed be a barrier to building a supraethnic identity, as Kazakhstani supraethnic identity includes an expectation of some Kazakh fluency.

However, affiliation with the Kazakhstani identity was also observed in the non-Kazakh-speaking population. This suggests that for many, if not most, respondents, their identification as Kazakhstani is, from the perspective of language choice, a counter-state identification. In other words, citizens of Kazakhstan have adopted some, but not all, of the state-framed content and reframed it into a counter-state narrative of identity that refutes the necessity of Kazakh language knowledge for belonging in the Kazakhstani political community. This emphasizes the postmodern nature of Kazakhstani national identity and illustrates some of the limitations on the state's ability to control policy implementation.

These limitations, and Kazakhstani citizens' ability to affiliate with certain policy initiatives and ignore others, speak to a pattern that Henry Hale has identified in the context of regime change: that formal institutions matter, in that they alter patterns of informal politics, often in ways not envisioned or unintended by the state (2011, 582). In this case, a broadly shared Kazakhstani identity that does not necessarily include the Kazakh language may have created limits on the domestic utility of the demonym from a state-framed perspective. Rather, this hybrid Kazakhstani identity may be more likely to become salient in contexts where primary language does not matter, for example, when traveling abroad (see Rees 2015 for an extended discussion of the domains where Kazakhstani identity appears to be particularly salient).

The model also suggests a significant connection between how important individuals rate their citizenship and their degree of Kazakhstani affiliation. One implication is that if the Kazakhstani state wants to increase supraethnic affiliation, they should stress (through education, propaganda, etc.) the importance of citizenship. Specifically, they might increase public attention to the benefits of holding citizenship in Kazakhstan. If individuals perceive their citizenship to be important, they are more likely to strongly affiliate with the Kazakhstani identity.

The Kazakhstani state is perhaps cognizant of the disconnect between the policy goals of belonging to the Kazakhstani nation and the widespread endorsement of the Kazakhstani identity, particularly by non-Kazakh speakers. This is evident in the official "Kazakhstan-2050" strategy document, which replaces the "Kazakhstan-2030" strategy document. Rather than emphasize the concept of Kazakhstani and promoting Kazakhstaniness, Kazakhstan-2050 emphasizes the idea of the people of Kazakhstan as a "*mengilik yel*" (depending on translation, "eternal state" or "eternal country") rather than *ult* (nation), *halyq* (people), or something else. Continuing research will track the potential transformation of Kazakhstaniness into a new conceptualization of nationalism.

Overall, the contribution of this study is to further understand the supraethnic policy choices and challenges facing a multi-ethnic Kazakhstan through the lens of the Assembly of People. We emphasize that citizen responses to Kazakhstani identity-promoting policies have varied. We build on existing literature on nations and nationalism, showing the impact that the state can have in certain domains of the nation-building process, particularly in terms of de-emphasizing the salience of ethno-national identity in favor of a state-created supraethnic identity. As such, we build on the idea of "supranational" citizenship as introduced by Howard, but with attention to the post-Soviet context (2006, 2009). Additionally, we reframe and reinterpret the normative work on multiculturalism and multicultural identity policies appropriate for the contemporary liberal-democratic ideal in a way that makes the discussion relevant for top-down, state-framed policy promulgations in post-Soviet semi-authoritarian contexts. In other words, we break down the idea of the semi-authoritarian state as a monolithic anti-liberal actor, and instead examine the tools and institutions of facade democracy as observed in these states as potential sites of (small-scale, citizen-level, domain-specific) identity liberalization.

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## Notes

1. See Bremmer 1994; Fierman 2000, and Bohr 1998 (following Amrekulov and Masanov 1994) for extended discussion.
2. Mentions of “the assembly” or “the Assembly of the People” refers to the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan.
3. See Schatz 2009 for extended discussion.
4. Kazakhstan’s regime falls short of meeting most procedural requirements for democracy and is consistently evaluated by most outside measures as authoritarian and low in political freedom (Marshall, Gurr, and Jagers 2014; Freedom House 2015). Since democratic regimes are broadly recognized as the only legitimate regime at the international level, and because close ties with foreign partners is necessary to attract investment and sustain economic development, the Kazakhstani state has made symbolic efforts toward a façade of democratic accountability.
5. Authors’ translation from Russian.
6. Neither ethnicity nor nationality is consistently reported for the members of the assembly serving as members of the *Mazhilis*. Therefore, the characterizations of ethnic background and/or language knowledge were made for each member based on publicly available personal information available at *zakon.kz*. Criteria included language listed as primary, membership in ethno-national cultural organizations, etc.
7. Map from Google Maps (“Kazakhstan” 2015) with authors’ modifications.
8. Shymkent also has a sizeable Uzbek population.
9. See [www.opinions.kz](http://www.opinions.kz) for background information on the research institute.
10. Kish (1965) offers a method for selecting one individual from each household to be selected. Although there is a selection bias that can be corrected by weighting each response, the difference between weighted estimate and biased estimate in prior studies has been shown to be negligible (Kish, 400), so this study uses the unweighted estimates.
11. Due to data limitations, we were unable to directly assess respondents’ knowledge of or engagement with the assembly. Instead, we rely on the proxy of political engagement that measured respondents’ knowledge of and engagement with politics in general; we assume that this political engagement encompasses many Kazakhstani political organizations, including the assembly.
12. As the dependent variable is not evenly distributed across the response categories, we also ran a robustness check using a logit model. Under this specification, the dependent variable is whether or not the respondent felt strong Kazakhstani affiliation. These results are included in Table 5; we found that the regression coefficients had consistent signs across the two models.

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