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N.R. Nurpeissova^{1*} , Zh.M. Tolen² 

¹Al-Farabi Kazakh National University

Almaty, Kazakhstan

²Turan University

Almaty, Kazakhstan

*E-mail: nurpeysovan@mail.ru

INCLUSIVE AND EXCLUSIVE MODELS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF MODERN POLITICAL THEORIES: A THEORETICAL REVIEW

Abstract

Purpose. This article examines inclusive and exclusive models of national identity and clarifies the conditions under which civic institutions and ethnocultural continuity may support equal national belonging. **Design/methodology/approach.** A critical conceptual review brings foundational theories of nationalism into dialogue with scholarship on citizenship, boundaries, recognition, and recent empirical studies. Identity content is distinguished from the openness of membership, and Kazakhstan scholarship is used as an illustrative context. **Findings.** Civic and ethnocultural elements do not determine inclusion by themselves. Their consequences depend on membership and equal standing, effective participation, symbolic recognition, communicative access, and opportunities to contest restrictive rules. Mixed configurations can sustain either inclusive belonging or unequal recognition. Four conditional propositions specify relationships for subsequent empirical investigation. The review does not collect original empirical data or demonstrate the superiority of a hybrid model. **Originality/value.** The contribution is an integrated diagnostic framework connecting the content of national identity with the institutional and symbolic conditions of inclusion. Its practical value is to support differentiated evaluation of identity policies without assuming that civic rhetoric guarantees equal participation or that historical-cultural continuity necessarily excludes minorities. The framework also identifies questions for future research on the relationship between self-identification, perceived recognition, and access to institutions.

Keywords: national identity, national inclusion, civic nationalism, ethnocultural continuity, membership boundaries, Kazakhstan.

Н.Р. Нурпейсова^{1*}, Ж.М. Төлен²

¹Ал-Фараби атындағы Қазақ ұлттық университеті

Алматы қ., Қазақстан

²Тұран университеті

Алматы қ., Қазақстан

*E-mail: nurpeysovan@mail.ru

ҚАЗІРГІ САЯСИ ТЕОРИЯЛАР АЯСЫНДАҒЫ ҰЛТТЫҚ БІРЕГЕЙЛІКТІҢ ИНКЛЮЗИВТІ ЖӘНЕ ЭКСКЛЮЗИВТІ ҮЛГІЛЕРІ: ТЕОРИЯЛЫҚ ШОЛУ

Аңдатпа

Мақалада ұлттық бірегейліктің инклюзивті және эксклюзивті үлгілері қазіргі саяси теориялар аясында сыни тұжырымдық шолу арқылы қарастырылады. Зерттеудің мақсаты ұлттық бірегейліктің азаматтық және этномәдени мазмұнын ұлттық қауымдастыққа мүшеліктің ашықтығынан ажыратып, әртүрлі топтардың тең қатысуына ықпал ететін жағдайларды анықтау. Модернизм, конструктивизм және этносимволизм ұлттың қалыптасуы мен тарихи сабақтас-тығын түсіндіру тұрғысынан салыстырылады. Бұл теориялар белгілі бір бірегейлік үлгісінің инклюзивтілігін өздігінен қамтамасыз етпейтіні көрсетіледі. Шолуда ұлттық бірегейлік туралы

іргелі еңбектер азаматтық, мәдени танылу және әлеуметтік шекаралар жөніндегі зерттеулермен байланыстырылады. Талдау бес өлшемге негізделеді: ұлттық қауымдастыққа мүшелік пен тең мәртебе, институттарға нақты қатысу, мәдени-тарихи үлестің қоғамдық танылуы, тілдік және ақпараттық қолжетімділік, сондай-ақ бірегейлікке қатысты ережелерді талқылау және қайта қарау мүмкіндігі. Азаматтық қағидалар мен этномәдени мұраның үйлесуі әмбебап оңтайлы шешім ретінде бағаланбайды. Мұндай үйлесімнің салдары құқықтардың іске асуына, қоғамдық рәміздердің түсіндірілуіне, тілдік талаптардың қолданылуына және азаматтардың пікір білдіру мүмкіндігіне тәуелді. Осы байланыстар негізінде кейінгі эмпирикалық зерттеулерге арналған төрт шартты болжам ұсынылады. Қазақстан жөніндегі ғылыми әдебиет тұжырымдық мәселелерді нақтылау үшін пайдаланылады; зерттеуде бастапқы эмпирикалық деректер жиналмайды және ұсынылған тәсілдің тиімділігі тексерілмейді. Мақаланың ғылыми үлесі ұлттық инклюзияны бірнеше өзара байланысты өлшем бойынша бағалауға арналған біртұтас талдау негізін ұсынуда. Бұл тәсіл мемлекеттік тіл мен тарихи мұраны автоматты түрде эксклюзия белгілері деп қабылдамай, олардың нақты институционалдық жағдайлардағы рөлін саралауға мүмкіндік береді.

Түйін сөздер: ұлттық бірегейлік, ұлттық инклюзия, азаматтық ұлтшылдық, этномәдени сабақтастық, мүшелік шекаралары, Қазақстан.

Нурпейсова Н.Р.^{1*}, Толен Ж.М.²

¹Казахский национальный университет имени аль-Фараби

г. Алматы, Казахстан

²Университет «Туран»

г. Алматы, Казахстан

*E-mail: nurpeysovan@mail.ru

ИНКЛЮЗИВНЫЕ И ЭКСКЛЮЗИВНЫЕ МОДЕЛИ НАЦИОНАЛЬНОЙ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ В КОНТЕКСТЕ СОВРЕМЕННЫХ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИХ ТЕОРИЙ: ТЕОРЕТИЧЕСКИЙ ОБЗОР

Аннотация

В статье представлен критический концептуальный обзор инклюзивных и эксклюзивных моделей национальной идентичности в контексте современных политических теорий. Цель исследования состоит в разграничении гражданского и этнокультурного содержания идентичности и открытости границ национального сообщества, а также в определении условий равноправного участия различных групп. Модернизм, конструктивизм и этносимволизм сопоставляются как объяснения формирования наций и исторической преемственности. Показано, что эти теоретические подходы сами по себе не гарантируют инклюзивности определенной модели идентичности. Фундаментальные работы о национализме рассматриваются совместно с исследованиями гражданства, культурного признания и социальных границ. Предложенная аналитическая схема включает пять измерений: принадлежность к национальному сообществу и равный статус, эффективное институциональное участие, символическое признание, коммуникативную доступность и возможность оспаривания и пересмотра правил национальной принадлежности. Сочетание гражданских принципов и этнокультурного наследия рассматривается как условная конфигурация, а не универсально оптимальное решение. Ее последствия зависят от реализации прав, интерпретации общественных символов, применения языковых требований и возможностей граждан влиять на соответствующие решения. На этой основе сформулированы четыре условных положения для последующей эмпирической проверки. Научная литература о Казахстане используется для иллюстрации концептуальных вопросов; первичные эмпирические данные не собираются, а эффективность предложенной схемы не проверяется. Научный вклад статьи заключается в объединении взаимосвязанных измерений национальной инклюзии в единую диагностическую схему. Она позволяет оценивать политику идентичности с учетом конкретных институциональных условий, не отождествляя

государственный язык или историческое наследие с механизмами исключения и не предполагая, что формальное равенство автоматически обеспечивает признание и участие.

Ключевые слова: национальная идентичность, национальная инклюзия, гражданский национализм, этнокультурная преемственность, границы национального сообщества, Казахстан.

Introduction

National identity concerns the ways in which people understand themselves as members of a national community and the public rules through which that membership is recognized. It connects personal attachment with institutions, historical narratives, language, and representations of collective life. These elements do not necessarily move together. A person may hold citizenship without being accepted as a full member of the nation, while someone living abroad may retain a strong national identification. For political theory, the relevant problem is therefore how national belonging acquires meaning and how that meaning affects equal standing, participation, and recognition within a political community (Anderson, 2006; Brubaker, 2002; Smith, 1991).

The distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism remains influential because it identifies different grounds of belonging. Civic accounts emphasize citizenship and common political institutions; ethnocultural accounts emphasize historical continuity, ancestry, language, and cultural attachment. However, this distinction becomes misleading when civic identity is automatically classified as inclusive and ethnocultural identity as exclusive. Political principles can be enforced through restrictive cultural expectations, while a historically situated public culture can permit equal membership and legitimate cultural differences. The content of an identity and the openness of its boundaries consequently require separate analysis (Shulman, 2002; Yack, 1996).

This separation is particularly important in polyethnic societies, where nation-building involves the relationship between common institutions and different historical experiences. Shared political membership need not eliminate cultural attachment, and cultural continuity need not establish inherited ownership of the state. The question is how institutions mediate these relationships. Formal equality, accessible participation, public recognition, and opportunities to challenge restrictive rules can differ substantially even where official narratives combine similar civic and cultural elements. Describing a national identity as mixed or hybrid does not, by itself, establish that it provides inclusive membership (Kymlicka, 1995; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Kazakhstan provides a relevant setting for examining this problem through existing scholarship. Studies of its nation-building discuss the interaction of civic identification, Kazakh historical-cultural continuity, language, and post-Soviet institutional change. Their findings should be interpreted within the periods, populations, and methods examined. They offer useful examples of the distinction between identity narratives and experiences of belonging, but they cannot verify a general theory simply because civic and ethnocultural elements coexist (Dave, 2007; Isaacs & Polese, 2016; Rees & Webb Williams, 2017).

This article critically examines inclusive and exclusive models of national identity and develops a framework for evaluating the conditions under which mixed configurations may reduce or reproduce exclusion. It addresses three questions. First, how do theories of national identity explain membership boundaries without conflating national origins with normative inclusion? Second, which institutional and symbolic conditions distinguish inclusive from restrictive configurations? Third, how can these conditions be organized into an analytical framework applicable to polyethnic societies while retaining variation between institutions, groups, and historical contexts?

The contribution is a synthesis that connects the content of national identity with five dimensions of inclusion: membership and equal standing, effective participation, symbolic recognition, communicative access, and contestability. The framework is intended to clarify comparisons and generate conditional propositions for later empirical research. It does not rank countries or claim that combining civic institutions with ethnocultural narratives is universally preferable. Its practical value lies in identifying the particular rules, representations, and access conditions through which national belonging becomes more or less inclusive.

Literature review

Theories of nation formation and the problem of inclusion

Modernist theories explain nations in relation to transformations in social organization rather than treating them as unchanged historical communities. Gellner (1983) connects nationalism with the cultural standardization associated with industrial society. Anderson (2006) examines the conditions under which people imagine a community whose members they cannot all know personally. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) show how traditions acquire political significance through practices that present continuity with a selected past. These accounts explain how national solidarity is produced, but their explanations do not establish that its boundaries are open. Standardization can make common institutions intelligible while also restricting which languages, histories, and practices receive public authority.

Ethno-symbolism directs attention to the historical resources from which modern nations draw meaning. Smith (1991, 1998) emphasizes myths, memories, symbols, and the persistence or reinterpretation of ethnic attachments. This perspective helps explain why constitutional membership may acquire emotional significance through culturally situated narratives. Historical continuity nevertheless requires interpretation: it cannot be reduced to the claim that a single group possesses the nation permanently. Nor should an explanation of inherited attachment be treated as a justification for unequal citizenship. The political consequences of historical narratives depend on how they define membership and whose contribution they recognize.

Primordialist and perennialist approaches address questions of attachment and continuity that differ from modernist explanations of nation formation. Their analytical relevance lies in the perceived strength of inherited ties and in arguments about the longevity of national communities. Smith (1994) locates the relationship between premodern attachments and modern national identity within a contested historical inquiry, while Hobsbawm (1992) emphasizes changes in the political meaning and criteria of nationhood. Claims about the historical duration or experienced givenness of belonging must be distinguished from the institutional rules governing membership. A political actor may mobilize an inherited identity inclusively or use a recently constructed identity restrictively. Theories of origins therefore cannot be assigned mechanically to inclusive or exclusive policy models (Smith, 1998).

Constructivist and relational approaches shift attention toward the production of categories and boundaries. Brubaker (1996, 2002) examines nationalism through institutions, political claims, and categories of practice rather than assuming that ethnic groups are internally uniform actors. This perspective distinguishes the official definition of a national community from individual identification and collective mobilization. It also explains why boundaries can become politically salient without requiring every person categorized on either side to share the same interests. Inclusion becomes a question of how categories are applied and institutionalized, not simply whether an identity is historically authentic. Barth's (1969/1998) account of ethnic boundaries adds a related insight: cultural difference can persist through social interaction and boundary maintenance even when the practices associated with a category change. A historically variable cultural inventory should therefore not be confused with a fixed rule of membership.

Civic and ethnocultural content

The civic-ethnic distinction provides a starting point for identifying different membership criteria, but substantial scholarship questions its use as an exhaustive classification. Yack (1996) challenges the idea that civic nations lack cultural inheritances. Shulman (2002) examines how civic, cultural, and ethnic elements are combined rather than distributed neatly between countries. The analytical implication is not that all distinctions should be abandoned. It is that constitutional commitments, language, ancestry, and historical attachment should be identified separately before their consequences are assessed.

Cultural content is unavoidable in many public institutions: schooling uses languages, public ceremonies refer to histories, and state symbols represent particular events. These facts do not establish exclusion on their own. The relevant question concerns whether culturally situated institutions treat members as equals and allow legitimate differences in affiliation and interpretation. Conversely, the use of universal political language does not ensure inclusion when recognition depends on inaccessible tests

of cultural authenticity. Civic rhetoric and cultural hierarchies can operate together, just as historical continuity and equal citizenship can coexist. Brubaker's (1992) historical comparison of citizenship and nationhood makes this institutional relationship explicit: the meaning of citizenship is shaped by political understandings of the national community and their development over time.

Normative theories explain why these distinctions matter. Kymlicka (1995) examines the relationship between liberal citizenship and minority rights, including the significance of the cultural conditions in which individuals make choices. Miller (1995) gives national attachment a role in political obligation and solidarity. Habermas (1998) relates democratic inclusion to equal rights and participation in public life, while Parekh (2006) emphasizes intercultural dialogue in the negotiation of shared political arrangements. These approaches do not resolve every dispute over minority recognition, but they establish that common political membership and cultural belonging cannot be evaluated through a single variable. A review of inclusive identity must therefore consider both shared institutions and the distribution of standing within them.

Constitutional patriotism contributes a related account of attachment grounded in political principles. Such attachment is expressed through historically situated institutions rather than through principles detached from public life. This distinction prevents a false choice between emotionally meaningful national narratives and abstract constitutional equality. The central issue is whether political identification allows the inherited culture of a majority to remain contestable and whether members can participate without demonstrating a predetermined cultural pedigree (Müller, 2007).

Boundaries, recognition, and everyday identification

Boundary scholarship clarifies the mechanisms linking identity to inclusion. Lamont and Molnár (2002) distinguish symbolic distinctions from social boundaries that shape access to resources and opportunities. A classification becomes consequential when it informs recognition, administrative treatment, or participation. Wimmer (2013) further places boundary formation within relations of power, institutions, and networks. These approaches help avoid treating every expression of cultural difference as discrimination, while requiring close attention to the circumstances in which cultural markers become barriers.

The politics of belonging involves more than individual self-identification. Yuval-Davis (2006) relates belonging to the political projects through which membership boundaries are established and defended. This perspective raises questions about who has the authority to define the national community and whose claims receive public recognition. Billig (1995) draws attention to ordinary practices through which nationhood is reproduced. Taken together, these works suggest that inclusion is shaped by everyday interactions and routine institutional practices as well as by constitutional statements or prominent political speeches.

Recent scholarship refines these distinctions. Piwoni and Mußotter (2023) treat the revision of the civic-ethnic distinction as a partial conceptual success rather than a reason to abandon careful comparison. Heiskanen (2023) examines the geographic and ideological asymmetries of the Kohn dichotomy. These analyses caution against defining Western identities as normatively open and other identities as culturally deficient. Their shared implication is that the properties of a membership criterion should be specified independently of the geographic category attached to it.

The object being measured also matters. König (2024) documents variation in the forms and operationalization of national and European identity. Kaplan (2022) distinguishes identity from solidarity, making it inappropriate to treat a common national label as direct evidence of cooperation. Mader and Mußotter (2026) examine the problems created by conflicting survey measures, while Eger and Hjerm (2022) question the mixing of identification, membership criteria, pride, and chauvinism in inductively derived typologies. These works support keeping membership content, attachment intensity, evaluative attitudes, and institutional consequences analytically distinct.

Empirical studies further show why cultural content needs contextual interpretation. Gagnon (2023) finds that cultural understandings of national identity in Quebec can accompany different opinions about immigration. May (2023) identifies multiple boundary patterns across national contexts rather than a single civic-ethnic division. Mader and Schoen (2023), drawing on German panel evidence, show that

membership criteria can remain substantially stable over time. National identity is historically constructed, but this does not mean that individuals revise its content continuously or that institutional boundaries change whenever public narratives change.

The literature thus establishes an important distinction but leaves a practical analytical task: connecting different levels of belonging without collapsing them. Individual identification, public narratives, and institutional arrangements must be related through specified mechanisms. The framework developed here addresses this task by separating identity content from boundary openness and then examining the conditions under which common membership becomes accessible, recognized, and revisable. Its contribution builds on existing debates rather than treating the coexistence of civic and cultural elements as a new discovery.

Research methodology

The study uses a critical conceptual review. This design is appropriate for clarifying categories, comparing competing explanations, and developing a framework from existing scholarship. The article does not collect original survey, interview, or observational data. Empirical studies are examined for the particular relationships and contexts they investigate; their findings inform the conceptual comparison without being treated as tests of the framework proposed here.

The material consists of a purposively assembled bibliography of 50 publications. Foundational works establish arguments about nation formation, national attachment, citizenship, minority recognition, and boundary construction. Recent journal articles supply contemporary conceptual criticisms and selected empirical comparisons. Kazakhstan and post-Soviet scholarship provide contextual material for examining the relation between official identity narratives, language, and perceived belonging. Inclusion in the bibliography rests on a source's relevance to these relationships and the availability of identifiable scholarly publication information.

Selection was guided by three connected concerns: the definition of national membership, the mechanisms linking membership to institutional or symbolic access, and the evidence used to describe those relationships. Classic texts were retained where later debates depend on their concepts. Contemporary studies were selected to examine how these concepts are applied or questioned, including work that complicates the civic-ethnic division. Citation trails and publisher or journal records were used to verify bibliographic details. The resulting corpus is selective; it is not presented as an exhaustive search or a systematic estimate of the distribution of scholarly positions.

The unit of conceptual comparison is a claim about national belonging. Each claim is examined in relation to its level of analysis, membership criterion, proposed mechanism, and relevant institutional context. An argument about how people identify themselves is distinguished from an argument about the legal or administrative conditions they encounter. Similarly, a theory of national origins is separated from a normative judgment about equal standing. These distinctions prevent findings about individual attitudes from being generalized automatically to state institutions, or explanations of historical continuity from being treated as prescriptions for present membership.

The comparison proceeds through two related questions. The first concerns identity content: which civic, cultural, historical, religious, or ancestry-based elements are invoked? The second concerns openness: can differently situated people acquire and exercise equal national membership, receive recognition, and challenge restrictive interpretations? The resulting configurations organize the analysis rather than assigning countries to fixed types. A single state may contain different arrangements across institutions and domains, and those arrangements may change over time.

Five dimensions structure the subsequent synthesis. Membership and equal standing address who is regarded as a full member. Effective participation concerns access to common institutions and opportunities to influence them. Symbolic recognition examines historical narratives and public representation. Communicative access considers how language practices and requirements affect participation. Contestability concerns whether members can question and revise restrictive rules or interpretations. These dimensions are derived from the relationships addressed in the reviewed literature and are used consistently across the discussion of civic and ethnocultural content.

The synthesis identifies conditional relationships rather than a universally preferred national model. Proposed mechanisms are stated with the conditions on which they depend and with possible countervailing explanations. For example, language requirements are considered in relation to their institutional purpose, support available to learners, and the costs they impose. A shared historical narrative is evaluated through its treatment of different contributions and interpretations. Cultural continuity is therefore neither accepted as evidence of inclusion nor classified as exclusion in advance.

Kazakhstan is used as an illustrative context based on published research. Statements drawn from a particular study retain its period, population, and methodological scope. The article does not infer the current legal position of languages or minority rights from historical publications, and it does not treat an official statement of civic unity as evidence of equal access in practice. Comparisons with other settings identify potentially relevant mechanisms rather than presuming that findings transfer unchanged between states.

The limits of the approach concern selection, interpretation, and causal inference. A conceptual synthesis depends on the issues represented in the chosen literature and on how competing arguments are reconstructed. It cannot determine the prevalence of exclusion, calculate the effects of identity policies, or establish the superior performance of mixed configurations. The framework therefore generates questions and conditional propositions for subsequent investigation. Its credibility rests on clear definitions, appropriate attribution, and consistency between the type of evidence reviewed and the conclusions drawn.

Results

Identity content and membership openness are distinct

The first result of the conceptual comparison is a separation between the grounds of national belonging and the openness of national boundaries. Civic content refers to common political membership, institutions, and commitments. Ethnocultural content refers to historical continuity, cultural practices, language, and sometimes ancestry. Inclusion concerns whether those criteria and their application permit equal standing and meaningful access for differently situated members. These dimensions are related, but none can substitute for the others (Shulman, 2002; Yack, 1996).

This distinction makes four configurations analytically possible. A civic narrative may provide open membership, or it may require cultural conformity as a condition of being recognized as a proper citizen. An ethnoculturally marked identity may permit newcomers and minorities to participate in common institutions, or it may treat national ownership as inherited and unavailable to others. Mixed configurations can combine features from these positions. Their identification requires examining rules and practices rather than taking official self-descriptions as sufficient evidence.

Table 1

Identity content and the openness of national membership

Identity content	Membership openness	Analytical configuration	Diagnostic question
Civic	More open	Common political membership with accessible recognition and participation	Can differently situated members exercise equal standing through common institutions?
Civic	More restrictive	Universal political vocabulary combined with cultural or administrative gatekeeping	Do ostensibly civic requirements function as inaccessible tests of national authenticity?

Identity content	Membership openness	Analytical configuration	Diagnostic question
Ethnocultural	More open	Historically situated public culture with equal membership and legitimate difference	Can minorities and newcomers share public institutions and symbols without demonstrating inherited ownership?
Ethnocultural	More restrictive	Ascriptive ownership of national authenticity and unequal recognition	Do ancestry, religion, or cultural pedigree determine whose membership is treated as fully legitimate?

Note. Authors' conceptual synthesis drawing on Shulman (2002), Yack (1996), and boundary scholarship. The configurations are ideal types; openness can vary across institutions, groups, and time.

Table 1 describes ideal-typical configurations, not categories into which entire societies can be placed without qualification. Openness can vary between domains. An institution may admit members formally while limiting the language in which they can access services; a national narrative may acknowledge a minority historically while limiting its influence over current representations. The framework therefore asks which boundary operates, whose standing is affected, and through which mechanism. This approach avoids both assuming that civic identity is fully open and treating every cultural distinction as evidence of exclusion.

Inclusion requires institutional and symbolic specification

The second result is that inclusion requires specification across five dimensions. Membership and equal standing establish the baseline: people who meet relevant legal conditions should not be divided into more and less authentic nationals through inherited attributes. This principle addresses recognition within a political community rather than denying that admission and citizenship rules exist. The analytical task is to identify where classifications become hierarchies of standing and how those hierarchies influence participation (Brubaker, 2002; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Effective participation distinguishes a formal entitlement from the ability to exercise it. Access may depend on administrative procedures, information, available support, and opportunities for representation. National inclusion cannot be inferred from citizenship alone where members encounter substantial barriers to common institutions. At the same time, inequality in participation must not be attributed automatically to national identity: income, location, institutional design, and other factors may account for observed differences. Identity-related mechanisms require independent examination.

Symbolic recognition concerns the distribution of authority over the national story. Historical continuity can provide a resource for common attachment when different contributions and interpretations are legitimate. It becomes restrictive where a selected history is converted into exclusive ownership of national authenticity. Recognition is therefore more demanding than adding minority names to a fixed account of the nation. It includes examining whose experience can alter public narratives and whose interpretation is treated as belonging to the community (Smith, 1991; Wimmer, 2013).

Communicative access addresses the relationship between common language practices and effective membership. A shared public language can facilitate communication and participation. Whether a language requirement becomes exclusionary depends on its purpose, proportionality, support, and application. A requirement linked to a particular institutional function differs from an inaccessible test of national loyalty. Analysis must consider both the value of common communication and the distribution of the costs required to obtain access, including relevant opportunities for learning and accommodation.

Contestability concerns the possibility of revising boundaries and representations. Inclusive arrangements allow members to question interpretations of identity without their membership becoming suspect merely because they disagree. Consultation, complaint procedures, public debate, and institutional review can provide channels for such challenges. Their significance depends on whether

those channels enable meaningful revision rather than simply expressing disagreement. A national identity may retain substantial historical continuity while remaining open to reinterpretation; change need not imply the abandonment of common membership.

Table 2

Institutional and symbolic conditions of inclusive national belonging

Dimension	Inclusive condition	Risk of restriction	Possible empirical evidence
Membership and equal standing	Members are recognized without inherited tests of national authenticity	Legally equal members are ranked by ancestry or cultural pedigree	Membership rules, public categories, and experiences of recognition
Effective participation	Common institutions and opportunities for representation are accessible	Formal entitlements coexist with substantial barriers to access or influence	Access experiences, administrative practices, and participation barriers
Symbolic recognition	Historical narratives permit different contributions and legitimate interpretations	A single group monopolizes the national story; minority recognition remains tokenistic	Curricula, commemorations, museums, media, and narrative revisions
Communicative access	Language requirements are functionally relevant and supported by feasible learning and accommodation	Unassisted or disproportionate requirements operate as gatekeeping devices	Institutional requirements, learning support, and service accessibility
Contestability	Members can meaningfully challenge and revise restrictive rules and interpretations	Dissent over identity is treated as doubtful membership; review has little effect	Consultation, complaint procedures, public debate, and policy changes

Note. Authors' synthesis of citizenship, boundary, and recognition scholarship (Habermas, 1998; Kymlicka, 1995; Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Wimmer, 2013; Yuval-Davis, 2006). These dimensions are proposed analytical criteria, not a validated numerical index.

The five dimensions should be interpreted together. Symbolic recognition may remain superficial when participation is inaccessible, while common institutions may lack legitimacy when their members are represented as culturally subordinate. Communicative support can improve access without resolving ancestry-based judgments of authenticity. Conversely, a plural narrative may coexist with legal or administrative closure. Table 2 identifies the conditions and evidence relevant to these differences. It does not aggregate them into an unvalidated numerical index or assume that improvement on one dimension compensates for exclusion on another.

Mixed configurations require safeguards

The third result concerns the status of the proposed hybrid-synthetic approach. Combining civic institutions with ethnocultural continuity describes a mixed configuration. Such a configuration can support common attachment, but its consequences depend on arrangements that protect equal standing, meaningful participation, and legitimate difference. The presence of civic vocabulary does not establish these protections, and the presence of a culturally rooted national narrative does not preclude them. What requires explanation is the relationship between the elements, including the authority to interpret and revise their meaning (Kymlicka, 1995; Müller, 2007).

The framework thus treats mixed identity configurations as a conditional synthesis. Historical continuity provides resources of attachment; civic institutions establish common membership; participation and recognition connect these resources to the people who inhabit the political community. Contestability addresses conflicts between them. Where those connections preserve unequal standing, a mixed identity may reproduce exclusion. Where they provide accessible and revisable membership, the same broad combination can acquire a more inclusive character. These are propositions about configurations, not conclusions about the inevitable direction of national development.

Recent empirical research illustrates the need for this conditional assessment. Crepaz (2024) examines German responses to hypothetical immigrants and identifies the coexistence of civic expectations and racialized distinctions. The significance for the framework is that a stated commitment to rules can operate alongside unequal judgments of belonging. The study does not establish the prevalence of such mechanisms across all political communities, but it demonstrates why a civic criterion should not be accepted as evidence of open boundaries without examining its application.

Bracic's (2022) review locates ethnic exclusion across several social domains, including practices that are presented as integration. Fediunin (2023) examines nativist distinctions in Russia that can affect citizens and internal migrants as well as foreign nationals. These analyses show why legal membership and substantive recognition require separate investigation. Medvetskaya et al. (2025) associate cognitive flexibility with more inclusive identity profiles in a cross-sectional sample of English-speaking White Canadians. This association suggests a possible individual-level mechanism; it neither establishes a causal effect nor demonstrates that inclusive attitudes are translated into accessible institutions.

Discussion

Reconsidering the civic-ethnic dichotomy

The framework supports a more precise use of the civic-ethnic distinction. Civic and ethnocultural elements remain relevant because they identify the grounds on which belonging is justified. Their value diminishes when they become moral labels that classify one type as necessarily open and the other as necessarily restrictive. Political theory should specify the elements invoked, the institutions applying them, and the people whose standing is affected. This specification preserves the explanatory value of cultural and political content while allowing their consequences to remain open to investigation.

Modernist theories are especially instructive in this respect. The same practices that organize shared communication and common institutions can narrow the range of publicly authorized languages and histories. Gellner's (1983) explanation of standardization therefore cannot serve as a general theory of inclusion. Anderson's (2006) imagined community likewise raises questions about the boundaries of the community being imagined. Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) account of tradition directs attention toward its production and political use without establishing that invented traditions always integrate or always exclude. The framework evaluates those effects through institutions and recognition rather than through the age or constructed character of an identity.

Ethno-symbolism contributes an explanation of the resources through which attachment becomes historically meaningful. Its relevance need not imply that the majority's interpretation of history is final. A distinction must be maintained between continuity as a source of identification and continuity as an exclusive claim over the state. The former can support shared political membership; the latter can justify unequal standing. The relation between them depends on the narratives and institutions through which historical resources are used (Smith, 1991, 1998).

A related question concerns the meaning of social cohesion. Wamsler (2023) distinguishes dimensions of trust and shows that the relationships between national identity and trust differ according to whom trust encompasses. Attachment that supports cooperation among established insiders may not extend equally to strangers or less familiar groups. Kaplan's (2022) separation of identity and solidarity is useful here: a shared designation is not an adequate measure of cooperative relations. Claims that a national model increases trust must identify the groups included, the type of trust considered, and the institutional conditions being compared.

Stable identity content also complicates a simple account of continual reconstruction. Mader and Schoen (2023) find substantial, though imperfect, stability in membership criteria and relate that stability to political attitudes in their study context. A dynamic historical conception of nationhood can therefore coexist with relatively persistent individual criteria. The framework accommodates this difference by separating changes in public narratives from changes in institutions and personal understandings. An inclusive reform may alter an official representation without immediately changing perceptions of who counts as a full member.

Equality, continuity, and legitimate difference

The framework also clarifies why common institutions and historical-cultural continuity should not be treated as a simple trade-off. Cultural meanings can support solidarity without making membership dependent on ancestry. Constitutional equality can acquire emotional significance through public institutions, symbols, and experiences of participation. The relevant issue is whether differently situated members can regard those institutions as their own and whether they can shape the narratives through which common membership is represented (Kymlicka, 1995; Miller, 1995; Müller, 2007).

An inclusive national story does not need to assign identical experiences to every group. It can recognize different relationships to the territory, its institutions, and its history. Such recognition becomes politically meaningful when it permits members to contest their representation and contribute to the common narrative. Public symbols may retain historical origins while acquiring shared meanings. Their inclusiveness cannot be judged solely from their origin or from official claims that they belong to everyone; it requires attention to recognition and participation.

Equal standing also does not require that every institutional distinction be removed. The exercise of a public role can reasonably require particular skills, including language competence relevant to that role. The problem arises when a requirement exceeds its institutional purpose, lacks accessible support, or functions as a proxy for ancestry or cultural authenticity. Evaluating those conditions makes the analysis more precise than describing a state-language policy as inherently inclusive or inherently discriminatory. It also helps distinguish problems that require language support from problems that involve the structure of political recognition.

Historical representation can provide a resource for inclusion rather than a necessary source of closure. Jamróz-Dolińska et al. (2023) examine representations of Poland's multiethnic past and their relationship to preferences for civic nationhood. Their findings offer a bounded example of how a historical narrative can widen the imagined community. They do not establish that any commemoration of diversity will produce the same response, or that attitudinal effects translate directly into institutional participation. For the framework, the relevant issue is how historical content is interpreted and connected to membership.

Other research highlights the material and local conditions of belonging. Ķešāne (2024) examines the socio-emotional relationship between people and the state in Latvian emigrant narratives, indicating that national pride cannot be explained solely through ethnic or civic criteria. Wilmers (2023) analyzes the local construction of national narratives in Kazan and Ekaterinburg, showing that public actors and institutions can sustain and complicate central accounts of the nation. These studies support examining recognition and participation across different settings instead of assuming that national identity is transmitted uniformly from a single centre.

Kazakhstan as an illustrative context

Kazakhstan scholarship demonstrates why identity-related categories require careful separation. Dave (2007) situates ethnicity and language within the history of Soviet and post-Soviet institutional change. Isaacs and Polese (2016) bring together analyses of nation-building practices across the post-Soviet space. Rees and Webb Williams (2017) examine Kazakhstani identification in relation to ethnicity, language, and citizenship. These works address different questions and materials. Together they justify examining those variables separately rather than assuming that Russian-language use establishes Russian ethnicity or that civic identification replaces ethnocultural attachment.

Recent Kazakhstan studies extend this discussion. Sadvokassova et al. (2025) examine societal perceptions of nation-building through survey and interview material; Sadvokassova et al. (2026) focus

on ethnic minorities' perceptions and attitudes. The analyses arise from a related research programme and should not be treated as independent replications demonstrating a national model's effectiveness. They indicate that evaluations of nation-building and forms of identification require attention to variation between groups. Positive assessments of state initiatives do not, by themselves, establish uniform civic identification or equal experiences of belonging.

The institutions through which identity is represented are also heterogeneous. Insebayeva and Insebayeva (2022) analyze the ambiguity of national symbols and their relationship to nation-building and political legitimacy. Burkhanov and Sharipova (2024) examine historical narratives in school textbooks, including the persistence and reinterpretation of inherited approaches. Boman and Mussakhanova (2024) identify parallel trajectories in Kazakhstan's curriculum rather than a single educational account of the nation. These works make symbolic recognition and communicative access relevant objects of inquiry, but curricular coexistence is not evidence that every group experiences the same institutional access.

Maulen et al. (2025) place nation-building within ethnodemographic change, demonstrating the importance of considering the historical and social setting in which identity policies operate. The framework does not infer a direct causal relationship between demographic shifts and exclusion from this contextual analysis. Instead, it asks how changing conditions interact with institutional arrangements, representations, and the meanings attributed to membership.

Isaacs (2026) offers a recent methodological critique of civic-ethnic categorization in studies of Kazakhstan, foregrounding everyday practices, mobility, hybridity, and multilingual belonging. The present framework is compatible with that call for greater attention to lived and differently situated national attachments. Its more specific contribution is to organize membership, participation, recognition, communicative access, and contestability into linked diagnostic questions. It consequently treats hybridity as an established descriptive issue whose institutional implications need to be specified, rather than as a newly discovered solution.

The five dimensions provide a way to organize these interpretations. An inquiry into membership would examine who is recognized as a full national member. Participation would address access to institutions and opportunities to influence them. Recognition would consider how national narratives represent different histories. Communicative access would assess language requirements and support in particular domains. Contestability would examine whether participants can challenge restrictive interpretations. These questions concern identifiable institutional arrangements and experiences; they avoid portraying the country as uniformly inclusive or uniformly exclusionary.

The distinction between historical research and current conditions is important. Findings about a particular phase of nation-building do not establish the present legal status of a language, the contemporary distribution of participation, or current public attitudes. An assessment of those matters would require appropriately dated legal texts and empirical evidence. The purpose of the illustration here is to show how apparently competing accounts can be examined through shared dimensions, not to deliver a comprehensive evaluation of Kazakhstan's national identity policies.

Conditional propositions and future investigation

Four propositions follow from the framework. They specify relationships for later investigation and should be assessed against alternative explanations and contextual variation.

P1. Where equal legal membership is accompanied by accessible institutions and recognized national standing, members of minority groups are more likely to report national belonging than where equality is expressed principally through formal statements. Institutional access and recognized standing should be assessed separately from reported belonging. Relevant comparisons would also account for income, location, and other influences on participation.

P2. Public-language requirements are more likely to enable participation when they are proportionate to institutional functions and accompanied by accessible learning opportunities and appropriate accommodation. Requirements that impose substantial unassisted access costs are more likely to operate as restrictive boundaries. Testing this proposition requires examining specific domains rather than treating all language policy as a single intervention.

P3. Historical-cultural continuity is more likely to coexist with perceived recognition as a full national member when national narratives permit different contributions and legitimate interpretations. When the same content is treated as an ancestry-based ownership claim, unequal recognition becomes more likely. Analysis should distinguish official narratives, institutional representation, and the experiences of people whose histories are represented.

P4. Mixed configurations are more likely to produce substantive revisions of restrictive membership rules or representations where members have meaningful opportunities to challenge them. Where those opportunities are blocked, combining civic language with ethnocultural content can preserve unequal standing. Evidence would need to show whether consultation and review processes lead to substantive revision, rather than merely recording their formal existence.

These propositions are not independent predictions about every political community. They identify connections that may be strengthened, weakened, or redirected by economic inequality, institutional capacity, demographic change, and political mobilization. Their investigation could combine policy analysis, institutional comparisons, interviews, and surveys that distinguish self-identification from perceived recognition and access. Longitudinal designs would be particularly useful for examining how boundaries change and whether revisions reach the people whose standing they are intended to improve.

Measurement should reflect these distinctions. Bui (2024), using qualitative interviews and vignettes, draws attention to contextual variation in the interpretation of national identity and cautions against equating reported attitudes with behaviour. König (2024) and Mader and Mußotter (2026) likewise make the differentiation of identity constructs important for comparison. Future studies should separate how people define legitimate membership, how strongly they identify, whether they feel recognized, and what institutional opportunities they can exercise. A combined score that obscures these relationships would reproduce the conceptual problems the framework is intended to address.

Scope and practical implications

The framework offers a practical vocabulary for examining identity policies without selecting a preferred national model in advance. Policymakers and researchers can ask whether a particular arrangement establishes equal standing, provides effective participation, permits plural recognition, supports communicative access, and allows restrictive boundaries to be challenged. An arrangement may perform differently across those dimensions. Making the differences explicit is more informative than relying on a general claim that a policy is civic, multicultural, nationalizing, or hybrid.

Several limits remain. The review is selective, and the dimensions are an analytical synthesis rather than a validated measurement instrument. Sources examine different populations and institutional contexts, so the discussion does not estimate a common effect size. The four propositions also require evidence capable of distinguishing identity-related barriers from other forms of disadvantage. Future work should test the dimensions' explanatory value, refine their operational definitions, and consider whether additional mechanisms are needed in particular settings.

The framework's value consequently rests on analytical precision. It relates national attachment to the institutions and representations through which people exercise membership. It preserves the significance of historical and cultural continuity while specifying the conditions under which that continuity can be shared. It also treats civic equality as something to examine in practice, rather than as a property established automatically by a state's declared principles.

Conclusion

This critical conceptual review distinguishes the content of national identity from the openness of national membership. Civic and ethnocultural elements explain how belonging is justified, while inclusion requires attention to the rules, institutions, and representations through which membership is exercised. Theories of nation formation therefore cannot be assigned automatically to inclusive or exclusive political models.

The article proposes five dimensions for assessing these relationships: membership and equal standing, effective participation, symbolic recognition, communicative access, and contestability. Their integration provides a framework for examining mixed identity configurations without presuming that

the coexistence of civic institutions and historical-cultural narratives prevents exclusion. The practical implication is to identify particular barriers and conditions for participation rather than evaluate national belonging through a single label.

Kazakhstan scholarship illustrates the relevance of separating citizenship, language, ethnicity, and perceived belonging. It supplies contextual interpretations rather than empirical validation of the proposed framework. Four conditional propositions specify relationships that future research can examine through institutional comparisons and evidence of members' experiences.

The review's contribution is a diagnostic synthesis, not a claim to have discovered or demonstrated a universally superior hybrid model. Subsequent research should refine the dimensions, test their explanatory value, and establish how national boundaries change across institutions and social groups. Such work can clarify when cultural continuity supports shared membership and when it becomes a basis for unequal standing.

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Author contributions

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