

## **Multiparty system without ideology in Kazakhstan: Analysis of ideologems, “Law on Political Parties” and specifics of mass consciousness**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines Kazakhstan's multi-party system, analyzing the ideologies of existing parties, political party legislation, and the specifics of political culture in the republic. The authors claim that modern Kazakh political parties lack distinct ideological foundations, as they have not formulated clear ideological positions. The ideological function of the country's parties has weakened due to the previous leadership's emphasis on maintaining parties in power without fostering genuine ideological diversity, such as right- or left-wing parties. Surveys conducted by the Institute of Philosophy, Political Science, and Religious Studies in May–June 2021 and May–June 2022 highlight the characteristics of mass political consciousness in Kazakhstan. A survey of 3,000 respondents revealed that, both before and after the events of Sanguinary January 2022, the stance of state authorities played a decisive role in shaping political views. Additionally, strict requirements for creating and registering political parties reinforce the political status quo. The ideologies promoted by the authorities fail to address the interests of various social groups and remain disconnected from public concerns. According to sociological surveys, contemporary issues are often overlooked in favor of narratives centered on the Soviet or traditional past. As a result, the existing multi-party system does not provide ideological representation for either loyalist or protest sentiments.

**Keywords:** *Atrophy of ideological function, ideologems, party system, political culture, parties of power.*

### **Introduction**

At present, a substantial body of scientific research and practical developments exists on the study of Kazakhstan's multiparty system. Scholars such as Starr (2006), Del Sordi (2012), Bowyer

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(2008), Karmazina (2008), Baipakov (2023), and Bader (2011) examined various aspects of political party development in the country. Del Sordi and Bader examined the role of political parties and state authority within the broader political landscape of Central Asia. Since the 1990s, the conceptual framework introduced by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) has been widely applied by political scientists studying party systems in post-Soviet states, including Kazakhstan. However, in our view, the four socio-political cleavages identified by Lipset and Rokkan—between town and country, church and state, center and periphery, and labor and capital—are of lesser importance in Kazakhstan's context. A distinctive feature of certain post-Soviet countries, such as Russia and Kazakhstan, is the emergence of new social classes, a phenomenon effectively described by Kardonsky (2017) in relation to groups like security services and budget-dependent employees. However, the fading ideological content of Kazakhstan's political parties between 1990 and 2020, as well as the reasons for the divergence of their ideological orientations, remains an underexplored issue.

This article aims to address this gap in knowledge by analyzing the underlying causes of the fading ideological content in Kazakhstan's political parties. Understanding these factors will provide insight into the prospects for the development of a multiparty system in the country. At present, ideological orientations such as Islamist, Marxist, liberal, traditionalist, nationalist, internationalist, and pro-Russian views are largely absent from the party landscape. This stands in contrast to the 1990s, when parties and movements openly proclaimed communist, Marxist, and national-patriotic ideologies.

The issue of political revival became essential following the events of Sanguinary January 2022 (Tolen et al., 2023). In the aftermath, numerous questions regarding ideological content emerged, including: What kind of parties do Kazakhstani citizens need? Should party representatives be communists, liberals, socialists, traditionalists, nationalists, internationalists, or do citizens not concern themselves with the ideological positions of political parties? This discussion remains unresolved, and the final direction will be determined through a practical analysis of the country's political landscape.

The authors raised the following issues: How has the state affected the multiparty system? What explains the actions of N. Nazarbayev and K. Tokayev in promoting ideological narratives? Why has the ideological function of political parties become atrophied? What are the characteristics of mass political consciousness in Kazakhstan?

The article's structure reflects the key issues concerning the role of the state and the developmental stages of Kazakhstan's multi-party system. The Literature Review section is divided into two subsections, highlighting substantial works on multi-partyism and the ruling party that have emerged since the mid-1990s. The Materials and Methods section outlines the methodologies used to analyze data from sociological surveys. The Findings section is structured into three subsections, examining multi-partyism in the early 1990s, developments following the events of January 2022, and the characteristics of mass political consciousness among Kazakhstan's citizens. Finally, the Discussion section explores various perspectives on multi-partyism and the existing ideological propositions.

### **Literature Review**

#### ***Multiparty system after adoption of the Constitution in 1995***

In the early years of Kazakhstan's independence, priority was given not to consolidating standards and procedures that could ensure constitutional stability and electoral system consistency but rather to maintaining interethnic balance, which became the foundation of the program and policy of the *People's Congress of Kazakhstan*. Meanwhile, the establishment of private ownership of the means of production was a key aspect of the program of the relatively minor *Social Democratic Party of Kazakhstan*. A survey conducted in March 1996 by the *Institute for Development of Kazakhstan*, involving 2,910 respondents from all regions, confirmed that public opinion in the mid-1990s reflected a trend toward authoritarianism, favoring a statist-egalitarian political model (Babakumarov et al., 1996).

The study conducted by the Giller Institute in 1995, based on an analysis of 1,500 interviews and a nationally representative sample, determined that Kazakhstan's approach to governance contributed more to an authoritarian regime than a democratic one. Attitudes toward power structures were highly contradictory. According to Gurevich, drawing on the 1995 sociological study, President Nazarbayev had an approval rating of 80.5%, yet 19.5% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction, demanding a better quality of life from the government. In other words, Kazakhstanis supported the president not because their lives had improved under his leadership, but because they feared conditions might worsen under a different leader (Gurevich, 1996). The study also noted the political incompetence of citizens in advocating for their interests. It highlighted a general underestimation of the role of legislative and representative institutions, as

well as flaws in electoral legislation and practices. The correlation between democratic conviction and electoral activity was particularly telling: as democratic beliefs increased, voter participation decreased (Gurevich, 1996; Iskindirova et al., 2024). This suggests that while citizens recognized democratic ideals, their ability to leverage the electoral process to their advantage was limited, reducing their participation in political processes and diminishing their effect on government decisions (Baikulova et al., 2024).

Organizational and political instability was a defining characteristic of Kazakhstani political parties in the 1990s, as most did not outlive their leaders. In many cases, parties did not require a clear ideology, functioning instead as "pressure groups" that leveraged their status to lobby for specific interests. For example, the "Republican Political Party of Labor" (RPPL) emerged from the "Union of Engineers of the Republic of Kazakhstan," while "The Justice Party" was established based on the "Union of Motorists of Kazakhstan." This pattern applied not only to such interest-driven groups but also to centrist parties like the "People's Congress of Kazakhstan," which dissolved after its leader, Suleimenov, left for a diplomatic post in Italy, concurrently serving in Greece and Malta in 1995. Similarly, the loyalist "Party of People's Unity of Kazakhstan" (PPUK) and the "Democratic Party Kazakhstan" (DPK) eventually merged into the "Otan" party. Unlike these short-lived entities, Nazarbayev as a leader remained politically dominant, outlasting both PPUK and Otan. Over time, the ideological and electoral functions of political parties faded. The ideological function was largely replaced by adherence to the publicly expressed views and policies of the president, while the effectiveness of the electoral function increasingly depended on government administrative resources, particularly in conducting national and local elections after 1995.

Kazakh political scientist Mashanov identified this issue, claiming that while the formation of a multiparty system had technically occurred, the party system itself had not yet stabilized. He claimed that the absence of a true multiparty system was evident in the continued characteristics of existing parties, which functioned more as proto-parties in terms of institutionalization and as "pressure groups" in their interaction with society (Mashanov, 1996). The executive branch of government capitalized on this situation to tighten control over the formation and development of political parties. A presidential decree issued in March 1995 required all parties to obtain permission from local authorities to hold meetings and demonstrations, effectively discouraging unregistered parties from continuing their activities due to the risk of fines and short-term arrests.

The benefits of minimal competition for the regime were clear, as it reduced electoral uncertainty, ensured full control over legislatures, and increased confidence in the regime's long-term stability (Bowyer, 2008).

During the 2004 election campaign for the Mazhilis (the lower house of Parliament), party positioning regarding the policy and personality of the President led to the formation of a right-and-left-wing bloc consisting of the left-wing Communist Party and the right-wing Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan. According to official data, this bloc failed to surpass the 7 percent electoral threshold. Meanwhile, protests emerged concerning vote counting in favor of pro-government candidates. Since 1995, such instances have become part of what is termed "managed democracy," effectively allowing state interference in the electoral process. In 2002, Ertisbaev, a political advisor to Nazarbayev, articulated the concept of "Managed Democracy." The core idea was that democratization in Kazakhstan should proceed under strict state supervision, with the government setting the pace, defining its parameters, and imposing "red flags" to intercept and neutralize opposition agendas (Ismagambetov, 2018).

At that time, three main methods were used to regulate party activities: 1) registration requirements, 2) legislative changes regarding party membership thresholds, and 3) appointing former members of *Nur Otan* to leadership positions in opposition or other loyal parties. The *Political Parties* law (1996) reinforced a permissive principle for party activity, allowing registration for any party with at least 3,000 members. However, in 2002, a new law replaced it, requiring all existing parties to undergo re-registration. Of the 19 officially operating parties as of July 1, 2002, only seven successfully completed the process. Some parties failed to meet the required membership threshold and were dissolved, while others refused to comply. Viewing the 2002 law as undemocratic, the *Republican People's Party of Kazakhstan*, founded by former Prime Minister Kazhegeldin, and the democratic *Azamat* party both refused to re-register and ceased operations (Buluktaev, 2013). The third method, appointing former *Nur Otan* members to leadership positions in other parties, was evident in *Ak Jol* (2011), which transformed into a pro-presidential party under Peruashev. This practice continued in 2015 when two pro-presidential parties, *Patriots* and *Auyl*, merged into the *People's Patriotic Party Auyl*. At an extraordinary congress on September 5, 2015, Ali Bektaev was elected chairman of *Auyl*, having been a *Nur Otan* member until September 2015, just as A. Peruashev had been until July 2011. From 1996 to

2002, the state restructured the party landscape twice, considerably reducing the number of opposition parties.

The appointment of *Nur Otan* members to leadership positions in other political parties occurred without resistance, avoiding splits but revealing ideological indifference and contributing to the atrophy of ideological functions. *Otan* was founded in 1999 and, by 2006, absorbed several loyal parties, transforming into *Nur Otan*. A clear indication of this ideological decline can be seen in the erosion of the *Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan* (CPPK). While formally adhering to Marxism-Leninism, segments of the *Communist Party* also expressed loyalty to the presidential government, leading to an internal split and the creation of CPPK in April 2004. The case of CPPK shows how loyalty to the regime was prioritized over ideological commitments, ultimately weakening its ideological foundation. This trend continued ahead of the parliamentary elections in January 2021 when CPPK abandoned its former symbols, distanced itself from Marxism-Leninism, and rebranded as the *People's Party*, further diminishing its ideological distinctiveness. The activity of the oppositional *Communist Party of Kazakhstan* was officially terminated in 2015 by a court decision. The formal justification was a discrepancy in the party's membership count, with the Ministry of Justice stating that the actual number of members was 38,000 instead of the declared 58,000, despite legislation at the time permitting a membership of fewer than 40,000. Prior to its closure, the party had already faced multiple suspensions and had undergone re-registration three times (Ageleuov, 2015). The weakness of ideological commitment was also evident in the positioning of the *All-Nations Social Democratic Party* (ANSDP), which identified as a center-left social democratic party but failed to actively promote the principles of democratic socialism, instead serving as a nominal opposition. By 2015, Kazakh political parties were distinguished less by their ideological positions and more by their stance toward the President's policies and leadership.

After the events of January 2022, Nazarbayev's party, *Nur Otan*, shifted its allegiance to President Tokayev without any internal debate and was later rebranded as *Amanat*. In general, the traditional political classification of *left-wing – center – right-wing* is not applicable to modern Kazakhstan, as most parties lack clear ideological principles and are primarily distinguished by their stance toward the President's policies (Buluktaev, 2013; Nyshanbayev et al., 2024).

### ***The President and Party of power***

In 1997, Kazakh scientists Arynov and Mashanov described the role of an intermediary between the authorities and the people, emphasizing the need to bridge the gap between their interests in both social and economic development (Arynov & Mashanov, 1997; Bokayev et al., 2025). This gap had already been identified in the Giller Institute study (Gurevich, 1996) and was further confirmed in a 2021 poll, which measured public trust in various government institutions. The results showed that 37% of respondents trusted the President, while 23% did not, and 40% were partially trusting. For the Government, 29% expressed trust, 31% distrust, and 40% partial trust. Trust in Parliament was recorded at 26%, with 34% expressing distrust and 40% partial trust. Similarly, local representative bodies elected by the people received 25% trust, 35% distrust, and 40% partial trust, while local government authorities had 27% trust, 33% distrust, and 40% partial trust (Amrebaev & Eshpanova, 2022).

The role of the party of power has been analyzed by various foreign scholars. Bader examined the late 1990s, emphasizing that the primary function of hegemonic parties in authoritarian regimes is to eliminate political competition. Beyond this, he highlighted another key function: stimulating popular engagement with the regime, noting that authoritarian systems operate with varying degrees of public involvement (Bader, 2011). Italian researcher Del Sordi argued that Nazarbayev's regime leveraged economic conditions to consolidate control over the party landscape, positioning "Nur Otan" as a party of power. She noted that Nazarbayev's slogan, "First the economy, then politics," encapsulated the Lee thesis, using economic growth as a justification for delaying political reforms. In interviews, "Nur Otan" members frequently defended this gradualist approach, prioritizing economic development over immediate political change. Del Sordi suggested that Nazarbayev sought a direct and controlled source of legitimacy, reducing his reliance on elite factions, and that the Soviet legacy played a role in shaping this ruling party model (Del Sordi, 2012). Similarly, Starr described the party of power as an instrument of presidential dominance, arguing that elections and parties served as corrective tools, engaging the public with presidential programs while ensuring that controlled elections maintained the leader's authority and the elite agreements underpinning it (Starr, 2006). The authors of this research propose that, following the events of January 2022, President K.-Zh. Tokayev initially maintained a dominant role in managing the "Amanat" party but soon distanced himself by stepping down as its leader.

### **Materials and Methods**

This study employed various analytical methods, utilizing data from sociological studies conducted by the Institute for Development of Kazakhstan and the Giller Institute in 1995-1996. A survey conducted in March 1996 by the Institute for Development of Kazakhstan, involving 2,910 respondents from all regions, confirmed a public inclination toward authoritarianism, favoring a statist-egalitarian political model. Additionally, the Giller Institute's 1995 study, based on 1,500 interviews, highlighted the electorate's limited capacity to effectively promote political interests through participation.

The surveys conducted by the Institute of Philosophy, Political Sciences, and Religious Studies in May-June 2021 and May-June 2022 reflect the value orientations and characteristics of mass political consciousness among Kazakhstanis before and after Sanguinary January 2022. The study's validity is ensured by the representativeness of the nationwide sample, which included 3,000 respondents aged 18 and older. Covering 14 regions and three cities of republican significance—Astana, Almaty, and Shymkent—the survey employed a face-to-face methodology. The hypothetical-deductive method was employed to present analyzed statements as hypotheses and verify their validity. The comparative method determined that Lipset and Rokkan's theory of societal cleavages is inapplicable to the structure of Kazakh society. Civic monitoring conducted by Public Foundation "Strategy" recorded an increase in protest sentiments between 2013 and 2021. The historical method and logical analysis highlighted the peculiarities of relations between the state, political parties, and ideological orientations of the public since the early 1990s. The historical method was applied in the periodization of multi-party system development, using criteria such as the degree of freedom in establishing and legally operating parties and their ideological diversity. The frequent application of the historical method in opinion polls (2021-2022) demonstrated its relevance, as public sentiment often referred to the Soviet and pre-Soviet past. However, despite the presence of protest sentiments, they did not lead to the revival of the ideological function of existing parties, presumably due to a reinterpretation of political concerns directed toward historical narratives rather than present realities.



## Findings

### *Multiparty system in the country in the early 1990s: Unfulfilled hopes*

The period from 1985 to 1990 was described by Karmazina (2008) as the genesis of political parties and sociopolitical movements, including the ripening of prerequisites for the emergence of political parties within the one-party system (1986-1987). Following this, popular fronts came to the fore, and proto-party systems began to emerge (1987-1990). The period from 1990 to 1993 reflected atomized party pluralism. The collapse of the Soviet Communist Party's ideological monopoly became evident in 1989, immediately after the repeal of Article 6 of the USSR Constitution, which had affirmed its leading and guiding role. Between 1990 and 1991, the first political parties formed with differing views on ideology. For example, the Social Democratic Party of Kazakhstan (SDPK) and the Communist Party maintained ideological foundations, whereas others, such as the Socialist Party, showed disinterest in defining a clear ideological stance. However, the early 1990s presented a favorable environment for the formation of a multiparty system. The People's Congress of Kazakhstan not only demonstrated programmatic intentions to establish interethnic harmony but also actively worked to reduce interethnic tensions at the local level (Bekturganova et al., 1996). Despite this, the authorities viewed the willingness of various ethnic groups to coexist peacefully as a positive but controlled trend rather than as an impetus for broader political pluralism.

The entire party spectrum was represented in the political space between 1991 and 1994. Left-wing parties included communists and socialists, while the People's Congress of Kazakhstan positioned itself in the center, and the People's Unity of Kazakhstan represented the right-wing orientation. The subsequent period from 1995 to 2000 was characterized by the dominance of parties formed under the influence of the top leadership, leading to the weakening of left-wing and centrist parties. From 2001 to 2003, the trend of forming such parties continued, culminating in 2004, when the primary objective of these parties became securing a parliamentary majority. During this time, the term "pro-presidential parties" gained official recognition (Buluktaev, 2013). In the early 1990s, during the initial formation of the multiparty system, several trends emerged: (1) the development of party ideologies in Kazakhstan, (2) the rise of a national-patriotic spectrum that lacked a clear organizational program due to limited trust and internal misunderstandings among its leaders, and (3) a strong alignment with the political course and leadership of President

Nazarbayev, whose ideological postulates ultimately served as a foundation for state loyalty rather than distinct party doctrines.

The first two tendencies began to emerge at the end of 1989, leading to the establishment of the Association of Independent Public Organizations of Kazakhstan (AIPOK) in 1990. This association included groups such as Green Salvation, the international historical and educational human rights society Memorial, and the party Zheltoksan, all of which had formed in the late 1980s and were among AIPOK's founding members. The third tendency became evident during the crisis of the Soviet political system and was reflected in N. Nazarbayev's book *Without Right-Wing and Left-Wing Parties*, where the title itself signifies his intent to consolidate government authority around himself and his aversion to political debate. In the book, Nazarbayev directly expressed his negative stance on calls to divide Kazakhstani society along political lines, emphasizing the futility of political debate (Nazarbayev, 1991). His rise to the post of First Secretary of the Kazakh branch of the Soviet Communist Party in June 1989 further reinforced this consolidation of power. According to Brzezinski's *Classification of Stages of Democratic Transformations*, Kazakhstan has not reached the final stage of democratization, unlike post-socialist avant-garde countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, where democratic institutions have become self-sustaining, multiparty systems have stabilized, and democratic norms have been entrenched in political and legal culture (Brzezinski, 1993). In those countries, constitutional and electoral reforms were adopted through roundtable negotiations in 1989–1990, ensuring consensus-based democratic transitions. Drawing on the classical sociological theories of Robert Michels, it can be argued that Kazakhstan demonstrated a high degree of cohesion around a charismatic leader in the early 1990s, with little room for a rationalist approach. This dynamic considerably weakened the electoral process and parliamentary role, as consensus-building often replaced parliamentary mechanisms—sometimes tacitly and other times through highly visible and tangible means, even if not statistically recorded (Malinkin, 1994).

### ***Mass political consciousness of Kazakhstanis in the sociological mirror***

The philosopher Burova, based on a survey of 3,000 respondents conducted in May–June 2021 (Table 1), concluded that among democratic values, the most highly valued by Kazakhstanis were respect for dignity and human rights (36.6%) and freedom of choice (20.8%). Conversely, the least valued—or those not fully appreciated or understood—were the rule of law (20%), political

pluralism (7.0%), the principle of separation of powers (6.6%), multiculturalism (5.8%), and respect for minority rights (3.2%) (Isabaeva, 2024).

**Table 1**

*The Most Demanded Democratic Values in the Republic of Kazakhstan*

	Democratic values	Percentage ratio (%)
1	Respect for dignity and respect for human rights	36.6
2	Freedom of choice	20.8
3	The rule of law	20
4	Political pluralism	7.0
5	Principle of separation of powers	6.6
6	Multiculturalism	5.8
7	Respect for minority rights	3.2
Total		100

*The table is compiled by the authors of the article based on research materials from the Center for Political Studies at the Institute of Philosophy, Political Sciences, and Religious Studies under the Committee of Science of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022 and is published for the first time.*

It should be noted that European democratic values ranked last when respondents selected values with unifying potential and importance for Kazakhstan (Table 2). According to survey results from 3,000 respondents in May-June 2022, the most frequently chosen values were: universal human values (20.8%), national cultural values (14.3%), common historical fate (10.6%), belonging to the same language group (10.6%), one social group (10.2%), one ethnic group (9.6%), political, economic, and social tasks of building a "new" Kazakhstan (10.3%), Islamic values (9.02%), and European democratic values (4.58%).

**Table 2**

*Values with Unifying Potential in the Republic of Kazakhstan*

	Unified values according to the respondents	Percentage ratio (%)
1	Universal human values	20.8
2	National cultural values	14.3
3	Common historical fate	10.6
4	The same language group	10.6
5	The same social group	10.2
6	The same ethnic group	9.6
7	Political, economic, social tasks of building a "new" Kazakhstan	10.3

8	Islamic values	9.02
9	European democratic values	4.58
Total		100

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Table 3 presents the results of a survey conducted among 3,000 respondents in May-June 2022, aimed at assessing the influence of various factors on the formation of political views among the population of the Republic of Kazakhstan. A total of 5,526 responses were recorded, as respondents were allowed to select up to three answers. The percentage distribution was calculated based on the total number of responses.

**Table 3**

*Factors Possessing A Decisive Impact On Formation Of Public Political Views*

	Factors	Number of answers	Percentage ratio (%) determined taking into account the number of answers (3 answers were allowed)
1	Policy of the official authorities	1453	26.3
2	Views of my family members	1199	21.7
3	Speeches by public figures or informal leaders	811	14.7
4	Views of my colleagues at work/places of study	653	11.8
5	Works and speeches of writers, poets, cultural figures	502	9.1
6	Speeches of opposition politicians	489	8.8
7	Difficult to answer	374	6.8
8	My own views	21	0.4
9	Nobody/nothing	14	0.3
10	Not interested	9	0.1
11	Islamic values	1	0.0
Total		5526	100

*The table is compiled by the authors of the article based on research materials from the Center for Political Studies at the Institute of Philosophy, Political Sciences, and Religious Studies under the Committee of Science of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022 and is published for the first time.*

The survey results show that the official government's policies play the most important role in shaping the political views and overall political outlook of Kazakhstan's residents. Additionally, the findings confirm that Islam has little to no influence on the country's political landscape.

Researchers Amrebaev and Eshpanova, referencing the 2021 survey, highlight that the alienation of the masses from politics and power remains a defining feature of the political consciousness of Kazakhstanis, significantly limiting the constructive potential of the "New Kazakhstan" initiative (Amrebaev & Eshpanova, 2022). This detachment is largely due to the dominance of traditional worldviews in the collective consciousness. For the older and partially middle generations, the past is synonymous with truth, justice, and established order, while the new era represents uncertainty, danger, and risk. This retrospective orientation fosters a conservative model of behavior, which often gravitates toward the Soviet-era ideals of social justice, the political visions of Alashorda leaders, the philosophical teachings of Abai and his followers, or even further back to the times of khans, beeis, and Kazakh batyrs, who sought justice and fought against external adversaries.

Moreover, Amrebaev and Eshpanova highlight that the post-Nazarbayev political elite tends to focus on Kunaev as a "role model," portraying him as a figure of exceptional modesty, asceticism, and service to his people. This perspective is reinforced by survey results indicating that the President enjoys the highest level of trust among state authorities (Amrebaev & Eshpanova, 2022).

The authors suggest that contemporary issues and challenges are being reinterpreted through past models, relying on outdated ideas and approaches from the previous century. This stagnation in political thought, combined with the slow progress in forming national unity, creates a deadlock that only fuels growing protest sentiments. The continued reliance on historical frameworks, rather than fostering innovative political ideologies and party development, ultimately contributes to the broader stagnation of Kazakhstan's political landscape. Kazakh sociologist G. Ileuova notes that, according to statistics from the first half of 2021, a considerable portion of the population had very low-income levels and, consequently, low consumer potential, which resulted in a general sense of lethargy. In a survey involving 1,080 respondents assessing the country's ongoing processes, the findings revealed a considerable decline in support for government actions, dropping threefold to just 13%. Additionally, 40% of respondents expressed only partial trust in the government (Shekunskih, 2021).

Based on the above, it can be concluded that the structure of social hierarchies influences the perception of ideological concepts. Baranova claims that ideology can gain mass political traction if certain conditions are met: 1) a unifying idea must transcend individual and group interests, and

2) the idea must be tangible and not distant, as long-term perspectives tend to reduce public interest. She also believes that the dominance of attributed status over achieved status leads to societal fragmentation and regression, with social mobility restricted within the boundaries of attributed status. Furthermore, Baranova concludes that the politicization of Kazakhstan's stratification system makes social integration and consolidation highly problematic (Baranova, 2000). The prevalence of attributed status criteria is further evident when examining class structures described by Russian sociologist Kordonski, whose framework, according to the authors of this study, is applicable to Kazakhstan's context. Kordonski claims that society can be best understood through estates rather than classes, ethnic groups, or general social groups, as estates are state-created entities. In this model, the entire social hierarchy is structured by the state, making it both comprehensible and predictable. This hierarchy includes civil servants, military personnel, law enforcement officers, judges, professionals, pensioners, workers in state corporations and private enterprises, businessmen, and state employees, all of whom, to varying degrees, are shaped by state policies (Kordonski, 2017).

Today, state employees and law enforcement officers exhibit the most visible features of social estates, even though they did not belong to separate groups in Soviet society. When a substantial portion of society is divided into de facto estates, it becomes difficult for each group to transcend its own interests, which in turn inhibits the emergence of unifying ideological concepts (Baranova, 2000). For an idea to serve as a true consolidating force, it must surpass group and individual interests, as political alignment often follows ideological adherence. However, the detachment of Kazakh political parties from ideology has its own underlying causes. The resulting ideological vacuum is often filled with superficial rhetoric rather than substantive ideological frameworks. A prime example is the ruling party, *Nur Otan*, which, while eschewing a clear ideological foundation and avoiding public debate, has repeatedly claimed adherence to a range of ideologies—patriotism, social democracy, liberalism, and even social conservatism. These shifting alignments were described as "flexibility and sensitivity" by the party's first vice-chairman, Kaletaev, in 2009. He believed that adopting either a conservative or liberal stance at different times had allowed *Nur Otan* to navigate post-reform challenges effectively (Kaletaev, 2009). However, despite these justifications, the party has yet to develop a coherent ideological strategy, making it appear to the public as a loosely assembled group of individuals granted party status due to past political maneuvers rather than a movement with a defined vision or purpose.

It should be acknowledged that the various ideological narratives circulating in Kazakhstan's political discourse—such as improving quality of life, modernization in social, economic, and political spheres, sustainable development, achieving global competitiveness, transitioning to an innovation-driven economy, and regional leadership—are not actively pursued as core objectives by political parties. As a result, their emotional and mobilizing potential remains limited (Shaukenova, Dunaev, 2013). Following the events of January 2022, an attempt was made to revive multiparty democracy, leading the government to simplify the process of registering political parties. Currently, only 5,000 members are required to establish a new political association, and the electoral threshold for entering the Mazhilis has been reduced from 7% to 5% of the vote (Nitchenko, 2023). An important political development occurred in March 2024 when President Tokayev personally articulated a series of ideological principles and strategic guidelines shaping Kazakhstan's emerging national ideology. He consolidated key ideological tenets and fundamental values aimed at guiding the country toward a prosperous future. Among them, he emphasized Independence and Patriotism, Unity and Solidarity, Justice and Responsibility, Law and Order, Diligence and Professionalism, and Creativity and Innovation. The president further stressed that by adhering to these ideological foundations, Kazakhstan could secure its rightful place in the rapidly evolving and unpredictable landscape of the 21st century (Tokaev, 2024).

### ***Multiparty system after January 2022 Events***

By the end of May 2022, twenty-one applications for the registration of new political parties had been submitted to the Ministry of Justice, marking an unprecedented surge in legal political activity since the turbulent 1990s. The process of forming new parties had initially begun in 2019 but considerably accelerated in early 2022 (The Party Boom 2022). By early 2023, two newly registered parties, “Republic” and “Baitak,” joined the existing political landscape, which already included “Amanat,” “Ak Zhol,” “People’s Party,” “People’s Patriotic Party Auyl,” and the “All-Nations Social Democratic Party.” Among them, “Auyl” was generally regarded as a loyalist party, while the “All-Nations Social Democratic Party” was considered opposition-oriented but politically passive, having declined to participate in the 2021 parliamentary elections. All these parties competed in the March 2023 elections for the lower house of Parliament (Majilis), except for “Baitak,” which did not secure participation.

“Amanat” emerged as the clear winner of the elections, securing 53.9% of the vote, which translated into 40 of the 69 parliamentary seats. Additionally, the party won 22 out of 29 parliamentary seats in single-mandate constituencies, resulting in a total of 62 seats (63.3%). Although this result was lower than what “Nur Otan” had previously achieved, it was still sufficient to dominate the legislature (Trocenko, 2023). Meanwhile, the party “People's Congress of Kazakhstan,” led by public figure Suleimenov, only completed its primary registration on January 31, 2023 (Forbes.kz, 2023). Alzhanov claimed that the formation of fully-fledged, well-organized, and ideology-driven parties remains impossible under the current system of political control in Kazakhstan. He claimed that most parties are created at the directive of higher authorities and function as empty shells lacking genuine political substance due to the absence of democratic procedures (Kistkina, 2022). This perspective was indirectly confirmed by Karin, the Secretary of State of Kazakhstan, who acknowledged the ideological vagueness of political party programs in 2022-2023. He noted that existing parties failed to reflect the needs of society and that a genuinely diverse political landscape had yet to emerge. Most new parties lacked a defined social base and real political platforms, relying instead on populist rhetoric derived from social media trends, often leading to internal contradictions (Karin, 2022). Analyzing the period from 1999 to early 2022, the authors emphasize that President Nazarbayev’s endorsement played a crucial role in shaping ruling parties and fostering Kazakh identity as a means of consolidating power and integrating the populace into government initiatives (Shauenov, 2001). However, this form of consolidation was primarily socio-psychological rather than rooted in government effectiveness. Loyalist parties were unable to reinforce the ideological and normative legitimacy of the government due to the ongoing atrophy of ideological functions within Kazakhstan’s political system.

## **Discussion**

### ***Ideologems and search for a state ideology***

Different viewpoints do not directly confront each other in opposition, which can be attributed to the strategy of the ruling power to keep opponents on the periphery of the political process while maintaining the formal appearance of political pluralism within political parties. Schatz (2009) argues that this approach enabled pro-regime actors to accuse opposition figures of having foreign



ties while simultaneously creating the illusion that criticism of the regime was tolerated and that political pluralism existed in Kazakhstan. His perspective is compelling.

Alzhanov and founder of the "Free Kazakhstan" project (Almaty), noted that there was no real political struggle or fair elections in the country. Beisebaev, organizer of the civic movement "Trust of the People," highlighted that the party registration system was excessively bureaucratic, creating numerous obstacles at each stage for initiators seeking to establish a political party (Kistkina, 2022). For instance, even before holding a constituent congress, a party was required to register its initiative group. Beisebaev also emphasized the necessity of a full political spectrum, including left-wing and right-wing parties, liberals, and conservatives. Meanwhile, the Secretary of State of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Karin, highlighted that during 2022-2023, most initiative groups lacked a defined social base and a concrete political platform for the formation of new parties (Karin, 2022).

The atrophy of ideological guidelines was accompanied by increasing control over the party field by President Nazarbayev and state authorities, leading to the consolidation of authoritarianism rather than democracy. The formation of a state ideology became a more pressing issue than fostering party competition and diverse ideological orientations. At that time, the executive power in Kazakhstan was assigned a consolidating role (Baranova, 2000). Researcher Smirnov (2006) described this supra-party approach, emphasizing the formation of a national ideology aimed to protect and realize the vital needs, interests, and potentials of individuals, society, and the state. Ideologems serve as the foundational links in the development of state ideology, shaping the political trajectory of the country. This aligns with the assertions of the current President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, K.-Zh. Tokayev emphasized the role of ideology in ensuring sustainable national development, a perspective noted by public figure Nurmukhamedov (Kistkina, 2023). Publicist Mashaev analyzed the ideologems "New Kazakhstan" and "Second Republic," noting that following the January 2022 events, the authorities introduced "New Kazakhstan" as an ideological construct, filling the existing ideological semi-vacuum. He explained that "Second Republic" carries practical importance with a clear time horizon, as the implementation of the political reforms proposed by the head of state is set for completion within the year (Mashaev, 2022). These reforms led to the removal of Nazarbayev's privileged status as the Leader of the Nation in 2022. Additionally, foreign policy factors have considerably influenced Kazakhstan's socio-political landscape. Sociologist Beisembayev observed that Russia's military operation in

Ukraine, launched on February 24, 2022, accelerated decolonization processes within Kazakhstan, fostering a heightened interest among young citizens in their national identity, history, language, and culture, ultimately strengthening civil identity (Assyltayeva et al., 2024; Isabaeva, 2024; Kilinc et al., 2023). However, the formation of a national ideology requires a value consensus. Expert on international relations Abulgazin emphasizes the necessity of organizational and ideological efforts to build a unified Kazakh society. He argues that the key factors for national consolidation, particularly around the current government, include a total fight against corruption and the formation of a robust civil society (Abulgazin, 2024).

More than 10 years ago, concepts such as "Prosperity of Kazakhstan," "Independence of the country," "Elbasy" (Leader of the Nation), as well as "Man," "Freedom," "Unity," "Justice," "Law," "Family and traditions," and "Aspiration to the future" were identified as the core values of the People's Democratic Party "Nur Otan" during the discussion of the "Doctrine of National Unity" at the XV Congress on October 18, 2013 (Bocharova, 2013). This was the first time that Nazarbayev explicitly articulated a set of values meant to consolidate the nation around the government. However, some of these values, such as "Freedom," "Unity," "Justice," and "Law," in their ideological form, contradicted the traditional impulses of the past, where obedience to authority was unquestioned, and governance followed a rigid top-down structure. The supposed unity between the government and the people existed more in rhetoric than reality. Bowyer (2008) observed that "Kazakhstan's political party landscape is currently dominated by the ruling Nur-Otan party, which controls parliament and public discourse." In contrast, political scientist Masanov critically assessed the real state of affairs, referring to Kazakhstan as a "community" rather than a state and describing the ruling elite as a "tribe." He argued that political positions in this system primarily served as conduits between public office and private interests, with officials focused on rapid career advancement rather than governance. He further noted that the rules of this political competition were largely alien to urban Kazakhs from the north, who were detached from traditional Kazakh culture and clan-based affiliations. According to Masanov, the revival of clan politics in Kazakhstan resembled a "Brezhnev-style thaw," a sentiment he expressed in an interview in August 2001 (Surucu, 2002).

Some of the authors mentioned above, such as Smirnov, prioritize the state's role in shaping ideology as the primary factor, viewing it as essential for national cohesion. Others, like Abulgazin, argue that the ideological propositions advanced by the authorities are insufficient and

lack the necessary depth to unite society effectively. A third group, represented by Mashaev, highlights the practical shortcomings of these ideological frameworks, contending that they fail to foster national consensus due to their vagueness and disconnection from societal realities. Despite these differing perspectives, they collectively illustrate a form of pluralism that does not lead to direct confrontation within any discursive platform, reflecting a controlled and structured political environment.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the conducted research, the authors conclude that state regulation has played a decisive role in determining the number of registered parties, effectively shaping a political landscape where loyal parties dominate. However, these loyal parties, including the party of power, exhibit neither ideological nor organizational stability. Most registered parties tend toward political centrism, aligning with the president's course, which has led to the erosion of the ideological function. Notably, this phenomenon is rooted in a pull toward the past, where the creation of a state ideology served as the foundation for consolidation around the president and government. This process can be described as a "reincarnation of the Soviet past," resembling a time when a single ideology prevailed, and state-driven agitation and propaganda guided citizens toward implementing the directives of the last CPSU congress.

The government must renegotiate the "tacit social contract of the Brezhnev era" under new conditions, ensuring a tolerable standard of living not through increased labor productivity but through the distribution of petrodollars. The authors argue that the government's approach to problem-solving without citizen participation epitomizes a "politics without right-wing and left-wing parties." In contrast, combating corruption can only be achieved through active civic engagement, where individuals recognize their interests as members of specific social groups. However, increased citizen participation would mark the end of the supra-party national ideology described by A. Smirnov, which aims to protect and fulfill the essential needs, interests, and potential of individuals, society, and the state. Kazakhstani voters can demonstrate political competence when guided by clear interests that contribute to political stability and interethnic harmony. Incompetence, on the other hand, becomes evident in parliamentary and local elections, where citizens struggle to advocate for their interests as representatives of particular social groups.

Addressing this issue requires an understanding of the factors shaping political ideas. The social structure and value orientations of Kazakh society do not lend themselves to the development of class-based ideologies but instead offer the potential for achieving a value consensus. Therefore, it is essential to consider ideologems emerging from "below," such as demands for the elimination of corruption and nepotism. Many ideologems formulated through top-down ideological construction in modern Kazakhstan have not materialized. Those imposed from above remain disconnected from the public consciousness, with unclear prospects for implementation, as they fail to address everyday concerns and diminish public interest—further exacerbated by poor education quality, the absence of social mobility, and inadequate guarantees for the protection of citizens' rights.

The competition among various social and political forces, along with their mobilization into action, becomes inevitable only through the ideological revival and active political movement of current parties, the presence of socio-political debates, and the crystallization of distinct party ideologies. If these conditions are met, starting with the establishment of a value consensus, the process of ideological construction can be activated, revitalizing the ideological function of political parties. Ideological legitimacy can be built on this value consensus, while normative legitimacy should be reinforced through the effective functioning of political parties and representative institutions. When these institutions operate effectively, they can, in turn, enhance the government's overall effectiveness. The analysis of the ideological function of parties, their relationship with the state, and the transformation of a multiparty system into a stable party system remains a promising avenue for further research, particularly in comparative post-communist studies. One of the main objectives of this study was to identify the factors preventing the revival of an ideological function within Kazakhstan's political landscape. The authors conclude that the ruling party possesses untapped potential, but in order to realize it, it must break free from the oversight of Akorda's political technologists. Otherwise, the rigidity and inflexibility of the state apparatus will inevitably transfer to party functionaries, further stifling political dynamism. The demand for ideological diversity within political parties remains unmet, as the overarching development goals and societal ideologies have yet to be clearly articulated.

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