



RECONSIDERING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NATIONAL AND CIVIC IDENTITY: THE CASE OF UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: *This article examines the relationship between national and civic identity through the lens of contemporary political science theories and the experience of Uzbekistan. The study aims to identify the characteristics of the formation, transformation, and integration of national and civic identities in Uzbekistan. Using constructivist, institutional, and discursive approaches, the article explores the theoretical foundations of identity. It argues that in contemporary Uzbekistan, national and civic identities are not contradictory but complementary political and social categories. The author proposes the concept of “inclusive national-civic identity” as a theoretical model for strengthening civic cohesion while preserving ethnocultural diversity.*

Keywords: *identity, national identity, civic identity, nation-building, political integration, civil society, Uzbekistan.*

Introduction

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the issue of identity emerged as one of the central subjects of inquiry in political science, sociology, and international relations. Processes such as globalization, migration, the expansion of transnational communications, and the rapid development of digital technologies have significantly transformed traditional mechanisms of individual identification. Under these conditions, states face complex challenges related to preserving national cohesion, strengthening civic loyalty, and ensuring social integration.

The relevance of the identity question is particularly evident in the case of post-Soviet states. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the newly independent states simultaneously experienced processes of nation-building and the formation of new civic communities. Consequently, the relationship between national identity and civic identity became one of the key determinants of political development.

Uzbekistan has likewise pursued policies aimed at restoring national statehood, revitalizing historical memory, and strengthening national self-awareness since the early years of independence. At the same time, ensuring the harmonization of interests among various ethnic groups residing in the country and fostering nationwide civic solidarity have remained important policy objectives. In recent years, within the framework of the “New Uzbekistan” concept, particular attention has been devoted to the development of civil society institutions, the promotion of the rule of law, and the enhancement of citizens’ political participation.

These developments necessitate a reconsideration of the relationship between national and civic identities. While classical theories have often portrayed these two forms of identity as mutually opposed, contemporary political practice demonstrates the emergence of new models based on their integration and complementarity.

The primary objective of this study is to reassess the relationship between national and civic identity from both theoretical and practical perspectives, drawing upon the experience of Uzbekistan, and to develop a conceptual model based on their mutual integration.

The study pursues the following objectives:

- to analyze the theoretical foundations of the concept of identity;
- to identify the distinctive characteristics of national and civic identity as analytical categories;
- to examine the stages of development of identity policy in Uzbekistan;
- to assess the contemporary relationship between national and civic identities;

- to develop an inclusive model of identity adapted to the socio-political conditions of Uzbekistan.

Research Methodology

This study employs contemporary methodological approaches widely used in political science research.

First, a systems approach is utilized to examine national and civic identity as integral components of the relationships among the state, society, and the individual.

Second, the comparative analysis method is applied to investigate and contrast the experiences of Western countries, post-Soviet states, and Uzbekistan in the formation and development of identity.

Third, discourse analysis is employed to examine key political narratives and concepts, including “national revival,” “New Uzbekistan,” “Uzbekistani identity,” and “the unity of the people and the state,” in order to identify their role in shaping contemporary identity constructs.

Fourth, an institutional approach is adopted to analyze the political institutions and normative-legal mechanisms that influence the formation and development of identity within society.

Theoretical Foundations of the Concept of Identity

The concept of identity was first introduced into academic discourse by the psychologist Erik Erikson, who defined identity as the process through which an individual perceives and understands oneself as a member of a particular social community.

Subsequently, the issue of identity gained significant prominence in political and social sciences. Contemporary political science has developed three major theoretical paradigms for understanding identity:

Primordialist Approach

Primordialists view nations and identities as natural communities rooted in historical, ethnic, and cultural foundations. Proponents of this approach argue that language, religion, culture, and historical memory constitute the core elements of national identity.

Modernist Approach

Scholars such as Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson interpret the nation as a product of modernization. According to Anderson's theory of *Imagined Communities*, the nation is not a natural entity but rather a political and cultural construct created through shared narratives, symbols, and collective imagination.

Constructivist Approach

Constructivists conceptualize identity as a socially constructed phenomenon that is continuously produced and reproduced through social interaction. From this perspective, identity is shaped and maintained through political institutions, educational systems, mass media, and political discourses.

Among these paradigms, the constructivist approach provides the most appropriate methodological framework for analyzing the case of Uzbekistan. This is because, in the post-independence period, identity has been deliberately cultivated and developed as one of the key directions of state policy. Through political institutions, educational reforms, cultural initiatives, and public discourse, the state has played a significant role in shaping both national and civic forms of identity.

Literature Review and Theoretical Debates

The relationship between national and civic identity represents one of the most complex theoretical issues in contemporary political science. The major scholarly traditions addressing this topic offer different interpretations of the interconnections among the concepts of nation, state, and citizenship.

Within the framework of ethnosymbolist theory, Anthony D. Smith emphasizes the crucial role of historical memory, myths, symbols, and collective culture in the formation of modern nations. According to Smith, although national identity is

shaped within a modern political context, it cannot be entirely detached from its historical and ethnic foundations. In this regard, the experience of Uzbekistan partially confirms Smith's argument, as references to Amir Temur, the Jadid reform movement, traditions of ancient statehood, and national heritage became central elements of state identity policy during the years of independence.

Benedict Anderson conceptualizes the nation as an "imagined political community." According to Anderson's theory, members of a nation perceive themselves as belonging to a single community despite never personally knowing most of their fellow members. This collective imagination is constructed through educational institutions, mass media, and state symbols. In the case of Uzbekistan, the national flag, coat of arms, national anthem, Constitution, and nationwide public celebrations serve as important instruments for strengthening a shared sense of political community.

Ernest Gellner regards the nation as a product of industrialization and modernization. In his view, modern states seek to create a unified national space through common educational systems and standardized cultural frameworks. The development of a unified education system and the promotion of the state language in post-independence Uzbekistan may be interpreted as practical manifestations of this theoretical perspective.

Rogers Brubaker approaches nationhood and identity not as static categories but as forms of political practice. His framework allows identity to be understood as a continuously reproduced political process rather than a fixed social reality. This perspective provides an important methodological foundation for analyzing the evolution of the concepts of "Uzbek" and "Uzbekistani" within the socio-political context of Uzbekistan.

The theory of "constitutional patriotism" advanced by Jürgen Habermas is particularly significant for understanding the problem of civic identity. Habermas argues that in modern democratic states, the principal source of social cohesion is

not ethnic affiliation but rather citizens' commitment to shared constitutional values and political institutions. This approach is especially relevant for multinational and ethnically diverse societies.

Overall, contemporary theoretical perspectives suggest that no rigid boundary exists between national and civic identity. Rather, these forms of identity can function as complementary mechanisms that mutually reinforce one another under specific political, social, and historical conditions. Consequently, the key analytical challenge lies not in opposing national and civic identities, but in understanding the institutional and discursive mechanisms through which they can be integrated within a coherent framework of political community.

The Evolution of Identity Policy in Uzbekistan

First Stage (1991–2016): Restoration of National Statehood and Historical Memory

During the initial years of independence, the primary objective of state-building in Uzbekistan was the restoration and consolidation of the historical foundations of national statehood. In this context, identity policy was predominantly oriented toward strengthening national consciousness and reconstructing a coherent narrative of the nation's historical development.

The main priorities of identity policy during this period included:

- the reinterpretation and reassessment of national history;
- the revival of the legacy of Amir Temur and the Timurid dynasty;
- the strengthening of the status of the Uzbek language as the state language;
- the restoration and promotion of national values;
- the preservation and development of national culture, traditions, and customs.

These policies contributed significantly to the consolidation of national identity and the reinforcement of collective historical consciousness. However, the development of civic identity remained a relatively secondary concern, as the

primary focus was placed on nation-building and the affirmation of cultural and historical distinctiveness.

Second Stage (2016–Present): Civic Integration and Inclusiveness

Since 2016, the processes of political modernization in Uzbekistan have entered a new phase characterized by a stronger emphasis on civic participation, institutional reform, and inclusive governance.

Within the framework of the “New Uzbekistan” concept, particular attention has been devoted to:

- prioritizing the interests and well-being of citizens;
- strengthening the accountability of state institutions to the public;
- promoting the development of civil society institutions;
- enhancing interethnic harmony and social cohesion;
- expanding the principles of openness, transparency, and public accountability.

As a result, the political and institutional foundations of civic identity have become increasingly consolidated. Contemporary identity policy seeks not only to preserve national cultural heritage but also to foster a shared sense of citizenship that transcends ethnic, linguistic, and cultural differences.

Today, the concept of “*Uzbekistani*” (*o‘zbekistonlik*) is increasingly employed as a category expressing common civic solidarity and belonging. This notion reflects an emerging model of inclusive identity in which loyalty to the state, commitment to shared civic values, and participation in the political community complement rather than replace national and ethnic affiliations.

The Relationship Between National and Civic Identity

In contemporary political science, the relationship between national and civic identity is commonly explained through three major theoretical models.

Model 1: The Conflict Model

According to the conflict model, the strengthening of national identity inevitably leads to the weakening of civic identity, and vice versa. From this perspective, national and civic identities are viewed as competing sources of political loyalty and collective belonging.

Although this model has been advocated by some Western scholars, the experience of Uzbekistan does not fully support such an interpretation. Empirical developments suggest that the reinforcement of national consciousness has not necessarily hindered the formation of a broader civic community.

Model 2: The Parallel Development Model

This approach assumes that national and civic identities develop independently of one another and follow separate trajectories. National identity is associated primarily with cultural, linguistic, and historical factors, whereas civic identity is linked to citizenship, political participation, and legal membership in the state.

However, practical experience demonstrates that the boundaries between these two forms of identity are rarely rigid. In most societies, national and civic identities interact continuously and influence one another through political, social, and cultural processes.

Model 3: The Integrative Model

The integrative model argues that national and civic identities can coexist and complement one another, forming a unified system of identification. Rather than being mutually exclusive, these identities are regarded as interconnected dimensions of belonging within a political community.

The experience of Uzbekistan appears to correspond most closely to this model. Citizens may simultaneously maintain their ethnic identities while identifying themselves as members of a common civic community. Thus, individuals may perceive themselves as:

- ethnic Uzbeks;
- Karakalpaks;

- Kazakhs;
- Russians;
- Tajiks;
- Koreans;

while at the same time identifying as “*Uzbekistani*” (*o‘zbekistonlik*), that is, as equal citizens sharing a common political space and a common civic destiny.

This integrative understanding reflects the emergence of an inclusive model of identity in which ethnic, cultural, and historical affiliations coexist with civic loyalty, political participation, and commitment to the constitutional and institutional foundations of the state. Such a model contributes to social cohesion and political stability in a multicultural society by promoting unity without requiring the abandonment of cultural diversity.

Author’s Conceptual Framework: The Model of Inclusive National–Civic Identity

Based on the findings of this study, a theoretical model of **Inclusive National–Civic Identity** is proposed for the case of Uzbekistan.

The proposed model consists of the following interrelated components:

1. Historical Memory;
2. National Culture;
3. State Citizenship;
4. Constitutional Values;
5. Civic Responsibility;
6. Social Solidarity;
7. Political Participation.

The integration of these elements enables individuals to simultaneously possess both ethnocultural and political forms of identity. In this framework, national belonging and civic affiliation are not viewed as competing categories but rather as complementary dimensions of a unified identity structure.

The principal advantage of the model lies in its capacity to strengthen common civic solidarity while preserving ethnic and cultural diversity. Consequently, it provides a theoretical basis for achieving social cohesion in multicultural societies without undermining the distinct identities of individual ethnic communities.

The proposed concept may be expressed through the following formula:

$$\text{INCI} = \text{HM} + \text{NC} + \text{SC} + \text{CV} + \text{CR} + \text{SS} + \text{PP}$$

Where:

- **INCI** – Inclusive National–Civic Identity;
- **HM** – Historical Memory;
- **NC** – National Culture;
- **SC** – State Citizenship;
- **CV** – Constitutional Values;
- **CR** – Civic Responsibility;
- **SS** – Social Solidarity;
- **PP** – Political Participation.

According to this model, inclusive national–civic identity emerges from the cumulative interaction of historical, cultural, political, and institutional factors. The stronger the integration among these components, the more sustainable and inclusive the collective identity of the political community becomes.

Scientific Novelty

The scientific novelty of this research is reflected in the following contributions:

First, a new political science approach to understanding the relationship between national and civic identity in the context of Uzbekistan has been developed.

Second, the interaction between national and civic identity has been reconceptualized through the lens of an integrative paradigm, moving beyond traditional dichotomous interpretations.

Third, a conceptual model of **Inclusive National–Civic Identity** has been proposed, providing a theoretical framework for analyzing identity formation in contemporary multicultural states.

Fourth, the contemporary political meaning of the concept of “*Uzbekistani*” (*o‘zbekistonlik*) has been interpreted from the perspective of modern identity theories, highlighting its role as a category of inclusive civic belonging.

Fifth, drawing upon the experience of Uzbekistan, an identity policy model applicable to other post-Soviet states has been developed, offering both theoretical and practical insights for strengthening social cohesion and civic integration in diverse societies.

Conclusion

The issue of national and civic identity constitutes one of the most significant theoretical and practical challenges of political development in the twenty-first century. In the context of globalization, digital transformation, international migration, and the expansion of transnational communications, states face not only the task of modernizing political institutions but also the challenge of uniting citizens around a common political community. Consequently, identity has become a central concept in contemporary political science, as it is closely linked to state stability, political legitimacy, and social integration.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the relationship between national and civic identity should be understood not through the traditional paradigm of opposition, but rather through a paradigm of integration and mutual complementarity. Such an approach provides a more adequate explanation of contemporary identity formation processes in increasingly diverse and interconnected societies.

The theoretical analysis revealed that the interaction between national and civic identity is shaped by a combination of historical, political, and cultural factors. While the primordialist perspective emphasizes the ethnocultural foundations of

national identity, modernist and constructivist theories highlight its political and institutional dimensions. Furthermore, Habermas's concept of constitutional patriotism explains civic identity as one of the principal mechanisms of integration within modern democratic states.

The study examined the evolution of identity policy in Uzbekistan through two historical stages. The first stage (1991–2016) was characterized by efforts to consolidate the foundations of national statehood, restore historical memory, and strengthen national self-awareness. The second stage (from 2016 to the present) has been marked by increased attention to the development of civil society institutions, the promotion of transparency and accountability in public administration, the prioritization of citizens' interests, and the reinforcement of nationwide civic solidarity.

The analysis indicates that national and civic identities in Uzbekistan should not be viewed as competing categories. On the contrary, they are developing as interconnected mechanisms that contribute to the formation of a unified political community. In particular, the growing use of the concept of "*Uzbekistani*" (*o'zbekistonlik*) within political discourse reflects the consolidation of a broader civic identity that complements rather than replaces ethnic and cultural affiliations.

The principal scientific outcome of this research is the development of the concept of **Inclusive National–Civic Identity**. According to this model, identity in contemporary Uzbekistan is formed through the integration of the following components:

- historical memory;
- national culture;
- state citizenship;
- constitutional values;
- civic responsibility;
- social solidarity;

- political participation.

The proposed model demonstrates that sustainable social cohesion in a multicultural society can be achieved through the harmonious combination of ethnocultural belonging and civic commitment. It therefore offers a conceptual framework for understanding identity formation in Uzbekistan and provides a basis for further comparative research on identity policies in post-Soviet and other multiethnic states.

Overall, the study concludes that the future development of Uzbekistan's political community depends not on the predominance of either national or civic identity, but on their successful integration within an inclusive and democratic framework of collective belonging.

The proposed model makes it possible to strengthen common civic solidarity while preserving ethnocultural diversity. In this regard, it possesses not only theoretical significance but also practical relevance for multinational and multicultural societies seeking to maintain social cohesion without diminishing cultural plurality.

The findings of this study suggest that the experience of Uzbekistan represents a relatively successful example of an integrative approach to identity policy among post-Soviet states. This experience demonstrates the possibility of simultaneously strengthening national statehood and fostering civic solidarity through inclusive political and institutional mechanisms. Consequently, the Uzbek case may serve as an important theoretical and practical reference point for other states seeking to develop effective strategies for identity management, nation-building, and social integration.

Practical Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Educational curricula should be expanded to promote the harmonious integration of national and civic identity at all levels of the education system.
2. Higher education institutions should consider introducing a specialized course entitled “*Civic Identity and Contemporary Statehood*” in order to enhance students’ understanding of citizenship, political participation, and national development.
3. Youth policy initiatives should be strengthened through the implementation of projects aimed at promoting the shared civic identity embodied in the concept of “*Uzbekistani*” (*o‘zbekistonlik*).
4. The proportion of media content dedicated to the promotion of national unity, civic solidarity, and inclusive citizenship should be increased across both traditional and digital media platforms.
5. Institutional mechanisms that encourage civic integration and social cohesion in the sphere of interethnic relations should be further developed and improved.
6. The role of civil society institutions as a bridge between the state and society should be strengthened in order to enhance public participation and democratic engagement.
7. A system of regular sociological monitoring of identity-related issues should be established to assess trends in national and civic identity formation and to provide evidence-based support for policymaking.

These recommendations may contribute to the development of a more inclusive identity framework in Uzbekistan and provide practical guidance for strengthening social cohesion, civic participation, and political stability in contemporary multicultural societies.

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