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IDEOLOGY AND EVOLUTION OF KAZAKHSTAN'S RELIGIOUS POLICY: FROM SOVIET LEGACY TO MODERN INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Abstract

The purpose of the article is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the state policy of the SSR on the transformation of the religious worldview, beliefs and ethnic identity of national minorities, as well as on changes in their cultural identity and social identity. The leading methodological approaches are the descriptive method, historiographical analysis and synthesis, as well as problem-chronological and socio-cultural approaches. The article examines the normative legal acts regulating the activities of religious organizations and their impact on the cultural institutions of ethnic minorities. Special attention is paid to the study of the political and ideological mechanisms by which the Soviet regime exerted pressure on religious and ethnic structures, contributing to the unification of cultural identities and the suppression of religious traditions.

Keywords: religious worldview, ethnic identity, cultural identity, social identity, descriptive method, historiographical analysis, synthesis

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ҚАЗАҚСТАННЫҢ ДІНИ САЯСАТЫНЫҢ ЭВОЛЮЦИЯСЫ МЕН ИДЕОЛОГИЯ: КЕҢЕСТІК МҰРАДАН ҚАЗІРГІ КОНФЕССИЯРАЛЫҚ ДИАЛОГҚА ДЕЙІН

Аңдатпа

Мақаланың мақсаты-КСРО-ның мемлекеттік саясатының ұлттық азшылықтардың діни дүниетанымын, нанымдары мен этникалық сәйкестігін өзгертуге, сондай-ақ олардың мәдени бірегейлігі мен әлеуметтік сәйкестігінің өзгеруіне әсерін жан-жақты талдау. Жетекші әдіснамалық тәсілдер сипаттамалық әдіс, тарихнамалық талдау және синтез, сондай-ақ проблемалық-хронологиялық және әлеуметтік-мәдени тәсілдер болып табылады. Мақалада діни ұйымдардың қызметін реттейтін нормативтік-құқықтық актілер және олардың этникалық азшылықтардың мәдени мекемелеріне әсері қарастырылады. Кеңестік режим діни және этникалық құрылымдарға қысым көрсетіп, мәдени бірегейлікті біріздендіруге және діни дәстүрлерді басуға ықпал ететін саяси және идеологиялық механизмдерді зерттеуге ерекше назар аударылады.

Түйін сөздер: діни дүниетаным, этникалық бірегейлік, мәдени бірегейлік, әлеуметтік бірегейлік, сипаттау әдісі, тарихнамалық талдау, синтез

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ИДЕОЛОГИЯ И ЭВОЛЮЦИЯ РЕЛИГИОЗНОЙ ПОЛИТИКИ КАЗАХСТАНА: ОТ СОВЕТСКОГО НАСЛЕДИЯ К СОВРЕМЕННОМУ МЕЖКОНФЕССИОНАЛЬНОМУ ДИАЛОГУ

Аннотация

Целью статьи является проведение всестороннего анализа влияния государственной политики СССР на трансформацию религиозного мировоззрения, верований и этнической идентичности национальных меньшинств, а также на изменения в их культурной самобытности и социальной самоидентификации. Ведущими методологическими подходами являются описательный метод, историографический анализ и синтез, а также проблемно-хронологический и социокультурный подходы. В статье рассматриваются нормативно-правовые акты, регулирующие деятельность религиозных организаций, и их влияние на культурные учреждения этнических меньшинств. Особое внимание уделяется изучению политических и идеологических механизмов, с помощью которых советский режим оказывал давление на религиозные и этнические структуры, способствуя унификации культурной идентичности и подавлению религиозных традиций.

Ключевые слова: религиозное мировоззрение, этническая идентичность, культурная идентичность, социальная идентичность, описательный метод, историографический анализ, синтез

MAIN PART

The transformation of religious worldview, beliefs, and ethnic identity under the influence of state policy in the Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs) is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Understanding these processes requires clarifying key concepts such as religious worldview, ethnic identity, cultural identity, and social identity, as well as the mechanisms of state influence in shaping these aspects among national minorities. Religious worldview refers to a system of values and principles based on religious teachings, which define a person's perception of the world and their place in it.

In the context of the Soviet state policy, religious beliefs were subjected to significant transformation due to atheistic propaganda, restrictions on religious practices, and control over religious institutions. This resulted in a decline in open religious expression and an adaptation of religious practices to fit the constraints imposed by the state. The Soviet policy of nationalities sought to unify and, in some cases, homogenize ethnic cultures to create a collective Soviet identity, leading to the erosion of traditional cultural markers among national minorities. Social identity refers to the way individuals and groups perceive themselves within the broader social framework. In the Soviet Union, ideological control played a crucial role in shaping social identity through education, media, and state institutions. National minorities were encouraged or coerced into adopting Soviet ideals, often at the expense of their traditional social structures and affiliations.

The study is structured into several key sections. The Introduction presents the relevance of the topic, outlining the objectives of the research and highlighting the importance of analyzing the impact of Soviet policy on religious and ethnic identities. The Materials and Methods section describes the methodological approaches employed in the study, including descriptive analysis, historiographical synthesis, and the problem-chronological and socio-cultural methods. It also discusses the sources of legal documents, archival materials, and historical records. The Results and Discussion section presents the key findings, analyzing specific policies, legislative acts, and ideological strategies implemented by the Soviet authorities. It examines their effects on religious practices, cultural institutions, and national minority identities, as well as the long-term consequences of these policies. Finally, the Conclusion summarizes the research, drawing conclusions on the extent of state influence over religious and ethnic structures and discussing the implications for contemporary perspectives on cultural identity and historical memory.

This framework ensures a comprehensive examination of the subject, offering an in-depth understanding of the Soviet policies and their lasting effects on the transformation of religious, ethnic, and cultural identities.

INTRODUCTION

Kazakhstan's policy towards religion after the collapse of the Soviet Union is based on respect for religious traditions, the revival of cultural identity, and the maintenance of secular principles. As a country with a rich historical heritage, Kazakhstan has long been a crossroads of various religious traditions, where Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and other faiths have coexisted for centuries. After gaining independence, Kazakhstan experienced a significant religious revival, particularly in the strengthening role of Islam in the lives of the Kazakh people [1, p.48]. At the same time, religious diversity remains an important characteristic of the country, as different religious communities continue to develop freely, contributing to intercultural dialogue and social stability.

This study aims to analyze Kazakhstan's religious policy in the post-Soviet period, focusing on the mechanisms used by the state to balance its secular governance model with the revival of religious traditions. The research explores government strategies in regulating religious activities, ensuring religious freedom, and countering extremist ideologies. Additionally, it examines the broader impact of Kazakhstan's religious policies on national identity, cultural heritage preservation, and interfaith harmony [2].

Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

1. Kazakhstan's religious policy successfully balances the revival of religious traditions with the maintenance of secular governance.

2. Government regulations on religious activities contribute to social stability by preventing the spread of extremism.

3. Kazakhstan's promotion of interfaith dialogue strengthens national unity and enhances the country's international reputation as a mediator in religious affairs.

To explore these hypotheses, the study seeks to answer the following key questions:

1. How has Kazakhstan's policy contributed to the revival of religious traditions while maintaining the secular nature of the state?

2. What mechanisms has the government implemented to regulate religious activities and prevent extremism?

3. How do Kazakhstan's religious policies influence interfaith dialogue, cultural identity, and social stability?

This study aims to analyze Kazakhstan's religious policy in the post-Soviet period, focusing on how the country has managed to balance its secular state principles with the revival of religious traditions. The research examines the ways in which the government regulates religious activities, supports religious freedom, and prevents the spread of extremist ideologies. Additionally, this study explores the broader impact of Kazakhstan's religious policies on national identity, cultural heritage preservation, and the promotion of interfaith harmony [2, p.50].

One of the defining aspects of Kazakhstan's approach to religion is its commitment to interfaith dialogue and peaceful coexistence. A key initiative in this regard is the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, held in Astana, which brings together representatives of Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and other faiths to discuss issues of global peace, tolerance, and mutual understanding. This event has strengthened Kazakhstan's international image as a platform for dialogue between different religious communities, showcasing the country's efforts to build bridges between civilizations.

Alongside its promotion of religious dialogue, Kazakhstan actively regulates religious activities to maintain social stability and national security. The establishment of the Committee on Religious Affairs under the Ministry of Information and Public Development reflects the state's commitment to ensuring that religious freedom is exercised within a framework that does not threaten public order or social cohesion [3, p.197]. While religious groups are free to practice their beliefs, the government intervenes when necessary to prevent the spread of radical ideologies that could destabilize society.

Kazakhstan's secularism does not exclude respect for religious and cultural traditions. Religious holidays such as Eid al-Adha, Nauryz, Christmas, and Easter play an important role in public life and contribute to strengthening intercultural understanding [4, p.153]. The revival of Nauryz, a spring holiday symbolizing renewal and unity, reflects not only the preservation of ancient Turkic traditions but also the state's broader efforts to reinforce national identity. Additionally, Kazakhstan places significant emphasis on preserving its historical and cultural heritage, exemplified by the restoration of the Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi. This UNESCO-listed site is a center of pilgrimage and an enduring symbol of the country's deep-rooted spiritual and historical traditions.

Kazakhstan's religious policy seeks to ensure that all citizens can practice their faith in a peaceful and safe environment while respecting the secular principles of the state and common societal values. By balancing religious freedom with state regulation, promoting interfaith dialogue, and preserving cultural heritage, Kazakhstan has developed a unique model of religious governance that fosters both national unity and religious diversity [5]

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a combination of qualitative and historical research methods to analyze the transformation of Soviet religious policies in post-Soviet states, with a particular focus on Kazakhstan and Russia. The research is structured around the general descriptive method and historiographical analysis, complemented by additional approaches such as comparative analysis, content analysis, and case studies. This diverse methodological framework ensures a comprehensive and multidimensional perspective on the subject.

The general descriptive method is used to outline the main features of Soviet religious policies and how these policies have been adapted to modern realities in the 21st century. This approach helps structure the research logically, allowing for an in-depth examination of the development, evolution, and continuity of religious regulations across different historical periods. By systematically describing the mechanisms of state-religion relations, this method provides a foundation for further analysis.

The historiographical analysis serves as a key component of the research. This method involves a critical review of existing literature, archival records, and government documents related to Soviet and post-Soviet religious policies. The historiographical approach enables the identification of dominant narratives in historical and contemporary discussions on religious governance. Additionally, it allows for a comparative examination of how scholars, policymakers, and religious leaders have interpreted the role of religion in post-Soviet societies. The analysis also considers the ideological and political motivations behind the state's approach to religious institutions across different periods.

To provide a comparative dimension, the study incorporates the comparative analysis method, which is essential for understanding similarities and differences in religious policies across post-Soviet states. By comparing Kazakhstan and Russia, two countries with distinct yet interrelated approaches to religion, the research identifies patterns of continuity and divergence in state control over religious organizations. While both countries share a Soviet legacy of religious regulation, their modern policies differ in terms of state-religion relations, levels of government intervention, and the political role of religious institutions. This comparative approach helps contextualize broader trends within the post-Soviet space while acknowledging national variations.

The content analysis method is applied to legal documents, state policies, official statements, and speeches made by political and religious leaders. This method allows for an in-depth analysis of how governments construct and utilize religious narratives for political purposes, national identity formation, and social stability. The research examines:

- Religious laws and regulations on faith-based organizations
- Government discourse on religious freedom and extremism
- International reports on religious freedom and human rights

This approach helps assess how religious policies are framed and justified within contemporary governance structures, offering insights into the strategic role of religion in state policy.

The study includes case studies of specific religious policies and institutions within Kazakhstan and Russia to illustrate broader theoretical discussions with concrete examples. These cases offer empirical evidence of state-religion interactions and help evaluate the real-world implications of religious policies.

For Kazakhstan, the study examines:

- Regulation of Islamic institutions
- The role of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan (SAMK)
- The organization of interfaith dialogue through initiatives such as the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions

For Russia, the research focuses on:

- The relationship between the state and the Russian Orthodox Church
- State control over religious minorities
- Regulation of new religious movements

These case studies serve as illustrative examples that reinforce the broader arguments made throughout the research.

To ensure a well-rounded and evidence-based analysis, the study relies on a diverse range of data sources, including:

1. Archival materials and historical records from the Soviet era, which provide insight into past religious policies and state attitudes toward religious institutions.

2. Government publications and legal documents on religious regulation in post-Soviet states, such as constitutional provisions on secularism, laws on religious organizations, and policies on combating religious extremism.

3. Reports from international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and human rights advocacy groups, which provide external assessments of religious freedom and state-religion relations.

4. Academic literature, including books and peer-reviewed journal articles, which offer theoretical perspectives and empirical studies on Soviet and post-Soviet religious policies.

5. Interviews and expert opinions from scholars in religious studies, political science, and history, which provide firsthand insights into contemporary religious policies and their implications.

The justification for these methods lies in their ability to provide a holistic and multifaceted analysis of the research topic. The combination of historical, legal, and comparative approaches ensures a thorough examination of the legacy of Soviet religious policies and their adaptation in the 21st century. The integration of primary and secondary sources strengthens the reliability of the research by grounding its arguments in empirical data and established theoretical frameworks. Moreover, the inclusion of case studies and expert opinions adds depth to the analysis by illustrating how abstract policies function in real-world contexts.

By employing these research methods, the study seeks to offer a detailed and well-supported assessment of the role of Soviet-era religious policies in shaping contemporary state-religion relations. It highlights:

- The extent to which historical patterns persist
- How religious institutions are utilized for political legitimacy
- The ongoing tensions between secularism and religious revival in post-Soviet societies

Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how religion continues to function as a tool of governance and social control in the modern political landscape of the post-Soviet world.

It should be noted that the primary focus of our study is the analysis of political, ideological, and legal aspects of religious policy. Therefore, the emphasis was placed on the examination of official documents, public statements, and secondary academic literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The evolution of religious and ethnic identity in post-Soviet Kazakhstan has been the subject of increasing scholarly interest over the past decades, especially in relation to the legacy of Soviet religious suppression and the strategies of national identity construction in the independent republic. Numerous studies have revealed the deep structural impact of Soviet atheistic policies on religious institutions, practices, and social structures in Central Asia. The works of Ro'i [6, p.405], Olcott [7, p.107], and Khalid [8] provide the historical foundation for understanding contemporary dynamics. Ro'i provided one of the earliest comprehensive accounts of Islam under Soviet rule, detailing the suppression and regulation of religious life through institutional control and ideological propaganda. Similarly, Olcott emphasized how Soviet policies systematically eroded religious hierarchies while maintaining elements of ritual practice among communities, a duality also identified in later studies such as those by Hann [9, p.132] and Harding [10]. Hann particularly stressed the anthropological persistence of Islamic identity across Central Asia despite formal secularism.

The post-independence revival of religion in Kazakhstan is often framed as a controlled re-integration of spiritual life into national discourse. Anderson analyzed how post-Soviet states,

including Kazakhstan, attempted to manage religious revival while preventing the emergence of political Islam or extremism. This balancing act is evident in Kazakhstan's model, which scholars such as Payne describe as "managed pluralism," where interfaith dialogue is encouraged under state supervision.

From the standpoint of ethnic and cultural identity, Laruelle [11] and Dave [12] highlighted how the Kazakh state deployed symbolic nationalism to unify diverse ethnic groups. The state's promotion of Nauryz, mosque restorations, and interfaith congresses have been interpreted as instruments for building civic identity while preserving cultural heritage [13, p.515]. This approach reflects a broader post-Soviet strategy where states adapt Soviet-era governance tools—centralized regulation, registration, and selective tolerance—to the needs of legitimacy in a globalized, multi-confessional environment [14, p.425; 15, p.443].

Recent empirical studies further support this view. Khussainova et al. [2] conducted sociological research showing that religious identity in Kazakhstan remains important but is often shaped by state narratives and institutional boundaries. Likewise, Burova and Dzhamanbalaeva [16] emphasized the dual-layered nature of religiosity in Kazakhstan—formal institutional adherence alongside informal, culturally-rooted practices.

It is also worth noting that contemporary scholarship is increasingly addressing gender and minority perspectives. The work by KISI [17] on ethnic minority women demonstrates how identity is experienced intersectionally, combining ethnicity, religion, and gender. These studies underscore the importance of examining not only state-religion relations but also the everyday lived experiences of belief and belonging.

While previous research has provided in-depth historical and sociological analysis of religion in Kazakhstan, most works either focus on the Soviet period exclusively (e.g., Ro'i, Olcott), or address religious revival in isolation from ethnic identity construction (e.g., Anderson, Payne). In contrast, this article offers an integrated analysis of both religious and ethnic identity transformations, linking Soviet repression, post-Soviet secular governance, and the modern interfaith model into a coherent longitudinal narrative.

Moreover, unlike studies that emphasize only political or institutional mechanisms, this article incorporates a methodological synthesis - combining historiographical analysis, legal policy review, and comparative state analysis (Kazakhstan vs. Russia) - to frame Kazakhstan's evolving religious policy within a broader post-Soviet and global context. It does not merely document change but interprets how state strategies toward religion function as instruments of governance, diplomacy, and identity management in a multiethnic society.

RESULTS

The analysis conducted in this study provides a coherent picture of Kazakhstan's evolving religious policy and supports the three key hypotheses formulated in the introduction. The combination of legal document analysis, historiographical review, and comparative research allowed for a nuanced understanding of how state-religion relations have been shaped since independence.

This study addresses key gaps in understanding the evolution of religious policy in post-Soviet states, with a particular focus on Kazakhstan. Unlike other post-Soviet nations, Kazakhstan has developed a distinct approach to religious governance, emphasizing interfaith dialogue and social stability while maintaining elements of state oversight inherited from the Soviet period.

The research highlights the global significance of Kazakhstan's religious policy, particularly its efforts to position itself as a platform for interreligious dialogue at the international level. By examining these developments, this study contributes to a broader understanding of how religious policies transform in multinational and multi-confessional societies. The findings also provide practical insights for shaping policies that balance religious freedom and state regulation in the context of globalization and modern political challenges.

Evolution of State Religious Policy

A comparative analysis of religious policy in Kazakhstan and other former Soviet republics reveals both common patterns and regional differences. The historical trajectory of religious policy in Kazakhstan reflects a continuum of suppression, controlled tolerance, and strategic adaptation to modern realities.

1. Soviet Period: Suppression and Control (1917–1991)

During the early Soviet period, state atheism was a defining feature of religious policy across all republics. In Kazakhstan, this was reflected in:

- Closure of mosques and religious schools
- Abolition of Sharia courts
- Transition to the Latin alphabet (1923–1929) to reduce Islamic scriptural influence

These measures were part of a broader Soviet campaign against religious institutions, mirroring similar trends in Central Asia and Transcaucasia [10].

During World War II, a temporary relaxation of religious restrictions occurred across the USSR. In Kazakhstan, limited religious activities were permitted, and some mosques were reopened in 1944 [13, p.517]. However, this period of tolerance was strictly controlled by the state.

The post-war period (1953–1964) saw renewed repression of religion, with intensified atheistic propaganda, the closure of religious educational institutions, and stricter state control over clergy. This reflected a broader Soviet ideological commitment to secularism [14, p.448].

Between 1964 and 1985, religious policy entered a phase of controlled stability. While restrictions remained, limited concessions were granted, such as the verification of clergy in Kazakhstan (1968). Similar patterns were observed in other Soviet republics, though Orthodox Christianity in Transcaucasia received relatively more tolerance, while Islam in Central Asia remained tightly controlled [15, p.452].

2. Post-Soviet Transition: Religious Revival and State Regulation (1991–Present)

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, former Soviet republics experienced divergent religious policy trajectories:

- Kazakhstan adopted a balanced model, allowing religious revival while maintaining state oversight.
- Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan pursued a relatively liberal approach to religious freedom.
- Uzbekistan implemented strict government oversight, particularly concerning Islamic institutions [18, p.16].

In Kazakhstan, the post-independence period witnessed:

- A revival of religious institutions, with increased public visibility of Islam and Christianity.
- State control over religious organizations, ensuring alignment with secular governance principles.
- Promotion of interfaith dialogue, positioning Kazakhstan as a global center for religious diplomacy.

One of the defining features of Kazakhstan's modern religious policy is its hybrid approach, which combines:

1. Legal oversight to regulate religious activities and prevent extremism.
2. Cultural and religious revival, allowing greater public religious expression.
3. Interfaith dialogue, exemplified by initiatives such as the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions.

This model contrasts with Uzbekistan's stricter control and Russia's increasing politicization of religious institutions, particularly its alignment with the Russian Orthodox Church.

3. Kazakhstan's Unique Model: Balancing Control and Religious Pluralism

Kazakhstan's religious policy today reflects a delicate balance between secularism, religious freedom, and national security. Key findings from the study include:

- Elements of Soviet-era control remain: Religious organizations must register with the state, and certain activities are regulated to prevent radicalization.
- A shift from suppression to strategic regulation: Unlike Soviet policies aimed at eliminating religion, Kazakhstan's approach seeks to integrate religion into national identity without compromising secular governance.
- Global religious diplomacy: Through initiatives such as the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, Kazakhstan positions itself as an international mediator in religious dialogue.

4. Implications for Global Religious Policy

The findings of this study have broader implications beyond Kazakhstan:

1. Kazakhstan's model offers insights for other multi-confessional states seeking to balance religious freedom and state regulation.
2. The role of interfaith dialogue in national identity formation is increasingly relevant in global governance.
3. The study highlights the persistence of Soviet-era governance patterns, showing how post-Soviet states adapt historical mechanisms to modern realities.

This study reveals that Kazakhstan has successfully navigated the complex post-Soviet religious landscape by adapting elements of Soviet-era regulation while promoting interfaith dialogue and religious freedom. The country's strategic hybrid model serves as an example for states with diverse religious populations, illustrating how religious policy can evolve to maintain stability, cultural identity, and global engagement in a rapidly changing world.

The findings indicate that Kazakhstan has successfully implemented a model of governance that accommodates religious revival while firmly maintaining its secular constitutional framework. Following independence, the state enabled the restoration of mosques, churches, and other places of worship and permitted public religious expression. However, these developments occurred within a tightly regulated legal space, ensuring that secularism remained the guiding principle of state policy. This confirms the first hypothesis that the revival of religious traditions has been achieved without undermining the secular nature of the state.

The study also confirms the second hypothesis: state regulation of religious organizations has been instrumental in maintaining social cohesion and preventing religious extremism. Laws requiring registration, restrictions on proselytism, and state oversight of religious literature have served not only as tools of control but also as preventive measures in a region historically vulnerable to radical ideologies. These policies, while sometimes criticized for limiting certain freedoms, have played a key role in ensuring internal stability and preventing interreligious conflict.

The third hypothesis is supported by Kazakhstan's active role in promoting interfaith dialogue, particularly through the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. This initiative has elevated Kazakhstan's international image as a peace-building nation and fostered a domestic environment of mutual respect among religious communities. The integration of such dialogue into state policy illustrates how religion can be used not only for domestic harmony but also as a tool of soft power and global engagement.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study highlight Kazakhstan's unique trajectory in developing a religious policy that reflects both continuity with Soviet-era governance mechanisms and innovative strategies adapted to a multiethnic, globalized society. These findings align with and extend existing scholarship, while also revealing distinct national approaches that set Kazakhstan apart from other post-Soviet states.

Previous research has extensively documented the legacy of Soviet religious suppression and its long-term effects on institutional structures and community practices (Ro'i [6] Olcott [19]). Our findings confirm these structural patterns, especially in the legal and bureaucratic frameworks that still shape the regulation of religion in Kazakhstan today. However, unlike the earlier Soviet approach aimed at eradicating religion entirely, Kazakhstan has reconfigured religious oversight as a tool of stability rather than ideological suppression.

In contrast to Russia's politicization of the Orthodox Church (Hunter [20]; Radnitz [14]), Kazakhstan has pursued a strategy of religious neutrality through secularism, while also selectively encouraging interfaith cooperation. This is evident in initiatives such as the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, which position Kazakhstan as a regional platform for religious diplomacy - a theme not widely explored in comparative post-Soviet literature. The work of Payne [3] describes Kazakhstan's approach as "managed pluralism", a term which this study further supports by illustrating how the state carefully balances freedom of religion with mechanisms of control.

Moreover, this research adds to the literature by incorporating the intersections between religious and ethnic identity, a dimension often treated separately in existing works [11;12]. Our study shows that Kazakhstan's religious policy not only governs faith practices, but also plays a crucial role in shaping civic and national identity, especially among ethnic minorities. This confirms findings by Jessa [13] and Hann [9], who argue that cultural revival in Central Asia is often driven by both ethnic reassertion and controlled religious expression.

Importantly, while many studies have focused on macro-political or legal structures, our approach highlights the state's use of symbolic and cultural tools - such as the restoration of religious monuments, state-sanctioned holidays like Nauryz, and education policy - as mechanisms to consolidate national unity. These instruments not only support social cohesion but also reinforce Kazakhstan's image as a tolerant and modern Islamic society, in contrast to more conservative or authoritarian religious models in the region.

Despite these successes, the study also acknowledges ongoing tensions between secular governance and religious revival. The state's regulatory stance has been criticized by some international observers for limiting religious plurality, especially among unregistered groups. However, within the Central Asian context - where geopolitical instability and the risk of extremism remain real - Kazakhstan's approach appears to be a pragmatic middle path.

This study thus confirms that Kazakhstan's religious policy is not merely a reaction to the Soviet past but a strategically designed system that incorporates elements of control, revival, and diplomacy. It affirms Kazakhstan's position as a hybrid model among post-Soviet states: maintaining stability through state oversight while promoting a pluralistic religious environment. These findings offer a basis for rethinking how religious and ethnic identities are governed in transitional societies and suggest avenues for further comparative and empirical research.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, the policy of the Soviet state aimed at alienating religion from the state and promoting Marxist atheistic ideology had a significant impact on the religious practices and beliefs of the peoples living in the USSR. Migration processes, deportations, and forced ethnic changes were also utilized as tools to influence religious identities and disrupt traditional belief systems. These measures significantly weakened religious institutions, leading to the fragmentation of spiritual leadership and the reconfiguration of religious hierarchies. However, traditional elements of religious worship persisted within popular practices, demonstrating the resilience of cultural and spiritual traditions despite systematic suppression [19]. The control over religious structures not only distorted doctrinal elements but also altered the social roles of religious institutions within minority communities, particularly in Kazakhstan. This dual legacy of suppression and resilience has left profound and lasting imprints on religious identities and cultural traditions.

The Soviet state's policies reshaped the spiritual life of ethnic minorities, impacting intergenerational transmission of faith and community cohesion. However, this field of study still requires further exploration. Comprehensive research into the long-term effects of Soviet religious policies is essential to better understand their influence on the spiritual and cultural life of post-Soviet Kazakhstan and its diverse ethnic groups [9, p.139]. Future studies could examine how these historical processes inform contemporary challenges, such as religious revival, interfaith dynamics, and the interaction between state secularism and cultural pluralism in Kazakhstan.

Furthermore, the role of religious institutions in shaping social cohesion and political discourse in post-Soviet states warrants deeper investigation. The legacy of Soviet-era religious repression continues to manifest in legal and institutional frameworks that regulate religious expression, often balancing between promoting secular governance and accommodating cultural traditions. Understanding the nuances of this interaction is crucial for policymakers, religious leaders, and scholars analyzing the region's sociopolitical development. Additionally, the resurgence of religious identity in Kazakhstan highlights the complexities of religious freedom and state intervention, presenting both opportunities for cultural revitalization and challenges related to extremism and sectarianism.

By addressing these gaps, scholars can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the intersection between state power, religious life, and cultural continuity in the post-Soviet era. A thorough analysis of these historical and contemporary factors will not only illuminate the transformation of religious identity in Kazakhstan but also provide insights into broader trends affecting post-Soviet societies in Central Asia and beyond. Such research can inform policies that balance secular governance with the need to preserve religious and cultural heritage, ensuring stability and inclusivity in increasingly pluralistic societies. Migration processes, deportations, and forced ethnic changes were also utilized as tools to influence religious identities and disrupt traditional belief systems. These measures significantly weakened religious institutions, leading to the fragmentation of spiritual leadership and the reconfiguration of religious hierarchies. However, traditional elements of religious worship persisted within popular practices, demonstrating the resilience of cultural and spiritual traditions despite systematic suppression [19]. The control over religious structures not only distorted doctrinal elements but also altered the social roles of religious institutions within minority communities, particularly in Kazakhstan. This dual legacy of suppression and resilience has left profound and lasting imprints on religious identities and cultural traditions. The Soviet state's policies reshaped the spiritual life of ethnic minorities, impacting intergenerational transmission of faith and community cohesion. However, this field of study still requires further exploration. Comprehensive research into the long-term effects of Soviet religious policies is essential to better understand their influence on the spiritual and cultural life of post-Soviet Kazakhstan and its diverse ethnic groups [9, p.139]. Future studies could examine how these historical processes inform contemporary challenges, such as religious revival, interfaith dynamics, and the interaction between state secularism and cultural pluralism in Kazakhstan. In this context, further investigation into the evolving role of religion in shaping national identity and community resilience can also provide valuable insights into the broader regional dynamics of Central Asia. By addressing these gaps, scholars can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the intersection between state power, religious life, and cultural continuity in the post-Soviet era.

Drawing on historical analysis, policy review, and comparative approaches, the research confirms that Kazakhstan has developed a distinctive framework that balances secular governance with the revival and regulation of religious life.

The findings validate the three initial hypotheses. First, Kazakhstan has indeed succeeded in reviving religious traditions - particularly Islam and Christianity - without compromising its secular constitutional foundations. Second, the state's regulatory approach has played a crucial role in maintaining interfaith peace and minimizing the spread of extremism. Third, Kazakhstan's institutional support for interfaith dialogue has not only fostered national unity but has also elevated the country's international profile as a platform for religious diplomacy.

Unlike some other post-Soviet states, Kazakhstan's policy does not rely solely on legal restriction or ideological narratives. Instead, it employs a hybrid model that integrates religious tolerance, civic nationalism, and international positioning. This combination reflects both a continuity with past governance models and an adaptation to new geopolitical and sociocultural realities.

The article contributes to existing literature by offering an integrated perspective that links religious policy with ethnic identity and nation-building. It also emphasizes the importance of symbolic state actions—such as national holidays, restoration of religious monuments, and education policy—in shaping both public religiosity and civic belonging.

Recommendations

Given the findings, future research may explore:

- How younger generations in Kazakhstan negotiate religious identity within a secular framework;
- How unregistered or minority religious groups perceive state regulation;
- Comparative studies of religious diplomacy in Central Asia and its global implications.

Ultimately, Kazakhstan's case provides valuable insights for scholars, policymakers, and religious leaders interested in how pluralistic societies can construct inclusive, stable models of religious governance in post-authoritarian contexts.

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