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ATTITUDES TOWARD CIVIC EDUCATION PRACTICES AND CIVIC ORIENTATIONS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN KAZAKHSTAN

Abstract. This article examines university students' attitudes toward the practice of civic education in the Republic of Kazakhstan, as well as the extent to which their civic attitudes and patriotic self-awareness have formed. Based on a quantitative study encompassing a representative sample of students from various regions, it is shown that a majority of respondents demonstrate strong civic attitudes and identify with the concept of a civic nation. At the same time, significant differences were found in the perception of civic identity depending on the language of instruction and type of locality. The data obtained indicates an overall successful influence of state policy on the formation of civic values among university students. However, the results also point to the need for a more differentiated approach to civic education at universities, considering regional, linguistic, and sociocultural characteristics of the youth. The scientific novelty of the study is determined by the comprehensive analysis of the structure and factors of the formation of civic identity of Kazakhstan youth. The practical significance lies in the potential use of the results for developing educational programs and youth policy aimed at strengthening intercultural dialogue and national unity.

Keywords: civic identity; higher education; patriotism; civic education; multi-ethnic society; survey; contemporary history of Kazakhstan.

Introduction

The challenge of fostering a stable civic identity among youth comes to the forefront in the context of globalization and intensive sociocultural transformation of society. For multi-ethnic states such as Kazakhstan, strengthening the civic self-awareness of young people is seen as a key factor in ensuring interethnic concord and social cohesion. Contemporary realities in Kazakhstan are characterized by active and multidirectional modernization processes, against which the question of civic identity becomes particularly acute. It is crucial for the young generation to find an anchor in a system of values, avoiding the influence of destructive ideologies while maintaining commitment to national ideals. In these conditions, the higher education system bears a special responsibility for cultivating citizenship in students. Nevertheless, it is noted that amid ongoing reforms, Kazakhstan's higher education places greater emphasis on narrow professional specialization, whereas issues of social-humanitarian and ideological training remain peripheral in the curriculum (Asyltaeva et al., 2023). This imbalance in education can hinder the successful socialization of young people and the development of an integrated civic stance.

The aim of this study is to fill existing gaps in the research on civic identity of Kazakhstan university youth through a quantitative analysis of a broad sample of university students across the country. Despite the importance of this topic, scholarly literature lacks a unified opinion regarding the theoretical model and factors in the formation of youth civic identity. International studies offer a variety of approaches: from evaluating the influence of academic curricula and service-learning on students' civic competencies (Martini et al., 2023) to analyzing the role of history education in fostering citizenship (Kuş & Mert, 2023). This range

of emphasis reflects the culturally specific characteristics of different countries and educational systems. A universal model of civic identity has not yet been developed, leading to differences in how the concept is operationalized and research results interpreted. In Kazakhstan, the issue of youth civic identity has also been studied, but predominantly through qualitative methods and limited regional samples (Asyltaeva et al., 2023). This makes it difficult to generalize findings at the national level. The present study is designed to overcome these limitations through a representative quantitative approach, which will provide an objective picture of the civic attitudes of students across the country.

We proceed from the premise that the formation of civic identity is a complex, multi-layered process determined by both the influence of institutional environments (educational and governmental) and the interplay of individual and group identities formed during socialization. In modern conditions, young people's value orientations are shaped under the simultaneous influence of global trends and local cultural traditions (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2021). For example, in Kazakhstan's multi-ethnic society, youth assimilate the idea of a civic nation alongside ethnic values, while also absorbing elements of a global "cosmopolitan" identity. At the same time, strong intra-ethnic ties can reinforce ethnonational sentiments (Sharipova et al., 2017, p. 204). Thus, the hypothesis of our study is that students' views on civic values are influenced primarily by their language of instruction and sociocultural environment (urban or rural), whereas basic patriotic attitudes are broadly shared by most of the youth. This study is aimed at clarifying the structure of students' civic identity and identifying factors that facilitate or hinder its formation in the conditions of Kazakhstan's multi-ethnic society.

Research methodology

The research employs a comprehensive methodology combining historical and sociological approaches. Historical analysis was used to conceptualize the problem in dynamics: using the historical-genetic method, we traced the emergence and development of ideas of civic identity in Kazakhstan and identified historical conditions that influenced the current state of youth value orientations. The historical-comparative method allowed us to compare the formation of civic values across different generations and regions, helping to reveal persistent and changing features of Kazakhstan youth's civic identity. In addition, comparisons with data from studies in other countries (European Union, United States of America, Singapore, Turkey, CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States)) provided an opportunity to understand the specificity of Kazakhstan's experience in an international context. The use of historical typological analysis enabled the classification of the main civic identity models that took shape at different historical stages, highlighting typical features and factors in their formation. Periodization as a method provided a structured view of the development of youth civic values across key historical periods, each characterized by specific socialization conditions. Taken together, the historical methods laid the foundation for interpreting the empirical data, linking the past and present in questions of civic education.

The sociological component of the study was based on a quantitative survey of university students. Primary sociological data were collected via a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions. In the closed questions, respondents were offered options reflecting their position on various aspects of civic identity: notions of national affiliation (the "civic nation" concept vs. an ethnonational concept), attitudes toward patriotism and its expressions, knowledge of state symbols (text of the Constitution, National Anthem), assessment of the state's guarantee of civil rights, trust in political institutions, awareness of youth patriotic organizations, etc. The open-ended questions allowed respondents to define the concept of patriotism in their own words and to name any known youth organizations of a patriotic orientation. These qualitative responses were

subsequently subjected to thematic content analysis to identify key themes and ideas in the students' answers. The use of a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods corresponds to the mixed methods paradigm, enabling a deeper understanding of the problem. The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative results provided a richer interpretation: the quantitative data show the prevalence of particular attitudes, while the respondents' own words reveal the motivation and context behind these attitudes. Employing such a combined strategy aligns with advanced practices in sociological research (Babbie, 2015, p. 304; Creswell, 2014, p. 47) and enhances the reliability of conclusions by confirming results through multiple methods (methodological triangulation).

The primary sociological data were collected by surveying students of higher education institutions. The survey included 510 university students from five regions of the Republic of Kazakhstan in equal proportions. The sample was a simple random sample without replacement. The sample size was calculated using the formula:

$$n = \frac{z^2 s^2 N}{\Delta N + z^2 s^2},$$

Where n is the sample size, z is the confidence coefficient ($z = 1.96$ for 95% confidence, as chosen in this study), s^2 is the sample variance for a binomial distribution ($s^2 = p q$, where p is the proportion of the attribute and $q = (1 - p)$).

The product pq is maximal when $p = 0.5$, which is assumed in our case since the formula presupposes that a given question has two or more answer options from which only one is chosen. The more evenly the two options are chosen (i.e., the closer the proportion is to 50/50), the larger the required sample; therefore, if this proportion is not known in advance (as in our case), 50% is used, as we have done in this study.

N is the population size.

In our case, the total number of university students is 624,500 individuals (Zharkynbekova et al., 2025).

Δ is the margin of error (set at 0.05, i.e., 5%). Thus, the sample size was calculated as:

$$n = (1.96^2 * 0.25 * 624500) / (0.05^2 * 624500 + 1.96^2 * 0.25) \approx 384 \text{ people.}$$

Consequently, the representative sample size was 384 people. To achieve statistically significant representation of socio-geographical, sociodemographic, and ethnolinguistic characteristics, and to compensate for possible attrition (refusals to participate, invalid responses, etc.), as well as considering a combined use of quota sampling by respondent categories, the number of respondents was increased to 510. The distribution of the sample of 510 people, selected according to strict parameters, ensured statistically significant survey results.

Respondents from nearly all first-level administrative-territorial units were surveyed, providing statistically significant representation of all regions of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The sample was formed using a multistage selection scheme: at the first stage, from the total set of universities in each macro-region, several institutions were randomly selected; at the second stage, within each selected university, students were selected for the survey by simple random sampling without replacement. Additionally, quotas by gender and language of instruction were applied to guarantee representation of key groups. As a result, the survey covered 510 full-time students from 5 macro-regions of the Republic of Kazakhstan (North, South, West, East, Center) in approximately equal shares. Respondents spanned virtually all provinces (first-level administrative units) of the country, ensuring broad geographic coverage of the data. The gender composition of the sample was balanced: 59.4% were male and 40.6% female. By language of instruction, respondents split into two comparable groups: about half

are studying in Kazakh and half in Russian (a negligible fraction are in English-medium programs, whose responses were combined with the Russian-speaking group due to the similar sociocultural environment of instruction). The average age of respondents was 20.4 years; all respondents are citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The sample was approximately evenly divided between Kazakh-speaking and Russian-speaking students (including a small English-speaking subgroup merged with the Russian-speaking category). The gender composition was 59.4% male and 40.6% female, indicating a balanced representation of male and female students in the study.

The questionnaires were checked for completeness and consistency of responses, after which the data were processed with statistical methods using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. We computed frequency distributions of answers, percentage shares for each questionnaire item, as well as cross-tabulations (two-dimensional distributions) to identify relationships between variables.

Qualitative answers to the open-ended questions (definitions of patriotism, lists of organizations) were subjected to qualitative-quantitative analysis: responses were grouped by similar themes, and the most common formulations and ideas were identified. The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative results ensured a deeper interpretation: the quantitative data indicate the prevalence of certain attitudes, whereas the respondents' own words allow us to understand the motivation and context behind these attitudes. Adherence to such a combined strategy is in line with best practices in sociological research (Babbie, 2015, p. 304; Creswell, 2014, p. 47) and increases the reliability of conclusions by confirming results with different methods. Ethical aspects of the study were observed: student participation was voluntary, the survey was anonymous, and all data were processed and are presented in aggregate form.

Results and discussion

Perceptions of national identity.

The data show that among Kazakhstan students, a worldview based on the concept of a "civic nation" predominates. In response to the question about Kazakhstan's future, 71.8% of respondents answered that they envision it as a unified nation of citizens of all nationalities, while preserving each ethnic group's culture and language. This inclusive, supra-ethnic approach reflects the successful internalization by youth of the ideas of overall civic identity promoted by the state's ideology. At the same time, roughly one-third of respondents (about 28%) adhere to an ethnocentric vision, believing that in the long run all citizens of the country will form specifically a Kazakh (ethnically defined) nation based on the Kazakh language and culture. Another 7.5% found it difficult to give a definitive answer to this question. Thus, although most students espouse an integrative civic position, a significant portion of youth maintains an orientation toward an ethnonational model of the future (Figure 1).

Approximately 63,7% of surveyed students favor an inclusive civic vision of a unified Kazakhstan nation encompassing all ethnic groups, whereas about 28,8% favor an ethnocentric vision of a future Kazakh nation defined by the Kazakh language and culture. A small segment (around 7.5%) could not give a definitive answer regarding the nation's future direction.

Analysis revealed pronounced differences by language of instruction (Figure 2). Students studying in Kazakh are significantly more inclined towards an ethnonational worldview. In this group, the idea of an ethnically homogeneous nation was 6.3 times more popular compared to students in Russian- and English-medium programs (the share of adherents of the ethnocentric approach is 35.4% among Kazakh-speaking students versus only 5.6% among Russian-speaking students).

Figure 1

Students' answers on "How would you like to see the future of Kazakhstan?"

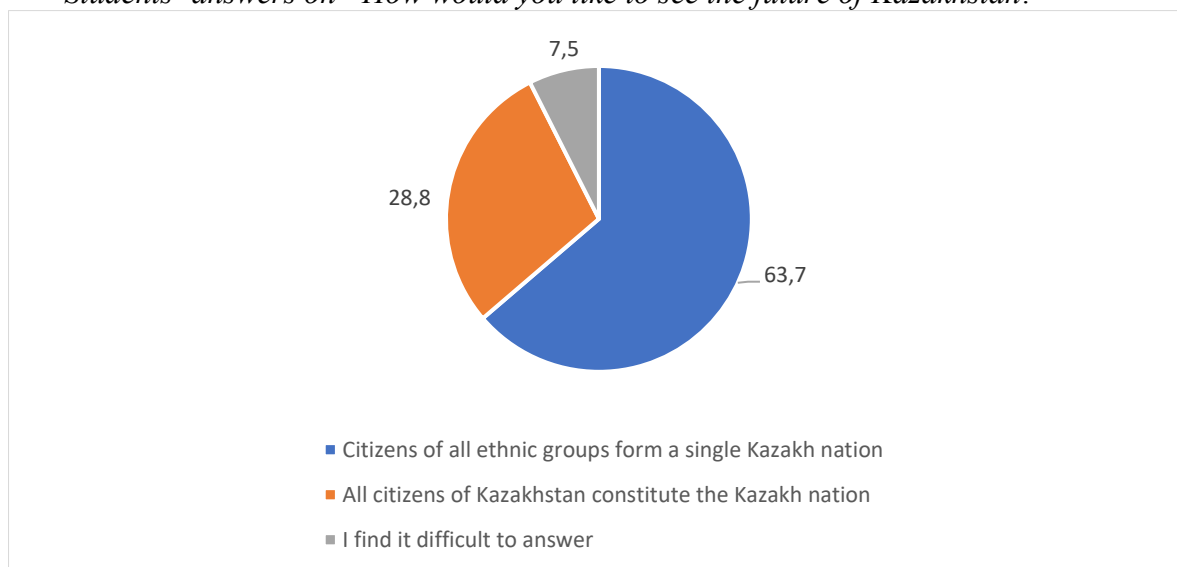
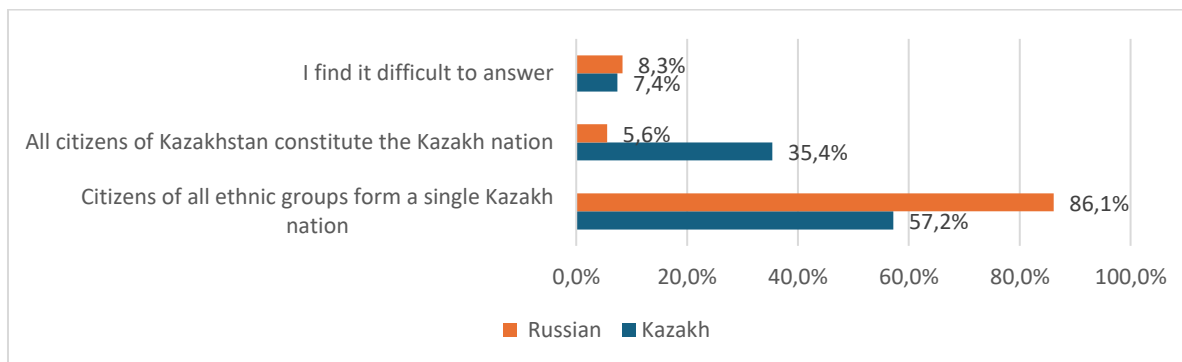


Figure 2

"How would you like to see the future of Kazakhstan?" (in terms of the language of instruction)

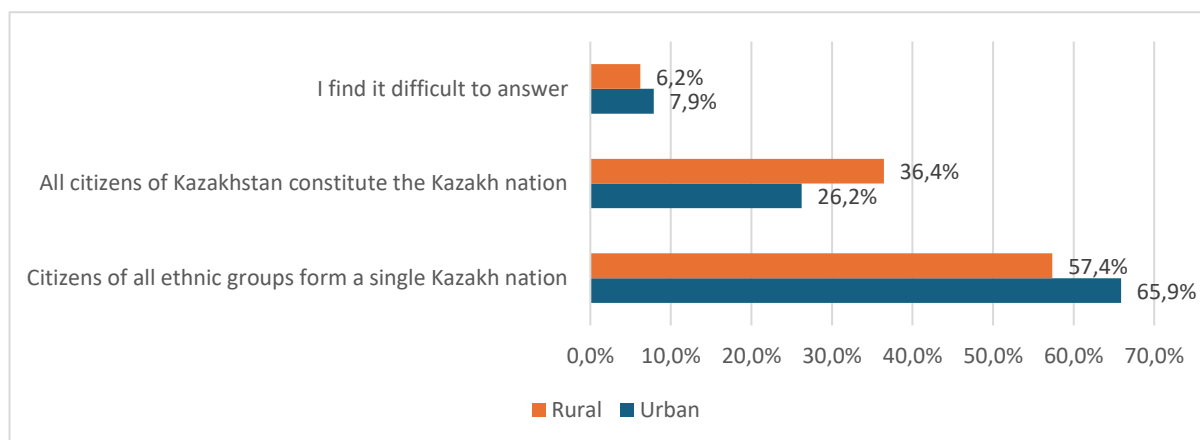


On the other hand, the vision of Kazakhstan's future as a civic nation is statistically more common among students instructed in Russian (embraced by 86.1% of that category), whereas among Kazakh-speaking students this figure was 57.2% - still a majority, but lower by about one-third. In other words, most of the Russian-speaking youth view the nation through the prism of civic identity, whereas among the Kazakh-speaking student audience, a substantial segment holds ethno-oriented views alongside the civic perspective. Regional differences also emerge: students who grew up and study in cities exhibit higher ethnocultural tolerance and support for the civic nation idea than youth from rural areas.

In rural districts, ethnocentric attitudes are somewhat more common (Figure 3). This urban-rural gap, typical for many countries, can be explained by the higher level of education and more multicultural environment in cities. Meanwhile, no significant gender differences were found in views of the nation's future: male and female students equally support the predominance of a civic identity. Nor is there a statistically significant difference in responses depending on the specific university (whether public or private, metropolitan or peripheral).

Figure 3

National identity preferences by students' place of upbringing (urban vs. rural). "How would you like to see the future of Kazakhstan?"



Kazakh-speaking students are considerably more likely to favor an ethnically defined concept of the nation (35.4%) compared to Russian-speaking students (5.6%). Conversely, an overwhelming majority of Russian-speaking students (86.1%) envision Kazakhstan's future as a civic nation of all its citizens, whereas among Kazakh-speaking students this share is 57.2%. The remainder in each group were unsure. These differences highlight the influence of the language-of-instruction environment on students' views of national identity. Students from cities show greater support for the inclusive civic nation concept (approximately 65.9% in urban youth vs. 57.3% in rural youth), while ethnocentric views are more prevalent among rural students (around 36.4%, compared to 26.3% among urban students). These urban–rural disparities likely reflect differences in multicultural exposure and education level between city and countryside environments.

Patriotic self-identification.

An overwhelming majority of students characterize themselves as patriots of their country. In a direct question, "Do you consider yourself a patriot of Kazakhstan?", 92.6% answered affirmatively. Another ~5% were unsure, and only a few respondents stated that they do not consider themselves patriots. This very high level of patriotic self-identification indicates that modern university youth largely possess a well-developed patriotic identity and attachment to their homeland. Interestingly, among students with Kazakh as the language of instruction, the proportion who call themselves patriots is slightly higher than among Russian-speaking students (though the difference is not fundamental on the order of 3–4% in absolute terms). This is corroborated by differences in explanations: some Kazakh-speaking respondents explicitly link their sense of patriotism with belonging to the Kazakh people. For example, some of them wrote in open-ended responses: "I was born Kazakh, so I am by default a patriot of my country", "I'm proud to be Kazakh, therefore I am a patriot", "A patriot is someone who was born Kazakh, who speaks the Kazakh language". In these statements, patriotism is equated with ethnic identity, which for a portion of youth reflects a merging of the concepts of nation and ethnicity.

Overall, however, considering all the data, a civic understanding of patriotism dominates among the youth. Most respondents, regardless of language of instruction, describe patriotism not in terms of ethnic exclusivity but through love for their country, pride in its achievements, and a willingness to serve society. For example, some answers define patriotism as "a feeling of deep love for the Motherland, a readiness to subordinate personal interests to the good of the country and to defend the Fatherland," or as "respect for the culture and history of one's

people, and responsibility for the development and future of the country.” Such formulations resonate with the modern understanding of citizenship and attest to the effectiveness of the state’s policy in the realm of civic education (Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On State Youth Policy”, 2015). Students are proud of Kazakhstan’s culture and values, strive to contribute to the country’s prosperity, and link their own future with the future of Kazakhstan. “I am a patriot because I am proud of the culture and achievements of my country and I want to contribute to its development,” this typical sentiment was expressed in many responses.

At the same time, the patriotic feelings of some of the youths are not unconditional, respondents critically assess certain social problems that diminish their trust in the state. In the open comments, many students mentioned factors negatively affecting their sense of belonging: corruption, social injustice, incidents of hazing in the army, limited opportunities for self-realization, and so on. For example, one respondent wrote: “Sometimes I’m ready to give my life for the Motherland, but other times, seeing news about soldiers dying from hazing, I start to doubt the value of such service.” Another noted, “I’m dissatisfied with the corruption; I’m still a patriot, but the government disappoints me.” Some stated that they respect the people of Kazakhstan, but “not the state at all.”

Such remarks show that a portion of youth adhere to critical patriotism: they love their country but feel discontent about specific problems or aspects of the social order. This stance was especially often expressed by students studying in Russian. For some of them, an ethnocentrist model of patriotism is unacceptable, yet even the implementation of a broader civic identity in practice is met with skepticism due to the mentioned problems. In their view, the existing model of civic upbringing is not sufficiently effective if it allows such negative phenomena that undermine young people’s faith in justice. This points to the need for further improvement of educational work, and young people’s patriotism must be reinforced by tangible positive changes in the social sphere.

To assess youth participation in civic education practice, respondents were asked an open-ended question: “Which Kazakhstan patriotic organizations or movements do you know of?” The responses showed a fairly moderate level of awareness. Most respondents managed to name 1-2 organizations, and most often they mentioned entities that are highly visible in the information space or education system. The most popular answer was the youth wing of the ruling Amanat party (many habitually referred to it by its old name Jas Otan, along with the former name of the party Nur Otan). In addition, respondents frequently named the republican movement Jas Sarbaz (a network of military-patriotic clubs for schoolchildren), the youth organization Jas Úlan, as well as simply the Armed Forces of the Republic of Kazakhstan as an institution of patriotic upbringing. Less frequently mentioned were youth associations such as Dala Qyrandary, the Jaña Adamdar (“New People”) movement, and veterans’ public organizations. On the other hand, a significant portion of respondents could not recall the name of any patriotic association, which indicates a weak involvement of these students in relevant types of public activity.

Notably, among the organizations mentioned were some whose activities are currently banned or discontinued in Kazakhstan. A few respondents listed radical movements of the past: for example, the youth movement Kahar, the youth league of the Alğa party, the Aibat movement, “Socialist Resistance of Kazakhstan,” the anarchist association ADA Section, Abyroi movement, etc. Although such answers were rare, the very fact of their appearance suggests that a small segment of youths have an interest in radical ideas or is at least familiar with their rhetoric. This confirms the presence, albeit not widespread, of elements of political radicalization in the youth milieu.

Another subset of respondents identified as “patriotic” some organizations that in fact have ceased activities. For example, the Patriots’ Party of Kazakhstan, the Azat party, and others were mentioned. Such answers can be explained either by a lack of awareness

(respondents named well-known names without knowing their current status) or by some students confusing patriotic organizations with any political parties from past years.

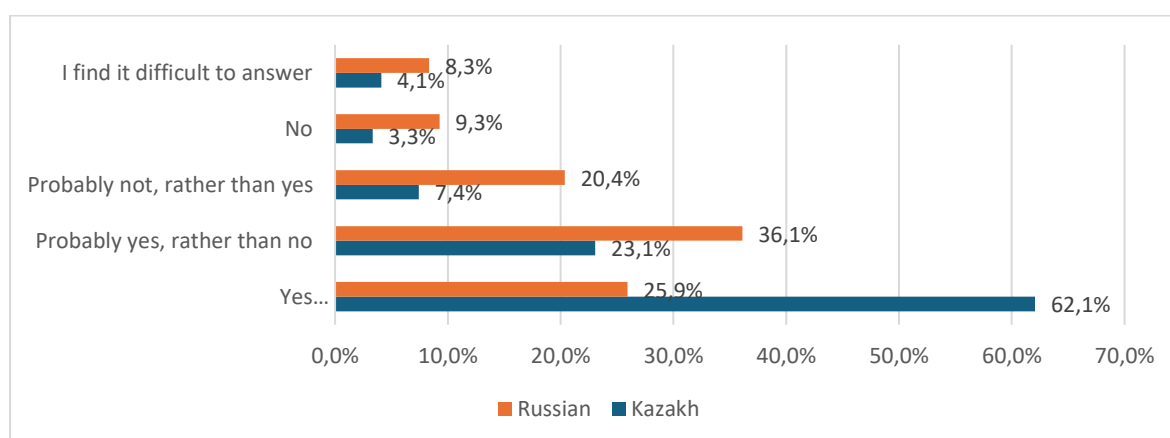
Overall, the results on this question point to the need to more actively promote modern programs and organizations engaged in civic education among youth, in order to improve their visibility and increase student involvement in public activities.

The survey showed that the majority of students possess basic civic literacy and are familiar with the key symbols of the state. The text of the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan had been read or studied to some degree by 83.9% of respondents (either in full or its main provisions, according to them). The National Anthem is known by heart to 98.6% of respondents, an expectedly high figure given its regular performance at official events and in educational institutions. No substantial differences by gender, language, or region were found in knowledge of the anthem and Constitution, and these indicators are high across all groups. Among the small minority (16%) of students who honestly admitted not knowing the text of the Constitution, the main reasons given were a lack of interest in studying the fundamental law or only having a superficial acquaintance with it. Some noted that they studied the Constitution in school/university classes but do not remember its provisions in detail. This result suggests the need to introduce more engaging forms of teaching constitutional basics to increase youth interest.

While the level of student familiarity with state symbols and constitutional norms is encouraging, it is also important to consider young people's sense of security regarding their civil rights. The survey included the question: "Do you believe that your social, civil, and political rights are guaranteed by the state?" Responses were distributed as follows: 80.6% of respondents are confident that their rights are ensured and protected by the state, whereas 14.5% expressed doubts about this (the rest were unsure). Thus, the most students trust the state system of rights and freedoms guarantees, yet a significant share, roughly one in seven, is skeptical. The differences among groups were quite telling. Among students with Kazakh as the language of instruction, optimism prevails: only about 10% of them doubted that their rights are guaranteed, whereas 90% were convinced of the opposite. Among Russian-speaking students, the picture is different: nearly every third (~33%) expressed doubt as to whether their rights are truly protected despite being declared by the state (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Students' confidence in state guarantees of their rights, by language of instruction
"Do you think that your social, civil and political rights are reliably guaranteed?"



This difference correlates with earlier results on patriotic attitudes: Russian-speaking youth are simultaneously more critical in their assessment of rights protection, whereas

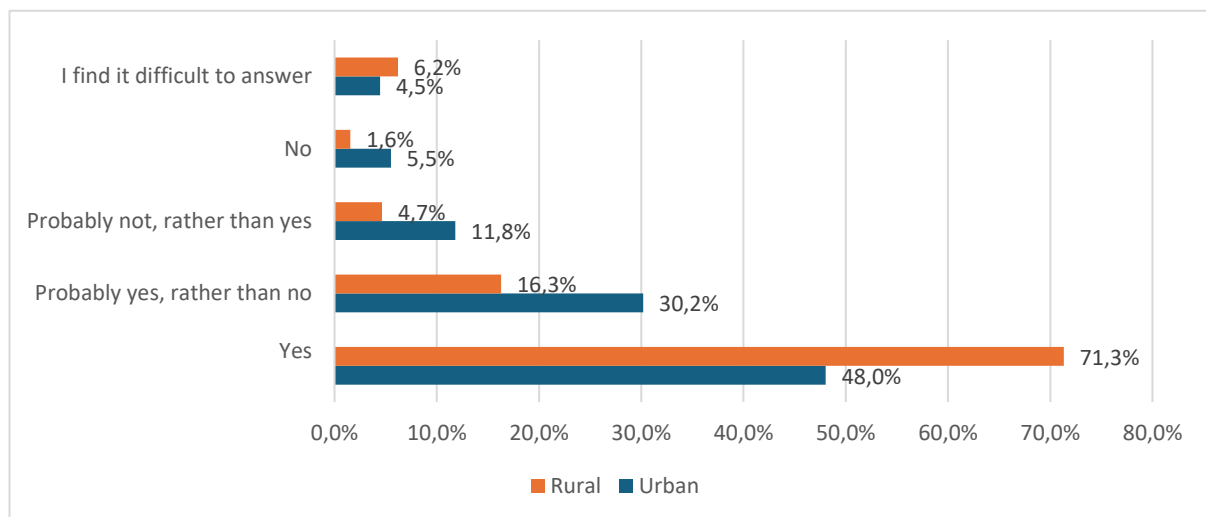
Kazakh-speaking youth are more confident in institutional guarantees. The reasons likely lie both in objective social differences (for example, a portion of Russian-speaking youth are urban residents with high expectations of institutional quality or are ethnic minorities potentially sensitive to issues of equality) and in the fact that the current model of civic socialization does not sufficiently engage those who have a poor command of the state language. The latter factor was noted in the context of patriotism as well: individuals who do not feel like full-fledged speakers of the state language may experience a sense of estrangement from the state ideology, which reduces their confidence in the protection of their civil rights.

Interestingly, the place of residence also affects the sense of social security. Students from cities turned out to be more critical: among them, the share doubting that their rights are guaranteed is higher than among rural youth (Figure 5).

Figure 5

Student confidence in rights guarantees by locale (urban vs. rural).

“Do you think that your social, civil and political rights are reliably guaranteed?”



Urban residents are likely more aware of instances of rights violations and better informed of their rights and therefore judge the performance of political institutions more strictly. Rural youth, by contrast, may be more inclined to trust state structures or simply perceive the issue less critically. No gender differences were found in the assessment of rights guarantees, male and female students are approximately equally likely to express trust or doubt.

Urban youth exhibit greater skepticism regarding state protection of rights: approximately 11.8% of city students doubt that their rights are fully guaranteed (with about 48% expressing confidence), whereas among rural students only around 4.7% harbor such doubts (and roughly 71.3% are confident that their rights are protected). This suggests that urban students, who are generally more informed and have higher expectations, apply more critical judgment to political institutions, while rural students tend to show higher baseline trust in state structures.

In summary, the survey results present a complex picture of university students' civic attitudes. On the one hand, there is a clear predominance of national civic values: most young people perceive the Kazakhstan political nation as a single community of citizens, declare patriotism, know and respect state symbols, and trust institutions to guarantee rights. On the other hand, cleavages were identified along sociocultural lines: primarily language and type of settlement. The Kazakh-medium segment of the student body is relatively more inclined toward ethnonational identity (though civic attitudes still prevail), whereas the Russian-medium

segment is more civic-oriented but also expresses greater skepticism about social realities. It is important to take these differences into account when developing civic education programs so that such programs reach all youth groups and help bridge potential divides.

Our study confirmed that an overwhelming majority of Kazakhstan's students perceive their nationality through the lens of a "civic nation", embracing the idea of unity among all peoples of the country. This finding is consistent with the official course of the State Youth Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which is aimed at forming a nationwide identity. From the first years of independence, the state demonstrated a commitment to the internationalist rhetoric and friendship of peoples inherited from Soviet ideology. In normative acts from the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On State Youth Policy" to patriotic education programs it was declared that youth should become bearers of pan-Kazakhstan values that cement a multi-ethnic society (Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On State Youth Policy," 2015; State Program of Patriotic Education, 2006; Concept for military-patriotic education of young people until 2030, 2023; Concept of the State Youth Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023-2029, 2023). For example, the State Program for Patriotic Education of Citizens for 2006–2008; Concept for military-patriotic education of young people until 2030 and the Concept of the State Youth Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023-2029 explicitly proclaimed the fostering of Kazakhstan patriotism and the strengthening of national unity as key goals of youth educational work. The data we obtained — three-quarters of students support the integrative civic concept — attest to a certain success of these efforts. The younger generation, in its majority, is proud of being citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan: according to a relatively recent nationwide survey, about two-thirds of Kazakhstan youth are proud to be citizens of their country (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2021). Our study recorded an even higher level of patriotic identification (over 90% declared themselves patriots), which may be explained by the fact that our sample consisted of university students who generally have a higher level of education and possibly a more developed civic identity.

At the same time, the results show that the ethnic component still plays a noticeable role in the self-identification of a significant part of the youth. About one-third of students — predominantly those in the Kazakh-language stream — hold an ethnonational worldview, prioritizing affiliation with the titular ethnic group. These results echo the findings of other studies. D. Sharipova and co-authors demonstrated that command of the Kazakh language and strong intra-ethnic ties correlate with more pronounced ethnic nationalism among youth (Sharipova et al., 2017). Our data is in line with this: students for whom Kazakh is the language of instruction (and often their native language) indeed choose an ethnocentric identity model significantly more often. This can be explained by the influence of family and school environments, where the native language and culture foster high trust in one's "own" ethnic group and, consequently, a tendency to view the nation primarily as an extended community of one's ethnicity. On the other hand, among Russian-speaking youth (many of whom are either ethnic minorities or Kazakhs educated in a Russian-speaking environment), a civic self-definition clearly predominates. These young people grew up in a more multiethnic setting, often in cities, and from an early age absorbed a supra-ethnic Kazakhstan identity. The state rhetoric about the unity of the people of Kazakhstan appears to resonate especially well with this audience for whom it is practically relevant (given their mixed ethnic surroundings). Furthermore, as noted by Sharipova's study, a higher level of trust in state institutions and a sense of security encourage youth to identify with the civic nation.

In our study, Russian-speaking students demonstrated lower trust in political institutions (every third of them doubts that their rights are guaranteed), which may partially explain why even among them 5–10% chose a neutral or ethnocentric option for the nation's future. Increasing this group's trust in the state—through successful anti-corruption efforts, ensuring equal opportunities, and respect for language rights — could strengthen their civic identity.

Language of instruction thus emerges as a significant differentiating factor. We found that young people from cities are more likely to support a multi-ethnic civic identity, whereas rural youth are more inclined toward traditional ethnonationalism. This phenomenon corresponds to general patterns known in social science: in rural areas, the population is typically more monoethnic, traditional values have greater influence, and education levels are lower, which all contribute to more conservative and ethnocentric views. By contrast, city dwellers live amidst cultural diversity and a higher level of information, which instills tolerance and supra-ethnic thinking. In Kazakhstan, internal migration in recent decades has led to some rural youth moving to cities, while simultaneously there has been an outflow of Russian-speaking youth abroad. These processes may gradually smooth out identity differences: new generations of urban residents of Kazakh origin adopt more cosmopolitan values, and the monoethnic environment of villages is slowly diminishing. Nevertheless, at present, our cross-sectional data capture a marked urban effect: urban youth are more critical but also more “civically minded” in their self-identification, whereas rural youth are more loyal to political institutions but also more ethnically oriented. Both groups equally profess patriotism, though what this concept means to them may differ.

The findings on youth criticality and trust are intriguing. Despite a high percentage of self-declared patriots, a significant portion of students (especially Russian-speaking students) critically evaluate the surrounding reality. Their comments revealed a sort of “conditional” patriotism: they love their Motherland if the Motherland (the state) behaves justly toward them. This rational approach is characteristic of a generation raised in an era of information and change. Young people expect the state to fulfill a kind of “social contract” — to secure rights, fight corruption, and act with integrity. When these expectations are not fully met, young people experience cognitive dissonance: on the one hand, they want to be proud of their country; on the other, reality gives them reasons for disappointment. This is particularly acute among the most educated and informed segment — youth in big cities. This group appears to be immersed in a global informational context that disseminates values of democracy, human rights, and critical thinking. They compare the situation in Kazakhstan with ideal models and more strongly perceive its shortcomings, resulting in a certain social skepticism. This picture aligns with the notion that a portion of Kazakhstan youth exhibit “critical patriotism” or even elements of protest civicness. Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize that even the critical respondents in our survey do not reject their civic identity. They still identify with Kazakhstan; they simply wish to see their country improve. This is an important point: their criticism stems from a desire for positive change, not alienation. Therefore, it is crucial for the state and society to pay attention to the pain points raised by youth (corruption, abuse in the armed forces, social injustice) and work to address them. Doing so would increase young citizens’ trust and strengthen their sense of belonging. Research shows that trust in the state is directly linked to the formation of civic identity: when young people feel the state is fulfilling its obligations, their pride in their country and desire to be part of it grows.

Another aspect is the presence of elements of political radicalization among youth. The fact that some respondents mentioned banned or marginal organizations indicates that, albeit very small, some young people is acquainted with radical ideologies. Our data cannot determine whether they support these ideas or are simply aware of them. However, the mere knowledge of the names of extremist movements suggests that such information has penetrated the youth environment, likely via the internet and social networks. This signal echoes findings of other researchers who note the emergence across Central Asian youth of small groups influenced by radical views (whether religious-extremist or ultra-nationalist) (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2021). In Kazakhstan, such cases are isolated, but they cannot be ignored. Government bodies and NGOs should intensify efforts to prevent extremism among youth, including through counter-propaganda in the online space and engagement of respected opinion

leaders. Involving young people in constructive civic movements and volunteer initiatives could serve as an alternative to involvement in radical ideologies.

The results should also be viewed through the prism of the multiple identity of modern youth. Young Kazakhstan people are simultaneously influenced by several levels of identification — local, ethnic, national-civic, and global. According to a survey conducted in 2021, the majority of Kazakhstan youth feel primarily connected to their locality (city/village), place national affiliation (Kazakhstan citizenship) in second place, and region (province) in third place (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2021). Moreover, the younger generation increasingly thinks in terms of global citizenship: about one-third of 14–24-year-olds reported that they consider themselves “citizens of the world” to some extent, and this figure is higher than among older youth (25–29 years). Our student sample is likely even more globally oriented, given their active internet use and often knowledge of foreign languages. This means that in shaping civic identity, it is necessary to connect the national and the global. The new form of patriotism should not be set in opposition to universal humanistic values. On the contrary, a successful modern Kazakhstan citizen can be simultaneously proud of their country and feel part of the global community. Educational programs at universities could emphasize this idea: patriotism through contributing to one’s country’s development while also respecting other cultures and global values. The concept of «global citizenship» (Global Citizenship Education) is actively promoted today by UNESCO and other international organizations, and it aligns well with Kazakhstan’s model of multi-ethnic patriotism.

In the higher education system, according to the State Compulsory Standard of Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan (State mandatory standard for higher education, 2022), these issues are addressed by a cycle of general education disciplines (more than 50 credits). This cycle includes such disciplines as the history of Kazakhstan, philosophy, Kazakh (Russian) language, foreign language, information and communication technologies, physical culture, and a module on socio-political knowledge (political science, sociology, cultural studies, psychology). Upon completion of these disciplines, it is expected that students will demonstrate civic engagement based on a deep understanding and scientific analysis of the main stages, patterns and peculiarities of Kazakhstan's historical development and will be able to develop their own moral and civic position, etc. For comparison, in other countries, civic education is implemented in three ways: through the introduction of a specific subject (e.g., in Japan – the compulsory course «Public», Singapore – «Social Studies») (Liguo Zhang et al., 2022; Sim J. B.-Y. et al., 2024), through integration into various subject areas through interdisciplinary links (e.g., Estonia) (Toots, A. et al., 2021), or through a combination of a specialized course with elements of integration of the civic component into other subjects (Lithuania – «Knowledge of the World», «Nature and Man», «Fundamentals of Civic Education») (Dukynaitė, R. et al., 2021).

Our study also highlighted gaps and opportunities for improving the practice of civic education at universities. First, a more targeted approach to different groups of students is clearly needed. Kazakh-speaking youth, especially those from rural backgrounds, should be inculcated with values of tolerance and multiculturalism, demonstrating the importance of all ethnic groups in a unified civic nation. Russian-speaking youth, on the other hand, should be more actively involved in state programs and communication in the state language, so that they do not feel like “second-class” citizens. It may be worth expanding the practice of bilingual patriotic events and encouraging the learning of Kazakh in a friendly way to overcome the language barrier in civic education. Second, the practical side of patriotic education needs to be strengthened. Students should not only hear slogans but also see real positive changes. For example, successful reforms in combating corruption and increasing transparency in the army and universities would significantly strengthen young people’s trust and their pride in their country. Social justice is what concerns young patriots and ensuring it would be the best lesson

in citizenship. Third, modern forms of volunteering, service learning, and participation in youth organizations should be more actively promoted among students. Our data showed insufficient awareness of civic associations: half of young people could not name a single real organization engaged in patriotic education. Universities should establish cooperation with youth NGOs, hold meetings and presentations of movements, thereby drawing students into real civic activity. The research demonstrates that involving youth in volunteer and similar projects increases their civic competence and commitment to democratic values.

Finally, we note the significance of the results for the scholarly understanding of the problem. Our analysis confirmed a number of theoretical propositions: the influence of the language environment of socialization on the type of national identity, the influence of the level of social trust on the willingness to identify with the civic nation, and the plurality of identity levels among youth. It also revealed an interesting phenomenon of critical patriotism that requires further study—what factors (e.g. education, overseas experience, media) lead some youth to combine patriotic feelings with a critical view of the state. From a practical standpoint, the results can be used by education authorities and youth policy makers to adjust educational programs. State youth policy in Kazakhstan is currently evolving to address new challenges — in particular, special emphasis is placed on the “hearing state,” working with youth, and engaging in dialogue. Our data provide succinct feedback: youth are largely loyal to the state and share the idea of a unified nation, but they expect real action to solve existing social problems. In this sense, indicators like those presented in this article (the share who trust/distrust, who support one concept or another) can serve as metrics of the effectiveness of youth policy. For example, an increase in the proportion of youth confident that their rights are guaranteed would indicate a strengthening of civic identity. Thus, integrating practical research results into decision-making can improve the justification and effectiveness of policy actions.

Conclusion

In this study, we systematized the results of a quantitative analysis of the civic identity of university youth in Kazakhstan. It was found that most students share the values of an overarching civic identity and view the people of Kazakhstan as a single civic nation. At the same time, a significant portion (around one-third) adhere to ethnonational attitudes, indicating the continued influence of traditional ethnic identity. A factor that substantially influences differences in attitudes is the language of instruction: Kazakh-speaking students are many times more likely to display ethnocentric views, whereas Russian-speaking students are more civically oriented. Regional characteristics also play a role: youth from major cities are more tolerant in interethnic relations and support the idea of a civic nation, whereas rural youth are more conservative. An absolute majority of respondents consider themselves patriots of Kazakhstan; however, the nature of their patriotism is predominantly civic rather than ethnocentrist. Students are proud of the country’s culture and achievements and are ready to contribute to its development, yet they are also critical of certain negative phenomena (corruption, manifestations of social injustice) that, in their view, hinder the full realization of the patriotic potential of youth. Thus, the study shows the need to improve state policy in the sphere of civic education, considering the linguistic and sociocultural characteristics of youth. University extracurricular programs are advised to differentiate their approach to different categories of students, reinforcing pan-national values while also engaging in open dialogue with young people to address their pressing issues. Only in this way can further strengthening of civic harmony and patriotism in the younger generation be ensured.

The scholarly value of this work lies in clarifying the structure and determinants of youth civic identity in Kazakhstan society, thereby contributing to the development of theories of intergroup relations, youth sociology, and contemporary history of Kazakhstan. The practical significance is due to the possibility of using the obtained empirical data by education

authorities and youth policy makers to devise targeted measures aimed at consolidating society and fostering a stable civic position among youth. The results of the study can be implemented in university educational processes and serve as a basis for training programs that strengthen Kazakhstan civic identity and intercultural dialogue.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest regarding the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

Funding Information

The research has been carried out within the framework of the project funded by the Science Committee of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the topic “Realization of civic education goals in the context of school history education for sustainable development of Kazakhstan society” (Grant No. AP23488994).

Author Contributions

Assel Myrzakhmetova: Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Project Administration, Writing Review and Editing; Igor Khlebnikov: Methodology, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Resources, Visualization, Writing-Original Draft; Arstan Satanov: Literature Review, Validation, Data Collection and Preparation, Grading Students' Works, Methodology; Yevgenia Matorina: Literature Review, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Discussion.

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