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RECONSTRUCTION AND MODERNIZATION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY AS CATALYSTS FOR STATENESS: A POST-SOVIET PERSPECTIVE

VIOLETTA MANUKYAN*
PhD in Political Science, Strategic Development Agency (SDA), Armenia

Abstract

This article explores the processes of national identity reconstruction and modernization as pivotal drivers in the formation and consolidation of stateness in post-Soviet contexts. Drawing on comparative case studies from selected former Soviet republics, this study analyzes how national identity narratives have been rearticulated and institutionalized to strengthen state legitimacy, foster political cohesion, and enhance sovereign functionality. Methodologically, the article employs a qualitative, comparative political analysis grounded in interpretive institutionalism and constructivist approaches to identity, integrating discourse analysis of official state narratives, policy documents, and public rhetoric with process tracing of post-Soviet nation-building trajectories. The analysis highlights the interplay between historical memory, cultural policy, and state-building strategies. It argues that the modernization of national identity, when grounded in inclusive civic values and responsive governance, substantially enhances a state's capacity to assert authority and ensure internal stability. By positioning identity not merely as a derivative of statehood but as a strategic instrument in its construction, the article contributes to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underpinning contemporary state-building processes.

Keywords: *Post-Soviet states, national identity, stateness, state-building, identity reconstruction, identity modernization.*

* Dr. Violetta Manukyan is Communications and Public Relations Officer at the Strategic Development Agency (SDA). Her research examines post-conflict state-building, stateness, and sovereignty, with a particular focus on legitimacy and the influence of international organizations on state formation. She is especially interested in how international recognition affects state sustainability.
Email: v.manukyan@sdaoffice.am ORCID iD: 0009-0007-3301-8708

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Introduction

More than three decades after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the fifteen successor states continue to grapple with the legacies of imperial collapse, contested sovereignty, and identity fragmentation. Central to the challenge of post-Soviet transformation is the task of reconstructing and modernizing national identity, a process not simply cultural in nature, but profoundly political. In weakly institutionalized environments, where the boundaries of the nation and the state do not always coincide, identity becomes a pivotal axis through which stateness is either consolidated or eroded. The extent to which post-Soviet states have succeeded in articulating coherent, inclusive, and forward-looking identity narratives correlates strongly with their degree of political stability, legitimacy, and international recognition.[1]

Qualitative studies across the region underscore the instrumental role of identity in state-building. For example, interpretive analyses of elite discourse in Estonia and Georgia demonstrate how historical memory and symbolic institutions are mobilized to reassert sovereignty and national continuity.[2] Process tracing in Armenia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan reveals how national identity policies, ranging from language reform to curriculum development, have been deployed to legitimize political regimes and redefine citizen-state relations.[3] Moreover, empirical work on cultural policy and media control in Belarus and Russia indicates how identity can be constructed in ways that reinforce authoritarian consolidation, often by fusing ethnonationalist rhetoric with statist paternalism.[4]

Quantitatively, cross-national surveys and datasets further illuminate the role of national identity in shaping political outcomes. The World Values Survey (WVS) and European Social Survey (ESS) have demonstrated consistent correlations between strong national identification and trust in political institutions, espe-

[1] Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Henry E. Hale, *Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[2] Eva-Clarita Pettai, *Memory and Pluralism in the Baltic States: National Identity, Culture and History after Independence* (London: Routledge, 2016); Stephen F. Jones, *Socialism in Georgian Colors: The European Road to Social Democracy, 1883–1917* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

[3] Ronald Grigor Suny, "Constructing Primordialism: Old Histories for New Nations," *Journal of Modern History* 73, no. 4 (December 2001): 862–96; Edward Schatz, "Framing the State in Times of Transition: Case Studies in Constitution Making," *Comparative Politics* 32, no. 4 (2000): 459–79.

[4] Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012); Andrew Wilson, *Belarus: The Last European Dictatorship* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

cially when identity is framed in civic rather than ethnic terms.[5] For instance, a 2020 Pew Research Center report found that in Estonia and Lithuania, where identity models are more inclusive and Europeanized, over 65 percent of citizens expressed confidence in democratic institutions, compared with less than 30 percent in countries such as Moldova and Kyrgyzstan, where identity narratives remain fragmented. Likewise, the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset reveals that post-Soviet countries scoring higher on "national identity clarity" also perform better on indicators of regime legitimacy, bureaucratic capacity, and civic engagement.[6]

These findings suggest that national identity is not merely an epiphenomenon of statehood, but a foundational variable in the construction of effective and legitimate governance. However, identity projects differ markedly across the post-Soviet space, ranging from the civic nationalism of the Baltic states to the instrumental multiethnic narratives of Central Asia, the civilizational discourse of Russia, and the trauma-inflected identity politics of the South Caucasus. This diversity underscores the need for a nuanced, comparative approach.

This article argues that the reconstruction and modernization of national identity constitute active and strategic mechanisms in the production of stateness across the post-Soviet region. Through a broad comparative analysis of all fifteen post-Soviet states, supplemented by process tracing in selected cases and a review of quantitative data, the study examines how identity narratives have been (re)articulated since 1991 and evaluates their impact on political cohesion, legitimacy, and state capacity. By situating identity as a core component of statecraft, rather than a byproduct of institutional evolution, the article contributes to the broader political science literature on state formation, legitimacy, and post-imperial transitions.

As already stated, his study employs a broad comparative scope across all post-Soviet states to identify typological variations in identity modernization and stateness. While depth per case is necessarily limited, the systematic inclusion of all fifteen states enables a more robust cross-regional typology, allowing generalizable conclusions about post-imperial state formation.

Conceptualizing Stateness and Identity Modernization: The concept of stateness has long preoccupied scholars of comparative politics and state–building. Scholars such as Charles Tilly, Theda Skocpol, and Joel Migdal have emphasized the centrality of coercion, extraction, and administrative competence in state for-

[5] Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, M*odernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
[6] Michael Coppedge et al., *Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Dataset v13* (Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute, 2023), https://datafinder.qog.gu.se/dataset/vdem.

mation.[7] More recent approaches disaggregate state capacity into coercive, extractive, and administrative dimensions, highlighting the institutional underpinnings of effective governance.[8] Yet in post-imperial contexts, capacity alone cannot secure durability. Legitimacy and societal cohesion are equally necessary. Following Linz and Stepan's seminal work, stateness can be defined as comprising three interlocking dimensions: authority and legitimacy (the recognized right to rule), cohesion (societal compliance and solidarity), and capacity (bureaucratic and administrative competence).[9]

Within this framework, identity modernization refers to the institutional transformation of symbolic repertoires and civic infrastructures that underpin legitimacy, cohesion, and capacity. The modernization of identity is not a superficial matter of rhetoric; it involves embedding new civic norms and competencies into state institutions. This process operates along at least four dimensions:

1. **Symbolic repertoires and memory politics**: updating monuments, toponymy, curricula, and historical canons to reflect pluralist narratives and distance the polity from imperial legacies.
2. **Linguistic and civic competencies**: standardizing language and education systems to enable equal citizenship and effective bureaucratic communication.
3. **Alignment with international norms**: incorporating principles of pluralism, the rule of law, and civic inclusion into identity narratives and policy frameworks.
4. **Depoliticization of indoctrination**: reducing the use of curricula and media for regime legitimation and expanding civic education to foster autonomous trust in institutions.

Datasets such as V-Dem's indicators of indoctrination in education and media (V-Indoc) provide comparative leverage in operationalizing these dimensions.[10] Language and citizenship laws, memory policies (e.g., legislation on monuments and museums), and education standards serve as observable proxies for identity modernization. These reforms are directly linked to the three dimensions of

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[7] Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992); Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Joel S. Migdal, S*trong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

[8] Hillel Soifer, "State Infrastructural Power: Concept and Measurement Proposals," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 43, no. 3–4 (2008): 231–51.

[9] Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 16–37.

[10] Coppedge et al., *Varieties of Democracy (VDem) Dataset v13*.

stateness: civic-inclusive identity supports legitimacy; integrative curricula and memory regimes foster cohesion; standardized language and depoliticized education–media ecosystems enhance capacity by building human capital and compliance.

Thus, identity modernization is theorized not as an ancillary process but as a central mechanism of state consolidation. In post-Soviet Eurasia, where historical legacies of empire, ideology, and multinational governance persist, the stakes of identity modernization are heightened. Choices about language, memory, and curricula are simultaneously symbolic and functional, shaping the very architecture of stateness.

Research Design and Evidence Strategy: The study employs a mixed–methods comparative design, integrating discourse and policy analysis, process tracing of selected cases, and cross–national quantitative analysis. Rather than providing exhaustive case narratives, the analysis focuses on tracing the core mechanisms—language reform, memory politics, education and media transformation, and citizenship policy—through which identity modernization shapes stateness.

1. Discourse and policy analysis: Government documents, laws, curricula, and public statements are examined to trace the evolution of identity reforms after 1991. This includes reforms in language policy (e.g., Kazakhstan's Latinization, Ukraine's language laws), memory politics (e.g., Baltic de-Sovietization, Ukraine's de-communization and de-Russification), and education/media frameworks (e.g., curriculum standards, V-Indoc scores).
2. Comparative process tracing: Cases are selected to maximize variation in identity strategies. The Baltic states represent civic and inclusive models of modernization, closely linked to rapid European integration. Ukraine demonstrates a hybrid trajectory, marked by an accelerated civic turn during and after the wars of 2014 and 2022. Moldova exemplifies ongoing identity contestation, balancing Romanianization, civic integration, and accommodation of Russophone communities. Belarus pursues a dual project of Soviet nostalgia and pragmatic identity management under conditions of authoritarian consolidation. Russia advances a civilizational framing of identity as a key instrument of regime legitimation. In Central Asia, states such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have adopted elite-managed models of identity modernization that retain strong patrimonial features. Finally, in the South Caucasus, the cases of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan reflect divergent orientations, ranging from pluralist to overtly geopolitical conceptions of national identity.

3. Cross-national patterning: Quantitative data are employed to examine correlations between identity reforms and indicators of stateness:
   - V-Dem: Regime legitimation, indoctrination in education/media, administrative capacity indices.[11]
   - World Values Survey (WVS) and European Social Survey (ESS): Indicators of civic identity, institutional trust, and societal cohesion.[12]
   - Pew Research Center surveys: Attitudes toward democracy, identity, and institutions in Eastern Europe and Eurasia.[13]
   - Additionally, the assessment is informed by the author's own "Peace Index",[14] an integral model for assessing stateness across political, economic, social, and security domains.

Recent studies (2022–2025) on wartime identity shifts in Ukraine and Belarus provide additional empirical insights into how crisis contexts catalyze identity modernization and recalibrate legitimacy.[15]

The integration of these methods allows for tracing causal mechanisms within cases, identifying typological patterns across cases, and assessing cross-national correlations. This triangulated approach aims to overcome the limitations of purely qualitative or quantitative studies and to illuminate the complex ways in which identity modernization conditions stateness in post-Soviet Eurasia.

Mechanisms of Identity Policy and Stateness

Identity modernization operates through multiple institutional and symbolic mechanisms that directly influence the three dimensions of stateness: legitimacy, cohesion, and capacity. In post-Soviet contexts, these mechanisms are particularly consequential because the legacies of empire and Soviet institutional design have left states both territorially and socially fragmented. This section examines four interrelated mechanisms: language and orthography reforms, memory and toponymy, education and media, and citizenship and minority policies. Each mechanism illus-

[11] Coppedge et al., *Varieties of Democracy (VDem) Dataset v13*.
[12] World Values Survey, *Wave 7 (2017–2022)*, https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV7.jsp; European Social Survey, *Round 10 (2020)*, https://ess.sikt.no/en/study/172ac431-2a06-41df-9dab-c1fd8f3877e7.
[13] Pew Research Center, "European Public Opinion Three Decades After the Fall of Communism," Pew Research Center, October 15, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/10/15/european-public-opinion-three-decades-after-the-fall-of-communism/.
[14] Violetta Manukyan, "From Conflict to Peace? Stateness Assessment of the South Caucasus Countries at the Crossroads of Political Processes from 2017 to 2022," *Journal of Political Science: Bulletin of Yerevan University* 2, no. 5 (September 2023): 11–33.
[15] Volodymyr Kulyk, "War, Language, and Identity in Ukraine," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 39, no. 1–2 (2023): 1–23.

trates how state strategies to modernize identity translate into measurable effects on authority, societal cohesion, and institutional capacity.

Language and Orthography Reforms: Language standardization serves as a critical tool for enhancing bureaucratic capacity and establishing a shared civic culture. In multilingual polities, standardization must be coupled with accommodations for minority groups to maintain legitimacy and cohesion. In Kazakhstan, the Latinization of the Kazakh alphabet, first announced in 2017 and revised several times, exemplifies how language reform functions as both a nation-building strategy and a geopolitical reorientation toward the global sphere and away from Cyrillic-based post-Soviet legacies.[16]

The delays and repeated revisions in Kazakhstan's reform process reveal the tension between technocratic precision and social inclusiveness that accompanies large-scale orthographic change. Other Central Asian states, including Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, pursued more gradual language modernization, balancing elite-driven symbolic initiatives with local acceptance. The Baltic states demonstrate a contrasting trajectory. Estonia and Latvia prioritized rapid linguistic integration of titular populations while offering structured minority language education to maintain civic legitimacy.[17]

Across cases, empirical evidence from V-Dem's administrative capacity indices indicates that language standardization correlates positively with bureaucratic effectiveness and compliance, provided minority rights are respected.[18]

Memory, Toponymy, and Decolonization: Memory politics anchors legitimacy and delineates the political community through monuments, museums, street names, and canonized histories. These symbolic tools serve not merely as markers of past events but as active instruments shaping contemporary civic cohesion. In Ukraine, the post-2022 acceleration from de-communization to de-Russification, including widespread hodonym changes and removal or re-inscription of imperial and Soviet symbols, demonstrates how external aggression can catalyze civic consolidation and national solidarity.[19]

The Baltic states similarly leveraged memory policy to reinforce post-Soviet sovereignty while aligning with European norms. In Estonia and Lithuania, memorials and public education highlight historical oppression and occupation, fostering a shared narrative that legitimizes contemporary political authority. Conversely, in Russia, memory politics often reinforces centralized civilizational narratives, em-

[16] Aidos Zholdasbekov, "Kazakhstan's Latinization Policy: National Identity and Global Alignment," *Central Asian Survey* 41, no. 2 (2022): 185–205.
[17] Pettai, *Memory and Pluralism in the Baltic States*,
[18] Coppedge et al., *Varieties of Democracy (VDem) Dataset v13*.
[19] Kulyk, "War, Language, and Identity in Ukraine."

bedding imperial continuity in civic consciousness and consolidating regime legitimacy at the expense of pluralist inclusion. Comparative research demonstrates that memory-based identity strategies are most effective in producing cohesive states when narratives are pluralist and forward-looking, emphasizing shared civic values rather than exclusively ethnic or exclusionary interpretations.[20]

Education and Media: Indoctrination vs. Civic Competence*:* Identity is co-produced in classrooms and media platforms. Post-Soviet regimes vary widely in the extent to which education and media are used for civic formation versus political indoctrination. Global datasets such as V-Indoc allow cross-national comparisons of these dynamics, quantifying the politicization of curricula and media content.[21]

Authoritarian consolidators, including Belarus and Russia, tend to embed selective heritage and civilizational frames into textbooks and state broadcasting, reinforcing regime legitimacy but limiting independent civic capacities. Reformist governments, such as in Georgia or Estonia, depoliticize curricula and expand civic values instruction, fostering social trust and resilience.[22]

Empirical correlations indicate that lower levels of indoctrination are associated with higher public trust in institutions and more stable legitimacy. For instance, V-Dem measures of education and media autonomy correlate with higher WVS and Pew measures of institutional trust, particularly in the Baltic states.[23]

Citizenship and Minority Policies: Policies governing citizenship, minority recognition, and language in education are central to the modernization of identity. Inclusive approaches, combining accessible citizenship pathways, minority language rights, and representation in public institutions, are associated with lower levels of identity contestation and higher institutional trust. In Estonia and Latvia, for example, gradual integration of Russian-speaking minorities through naturalization and education reforms has helped stabilize civic cohesion without undermining titular national identity.[24]

By contrast, exclusionary or instrumentalist approaches, such as selective recognition of minority groups or politicized naturalization procedures in Belarus and some Central Asian states, produce short-term regime legitimation but create long-term fragility in cohesion and capacity. Comparative studies indicate that these differences are measurable: V-Dem legitimacy indices and civic identity

[20] Kulyk, "War, Language, and Identity in Ukraine."
[21] Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*,45–67.
[22] Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*,45–67.
[23] World Values Survey, *Wave 7 (2017–2022)*.
[24] European Social Survey, *Round 10 (2020)*.

measures from WVS and ESS show consistent patterns linking inclusive identity policies to stronger societal compliance and institutional trust.[25]

Collectively, these mechanisms demonstrate that identity modernization is not symbolic alone; it is instrumental to state-building. Language reforms enhance administrative capacity; memory and toponymy anchor legitimacy; education and media shape civic skills; citizenship and minority policies govern inclusion and cohesion. The interaction of these mechanisms produces measurable effects on the three dimensions of stateness: legitimacy, cohesion, and capacity. Comparative analysis in the next section links these mechanisms to real-world trajectories across the post-Soviet space.

Comparative Trajectories, Cross-national Patterns, and Migration

The post-Soviet region presents a strikingly heterogeneous set of outcomes in terms of stateness and identity modernization. These divergent outcomes reflect not only initial conditions (e.g., pre-Soviet nationhood, ethno-linguistic composition) but also deliberate policy choices in identity reform, responses to external pressures, and internal regime strategies. While the Baltic states rapidly consolidated both civic identities and European-oriented institutional frameworks, other cases illustrate partial, stalled, or authoritarian trajectories. This comparative mapping highlights how different configurations of language reform, memory politics, and civic inclusion interact with state capacity and legitimacy. These configurations and their resulting trajectories are summarized in Table 1, which consolidates the dominant identity modernization strategies, key mechanisms, and stateness outcomes across all post-Soviet cases.

Baltic States: Rearticulating National Identity through Europe

The Baltic republics represent paradigmatic cases of rapid identity rearticulation. Emerging from the Soviet collapse with strong pre-Soviet national traditions, these states anchored identity reconstruction in narratives of occupation, resistance, and European belonging.[26] Unlike other post-Soviet republics, they possessed prior experiences of sovereign statehood (1918–1940) and retained historical narratives of forced incorporation into the USSR. These memories were rapidly mobilized in the early 1990s to craft legitimacy through discourses of resistance and continuity.[27]

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[25] Pew Research Center, "European Public Opinion."
[26] Graham Smith et al., *Nation-Building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: The Politics of National Identities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
[27] Pettai, *Memory and Pluralism in the Baltic States*.

Estonia's approach to its substantial Russian-speaking minority was emblematic of a hybrid model: stringent language and citizenship laws initially excluded many Soviet-era settlers from full participation, but subsequent reforms under EU accession pressure introduced pathways to integration. The result is a carefully balanced model of "civic exclusivity": rooted in ethno-linguistic core identity but softened by institutional pluralism. V-Dem and ESS data show that Estonia and Lithuania score consistently high in indicators of civic trust, institutional legitimacy, and media autonomy.[28]

European Union accession functioned as both a symbolic and institutional framework for modernization. By embedding identity in 'return to Europe' discourses, Baltic elites framed sovereignty not merely as independence from Moscow but as reintegration into Western institutions.[29] These choices had measurable outcomes: Eurobarometer surveys consistently show higher levels of trust in democratic institutions in the Baltics compared to other post-Soviet states, a reflection of successful civic identity consolidation.[30]

Ukraine: Nationalization of History and Civic Mobilization

Ukraine's identity trajectory is marked by oscillations between ethno-linguistic nationalism and civic inclusivity, often catalyzed by external shocks. The early independence period saw competing identity models: Western Ukrainian elites pushed for ethno-linguistic nationalism, while eastern and southern regions remained culturally and linguistically russified. This fragmentation initially produced weak symbolic cohesion and ambiguous citizenship regimes.[31] Since the early 1990s, state-sponsored memory projects, such as the promotion of the Holodomor as a central historical trauma, have served to consolidate sovereignty and distinguish Ukraine from Russia.[32]

The Orange Revolution (2004) marked the first mass civic mobilization around democratic and pro-European identity, but it was the 2014 Euromaidan uprising and subsequent Russian aggression that fundamentally recalibrated national

[28] Aadne Aasland, "Citizenship Status and Social Exclusion in Estonia and Latvia," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 33, no. 1 (2002); Pew Research Center, "European Public Opinion"; European Social Survey, *ESS Round 9 (2018/2019)*, https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org; Coppedge et al., *Varieties of Democracy (VDem) Dataset v13*.

[29] Piret Ehin, "Political Support in the Baltic States, 1993-2000," *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 7 (2007): 977–1000.

[30] European Commission, *Public Opinion in the European Union: Standard Eurobarometer 98* (Brussels: European Commission, 2023), https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2872.

[31] Gwendolyn Sasse, *The Crimea Question: Identity, Transition, and Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[32] Georgiy Kasianov, "The Holodomor and the Politics of Memory in Ukraine after 1991," in *Mass Starvation: The History and Future of Famine*, ed. Alex de Waal (Cambridge: Polity, 2018), 220–243.

narratives. The state's active promotion of the Holodomor as genocide, along with de-communization and de-Russification legislation, recast identity through a dual lens of historical trauma and civic resilience.[33]

These narratives gained renewed salience after the 2014 annexation of Crimea and subsequent conflict in Donbas, where civic identity became mobilized through grassroots volunteer movements and national defense initiatives.[34] Empirical evidence from the Razumkov Centre, as well as ESS and Pew surveys, shows a significant post-2014 rise in national identification across traditionally Russophone regions, suggesting a redefinition of Ukrainian identity as inclusive and civic, rather than solely ethno-linguistic.[35] The 2022 full-scale invasion accelerated this process: wartime narratives emphasized sacrifice, dignity, and democratic resolve. This "conflict-forged civic nationalism" has contributed to a durable consolidation of stateness under existential threat, a pattern mirrored in comparative literature on war and nation-building.[36]

Belarus: Ontological Insecurity and Identity Ambiguity

Belarus exemplifies a case where identity modernization has been strategically constrained by authoritarian governance. Unlike its neighbors, lacking a strong nationalist movement at the moment of independence, Belarus was largely a passive inheritor of Soviet statehood. President Alexander Lukashenko's regime perpetuated a paternalist narrative of stability, continuity, and Slavic brotherhood with Russia, effectively freezing identity discourse in neo-Soviet terms. It deliberately suppressed independent identity projects, privileging Soviet nostalgia and Russian linguistic dominance.[37] As a result, identity remained fragmented, with limited resonance among younger generations seeking European connections.

However, the 2020 protests following contested elections revealed the latent power of identity rearticulation. Civil society mobilized around pre-Soviet symbols (white-red-white flag, historical anniversaries), articulating an emergent national identity that challenged regime legitimacy.[38] While the ruling regime violently repressed these movements, their symbolic resonance exposed the regime's ontologi-

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[33] Keith Darden, *Resisting Occupation: Mass Schooling and the Creation of Durable National Loyalties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).
[34] Serhiy Kudelia, "The Donbas Rift," *Russian Politics and Law* 52, no. 5 (2014): 5–27.
[35] Razumkov Centre, "National Identity and Civil Cohesion in Ukraine: Trends 2014–2023," https://razumkov.org.ua/en/research-areas/surveys/identity-of-ukrainian-citizens-trends-of-change-may-2023.
[36] Darden, *Resisting Occupation.*
[37] Wilson, *Belarus*.
[38] David R. Marples, "Color Revolutions: The Belarus Case," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 54, no. 1 (2021): 1–14.

cal insecurity—an inability to generate a coherent, future-oriented identity. This fragmentation undermines all three pillars of stateness: legitimacy, cohesion, and capacity.

Belarus illustrates how ontological insecurity—uncertainty over collective self-definition—undermines state legitimacy and leaves stateness vulnerable to crises of representation.

Russia: Toward a New Civilizational Identity

Russia's identity reconstruction has been characterized by contestation between competing models: European integration, post-imperial nationhood, and Eurasian civilizational exceptionalism.[39] In the 1990s, attempts at liberal civic identity were largely eclipsed by institutional collapse and economic turmoil. By the 2000s, the Putin regime forged a new narrative around Eurasianism and civilizational uniqueness. Drawing on historical imperial myths and Orthodox cultural motifs, Russia's identity project positioned it as a global alternative to Western liberalism.

This shift was institutionalized through foreign policy (such as the "Russian World" doctrine), educational reforms (including the standardization of patriotic curricula), and memory politics (exemplified by the glorification of the Soviet victory).[40] The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the 2022 invasion of Ukraine were not only geopolitical acts but symbolic assertions of a revisionist identity. State-controlled media, educational reforms, and religious institutions have been instrumentalized to embed a civilizational identity that legitimizes external expansion and domestic authoritarianism.[41]

While these strategies have consolidated regime control and cultivated mass loyalty domestically, they have also isolated Russia diplomatically and entrenched authoritarian governance. Russia illustrates how identity modernization can take an exclusionary, imperial form that reinforces stateness in the short term but jeopardizes long-term legitimacy and international standing.[42]

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[39] Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*.

[40] Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*; Ronald Grigor Suny, "Living in the Hood: Russia, Empire, and Old-New Nationalisms," in *Nationalism and Democracy in the Welfare State*, ed. Kjell Goldmann et al. (Norwegian University Press, 2021), 55–76.

[41] Andrey Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk, *Russia, Ukraine and the EU: Interactions, Policies and Practices* (London: Routledge, 2015).

[42] Freedom House, *Nations in Transit: Russia*, 2024, https://freedomhouse.org/country/russia/nations-transit/2024.

Central Asian Republics: Elite-Driven Modernization in Multiethnic States

Central Asia's identity projects reflect the legacies of Soviet national delimitation, which produced multi-ethnic republics with contested histories. Central Asia's post-Soviet identity trajectories reflect the complex legacies of Soviet ethno-territorial engineering. Most states inherited borders that did not align with clear ethnic majorities, creating inherent challenges for cohesion.[43]

Kazakhstan has emerged as a partial success story. Under Nazarbayev, the state pursued "Kazakhization" through language and cultural revival policies, but balanced this with explicit recognition of minority rights and a multiethnic narrative.[44] The Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan, for instance, institutionalized interethnic dialogue and representation. Empirical studies suggest this pragmatic approach has underpinned relatively stable statehood and facilitated international partnerships, including with both the West and Russia.[45]

In contrast, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan pursued strongly personalized approaches to identity construction. In Uzbekistan, Tamerlane was elevated to the status of a mythic national founder in school curricula, while in Turkmenistan, state identity became entirely subsumed under the cult of personality. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, marked by civil conflict and weak institutions, have struggled to sustain cohesive identity frameworks, often reverting to localism and patronal politics.[46]

Across the region, identity remains instrumental to regime survival rather than civic cohesion. V-Dem data on indoctrination and rule of law suggest a strong correlation between authoritarian uses of identity and weak bureaucratic performance.[47]

The South Caucasus: Memory, Integration, and Boundaries

The South Caucasus, comprising Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, embodies a closely interlinked nexus of identity formation, historical trauma, and geopolitical rivalry. Armenia's national identity is grounded in one of the oldest continuous civilizational traditions in the world. As the first state to adopt Christianity as a state religion (301 CE), Armenia developed a robust religious, linguistic, and literary culture that served as a symbolic anchor during centuries of statelessness. Insti-

[43] Hale, *Patronal Politics*.
[44] Bhavna Dave, *Kazakhstan: Ethnicity, Language and Power* (Routledge, 2007; Martha Brill Olcott, *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010).
[45] Dave, "Kazakhstan".
[46] Sally Cummings, *Understanding Central Asia: Politics and Contested Transformations* (London: Routledge, 2012); Edward Schatz, "The Soft Authoritarian Tool Kit: Agenda-Setting Power in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan," *Comparative Politics* 41, no. 2 (2009): 203–222.
[47] Coppedge et al., *Varieties of Democracy (VDem) Dataset v13*.

tutions such as the Armenian Apostolic Church, the invention of the Armenian alphabet (405 CE), and medieval scholarship functioned as mechanisms of cultural continuity in the absence of political sovereignty in the form of a stateless nation.[48] This deep heritage, however, has also shaped identity modernization in complex ways. The collapse of the Armenian kingdom in the Middle Ages and subsequent domination under the Persian, Ottoman, and Russian empires[49] embedded a narrative of survival rather than statecraft. As a result, Armenian national consciousness historically revolved around cultural resilience and diasporic identity rather than institutional sovereignty.

Although the 1915 genocide continues to serve as a core historical trauma, particularly within the Armenian diaspora's identity formation, it represents only one facet of a broader narrative framework. In this post-Soviet republic, national identity has been reconstructed around themes of historical depth, religious continuity, cultural exceptionalism, and geopolitical vulnerability.[50] Educational curricula, monuments, and diplomatic discourse consistently emphasize Armenia's ancient statehood, spiritual legacy, and civilizational contributions.

This heritage-based identity has served as both a source of legitimacy and a constraint. On one hand, it unifies the global Armenian nation through shared memory, symbols, and cultural pride.[51] On the other hand, it sometimes inhibits the development of a forward-looking, civic model of nationhood that can accommodate diversity, dissent, and institutional modernization. Beyond the genocide, it is the recollection of statelessness that has fostered a defensive sovereignty paradigm, privileging existential security over pluralism. Since the 2000s, civic dimensions of identity have gained salience, particularly among younger urban populations. The reconfiguration of governance in terms of transparency, accountability, and participatory politics introduced new symbolic repertoires: the citizen as stakeholder, not merely survivor. However, the 2020 and 2023 Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts reactivated more traditional framings of identity as collective endurance and struggle.

Thus, Armenia's identity modernization reflects an ongoing tension between civilizational heritage and civic reinvention. While its rich historical repertoire

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[48] Robert W. Thomson, *The Armenian Church* (Routledge, 1996); Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Indiana University Press, 1993).

[49] Razmik Panossian, *The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 45–76.

[50] Panossian, *The Armenians*; Eduard Melkonian, "Memory, History and Identity in Armenian Educational Policy," *Caucasus Survey* 4, no. 2 (2016): 120–39; Harutyun Marutyan, *Iconography of Armenian Identity: The Memory of Genocide and the Karabakh Movement* (Yerevan: Gitutyun Publishing House, 2009).

[51] Suny, "Constructing Primordialism," 862–96.

provides symbolic capital and cultural cohesion, the long arc of statelessness complicates the consolidation of a pluralist, inclusive, and democratic national identity.

Georgia's national identity project is shaped by one of the most continuous state traditions in the post-Soviet space. With medieval monarchy, Christian statehood dating back to the 4th century, and a literary canon central to collective memory, Georgia has long imagined itself as a civilizational bridge between Europe and the East.[52] This historical depth has produced a strong sense of cultural distinctiveness, but also posed challenges for civic modernization in a multiethnic and territorially fragmented state.

Since regaining independence, Georgia's identity discourse has oscillated between ethno-cultural revivalism and European civic aspiration. The 2003 Rose Revolution marked a turning point, infusing national identity with democratic and reformist energy. The rule of law, accountability, and aspirations for Euro-Atlantic integration became central civic ideals within a renewed symbolic repertoire connecting identity to state governance.[53] Under leaders like Mikheil Saakashvili, the state promoted a vision of Georgia as a Western-oriented, high-capacity democracy, often in contrast to perceived Russian backwardness or authoritarianism.

At the same time, unresolved conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, combined with tensions involving other communities, revealed the limits of civic inclusion. The tension between a dominant ethnic-Georgian national identity and the reality of internal diversity remains a persistent friction point.[54] While public discourse emphasizes tolerance and multicultural heritage (e.g., Tbilisi's religious pluralism), minority regions often report marginalization, limited linguistic rights, and inadequate political representation.[55]

The 2008 Russo-Georgian War and ongoing Russian occupation of secessionist regions reinforced national narratives of victimhood, resilience, and geopolitical orientation. Educational reform, history curricula, and public monuments increasingly frame Georgia as a European nation under siege by imperial revanchism.

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[52] Jones, *Socialism in Georgian Colors*, 15–42; Natia Mestvirishvili, Maia Mestvirishvili, and Tamar Khoshtaria, "National Identity and Perceptions of Citizenship in Georgia Over the Last Decade," in *Identities and Representations in Georgia from the 19th Century to the Present* (De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021).

[53] Lincoln A. Mitchell, *Uncertain Democracy: U.S. Foreign Policy and Georgia's Rose Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Lia Tsuladze, "On Europeanisation, National Sentiments and Confused Identities in Georgia", Communist and Post-Communist Studies 50, no. 2 (June 2017): 125–33.

[54] Jonathan Wheatley, "Obstacles Impeding the Regional Integration of the Kvemo Kartli Region of Georgia." ECMI Working Paper No. 19, 2009.

[55] Minority Rights Group International, *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2023: Georgia* (London: MRGI, 2023).

This externalization of threat has been instrumental in consolidating national unity, but may also obscure internal divisions and governance deficits.[56]

Recent political polarization and a slowdown in democratic reforms have prompted questions about the sustainability of Georgia's civic identity trajectory. Although public sentiment remains broadly pro-European, shifts in policy direction and political discourse among governing elites have complicated the perception of Georgia as a straightforward case of identity modernization.

In sum, Georgia exemplifies a dual-track identity project: a deeply historical consciousness rooted in religious and cultural tradition, and a post-Soviet civic reimagination aligned with Western institutions. The tension between these forces, Orthodox national identity and democratic pluralism, constitutes the source of both Georgia's resilience and its vulnerability.

Azerbaijan represents a relatively rare case in the post-imperial world: a nation developing around the state, rather than a state emerging from an already cohesive national identity. Unlike many European or Middle Eastern contexts where nationhood preceded statehood, Azerbaijan's modern identity formation has been largely driven by the political apparatus of a young state, officially reestablished only in 1991, with earlier precedents lasting briefly (such as the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, 1918-1920).[57] The state-building project has therefore served as the primary engine of identity production, rather than simply a container for a preexisting nation.

This statist model of nationhood has resulted in a highly centralized, top-down construction of identity. Post-Soviet Azerbaijan has emphasized pan-Turkic cultural lineage, Islamic heritage, and secular modernity, while simultaneously distancing itself from Persian, Russian, and Soviet narratives. The Azerbaijani leadership, first under Heydar Aliyev and later Ilham Aliyev, has constructed an identity centered around statehood, territorial integrity, and victorious sovereignty, increasingly reinforced after the 2020 and 2023 military operations in Nagorno-Karabakh.[58]

Azerbaijan's cultural policy reflects this statist orientation. Through school textbooks, museums, literature, and public ceremonies, the state constructs a cohesive historical narrative rooted in heroism, cultural greatness, and geopolitical self-assertion. However, this narrative is not pluralistic. The state-sponsored identity

[56] Coppedge et al., *Varieties of Democracy (VDem) Dataset v13*; Pew Research Center, "European Public Opinion"; Giorgi Gvalia, Salome Lebanidze, and David S. Siroky, "Neoclassical Realism and Small States: Systemic Constraints and Domestic Filters in Georgia's Foreign Policy," *East European Politics* 35, no. 1 (2019.

[57] Svante E. Cornell, *Azerbaijan Since Independence* (London: Routledge, 2017), 1–42.

[58] Audrey L. Altstadt, *Frustrated Democracy in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2017), 121–144.

discourse includes systematic vilification of Armenians, with animosity permeating educational materials, televised media, and even folklore. Multiple human rights monitoring organizations and independent education watchdogs have documented anti-Armenian content in school curricula and children's literature, including fairy tales that portray Armenians as traitors or subhuman "others."[59] This process of symbolic dehumanization serves not only to mobilize public sentiment during conflict but also to cultivate a long-term exclusionary national identity.

In this framework, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is not merely a geopolitical issue but the symbolic heart of national belonging. The state has successfully framed the conflict as a struggle for historical justice and existential sovereignty. The victory in 2020 and the reclamation of territories in 2023 were celebrated as national rebirths, cementing the ruling regime's legitimacy while reinforcing narratives of trauma, grievance, and moral superiority.

At the same time, Azerbaijan projects a modern and cosmopolitan image externally. Urban modernization in Baku, energy diplomacy, and global cultural initiatives (e.g., hosting Eurovision 2012, Islamic Solidarity Games) seek to position Azerbaijan as a dynamic, forward-looking regional actor. Yet this external projection of inclusivity and modernity contrasts sharply with internal controls on pluralism, civic dissent, and minority representation.[60]

Thus, Azerbaijan exemplifies a case where the state manufactures the nation, drawing on cultural revivalism, territorial restoration, and exclusionary ethnonationalism. While effective in consolidating state authority and geopolitical posture, this strategy leaves little room for civic inclusivity or reconciliation, especially in the context of long-term Armenian-Azerbaijani relations.

Moldova: Between East and West

Moldova represents the archetype of identity ambivalence: it epitomizes the identity dilemmas of post-Soviet states caught between cultural affinities and geopolitical orientations. Its population is divided between Romanian-speaking Moldovans advocating unification with Romania and Russophone communities resisting Western integration. Political elites have oscillated between "Moldovanism" (a distinct identity) and "Romanianization", reflecting deeper geopolitical divides between East and West. The unresolved status of Transnistria further complicates national consolidation, fragmenting state legitimacy. The existence of a de facto breakaway

[59] Human Rights Watch, "Azerbaijan: Discrimination Against Armenians in Education and Media," *World Report 2021*; Felix Corley, "Education and Ethnic Hatred in Azerbaijan," *Forum 18 News Service*, 2021.
[60] Coppedge et al., *Varieties of Democracy (VDem) Dataset v13*; Freedom House, *Nations in Transit: Azerbaijan, 2024*.

region undermines the symbolic and territorial coherence of the Moldovan state, limiting its capacity to institutionalize a unified identity narrative.[61]

While Moldova's EU candidacy status (granted in 2022) represents a significant step toward Western alignment, surveys from the European Social Survey and Pew Research Center reveal persistent internal ambivalence toward identity orientation and low levels of public trust in democratic institutions.62 V-Dem indicators of legitimacy and civic cohesion also place Moldova among the weakest post-Soviet states in terms of stateness, underscoring how unresolved identity contestation impedes both governance and geopolitical orientation.[63]

Comparative Patterns and Theoretical Implications

The comparative analysis reveals three overarching patterns of post-Soviet identity reconstruction. First, memory-centered strategies anchor legitimacy by invoking historical trauma and resistance, yet risk entrenching exclusivity and limiting pluralism. Second, civic-inclusive narratives, as seen in the Baltics and increasingly in Ukraine, foster institutional trust and resilience, correlating with higher democratic consolidation. Third, identity's instrumental and authoritarian manipulation, evident in Belarus, Russia, and Central Asia, has contributed to regime endurance but undermined ontological security and institutional resilience over time. These patterns are summarized in Table 1, which consolidates the dominant identity modernization strategies, key mechanisms, and stateness outcomes across all post-Soviet cases.

These patterns underscore that national identity is not a residual cultural feature but an instrument of statecraft with tangible consequences for stateness. Quantitative data from the V-Dem dataset, the World Values Survey, and Pew Research Center demonstrate that states with higher levels of "identity clarity" consistently report stronger legitimacy and bureaucratic capacity. Conversely, identity ambiguity correlates with contested sovereignty and weak governance.

The implications are twofold. First, inclusive and flexible identity narratives are essential for reconciling pluralism with social cohesion in heterogeneous societies. Second, external disruptions—such as wars, revolutions, or integration initiatives—serve as catalysts for identity rearticulation, underscoring its dynamic and contingent role in state formation.

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[61] Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

[62] Pew Research Center, "European Public Opinion"; European Social Survey, *ESS Round 9 (2018/2019)*.

[63] Coppedge et al., *Varieties of Democracy (VDem) Dataset v13.*

Cross-national Patterns of Identity Modernization: A comparative analysis across post-Soviet states demonstrates three distinct trajectories of identity modernization, each with profound implications for sovereignty, state capacity, and international alignment.

First, states that successfully embedded memory-centered identity projects—notably the Baltic republics and Armenia—show higher resilience in democratic consolidation. In these cases, historical trauma (occupation, genocide, war) functions as a mobilizing framework that anchors legitimacy. However, while effective in securing sovereignty, this strategy risks ossifying exclusionary narratives that may limit pluralism.[64]

Second, examples such as post-2014 Ukraine and Kazakhstan's equilibrium-seeking approach illustrate how civic-inclusive identity models can more effectively accommodate diversity. Quantitative data from the V-Dem dataset v13 shows that states scoring higher on "identity clarity" and "civic inclusivity" also report stronger bureaucratic capacity and public trust in democratic institutions.[65] The Baltic states, for instance, consistently outperform their post-Soviet peers in Eurobarometer surveys measuring institutional trust and perceptions of governance quality.[66]

Third, in cases such as Belarus, Russia, and Turkmenistan, identity is instrumentalized in authoritarian ways, serving the purpose of regime endurance while undermining pluralistic consolidation and deepening ontological insecurity.[67] In such contexts, memory politics are not oriented toward reconciliation or inclusion but toward perpetuating centralized control. Russia's civilizational turn exemplifies this trajectory, embedding national identity in a project of external expansion and internal authoritarian consolidation.[68]

Taken together, these patterns suggest that national identity is not a cultural residue but a central mechanism of modern statecraft. Its articulation determines the quality of governance, the resilience of democratic institutions, and the credibility of sovereignty in a globalized system.

Migration as a Driver and Consequence of Identity Modernization: Both emigration and immigration have emerged as key facets of post-Soviet identity politics. The disintegration of Soviet borders set in motion large-scale mobility, with

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[64] David J. Smith et al., The Baltic States and Their Region: New Europe or Old? (London: Routledge, 2002).
[65] Coppedge et al., *Varieties of Democracy (VDem) Dataset v13.*
[66] European Commission, *Eurobarometer 97.3: Public Opinion in the European Union* (Brussels: Directorate-General for Communication, 2023).
[67] Stephen White and Ian McAllister, "Belarus, Ukraine and Russia: East or West?" *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 10, no. 2 (2008): 257–71.
[68] Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism.*

migratory trends since the 1990s playing a decisive role in reshaping identity modernization. Emigration from Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova has functioned as a double-edged phenomenon. On the one hand, diasporas serve as crucial identity anchors abroad, sustaining national narratives through remittances, lobbying, and cultural reproduction.[69] On the other hand, mass emigration exacerbates demographic decline and institutional fragility, creating what scholars describe as "hollow sovereignty."[70] Armenia's engagement with the European Union trajectory in 2025 is both supported and complicated by its diaspora: while remittances contribute nearly 12 percent of GDP, continued outmigration raises critical concerns about demographic sustainability.[71]

Labor migration to Russia remains a dominant feature of Central Asia, particularly in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, where remittances contribute between 20-30 percent of GDP.[72] This dynamic reinforces dependency on Russian economic structures while simultaneously reshaping local identities: younger generations in these republics increasingly view migration as part of the life cycle, embedding hybridized identities that combine local tradition with transnational practices.[73]

The experience of forced migration and displacement has significantly transformed national narratives across the region. In Ukraine, identity formation accelerated after 2014 and even more so following the 2022 invasion, as millions were uprooted and internally displaced.[74] Similarly, the 2020 and 2023 wars in Nagorno-Karabakh generated large-scale displacement, with Armenians from Artsakh reconstituting identity frameworks around victimhood, exile, and cultural survival.[75] In Azerbaijan, by contrast, the return of displaced persons is now institutionalized as a state project, framing repopulation of Karabakh as the culmination of national restoration.

Although less significant in scale, immigration continues to affect identity trajectories. In the Baltic republics, the presence of large Russian-speaking communi-

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[69] Panossian, *The Armenians.*

[70] Neil Melvin, "Post-Soviet Migration and the Re-Making of the Central Asian States," *Europe-Asia Studies* 48, no. 7 (1996): 1011–39.

[71] World Bank, *Migration and Development Brief 37: Remittances and Development in Armenia* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2025).

[72] Asian Development Bank, *Labor Migration in Central Asia: Patterns and Prospects* (Manila: ADB, 2024).

[73] Madeleine Reeves, *Border Work: Spatial Lives of the State in Rural Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

[74] Serhiy Kudelia, "The Maidan and Beyond: Ukraine's Identity and Civic Mobilization," *Journal of Democracy* 25, no. 3 (2014): 19–34.

[75] Armine Tigranyan, "Erasing Identity: Azerbaijan's Attack on Artsakh's Spiritual Heritage," *Regional Post*, July 10, 2025.

ties has posed complex questions of integration and civic inclusion. Their hybrid model of ethno-linguistic anchoring combined with civic inclusivity illustrates how immigration (or retained Soviet-era settlers) necessitated institutional innovation.[76]

Migration thus functions both as a catalyst and as an outcome of identity modernization. States that harness migration as a civic asset, via diaspora engagement, pluralistic governance, and inclusive integration, enhance their long-term legitimacy and resilience. Conversely, where migration exacerbates demographic decline or entrenches dependency, identity modernization remains fragile, vulnerable to external shocks and internal fractures.

The comparative evidence underscores that sovereignty in the 21st-century post-Soviet space is not reducible to territorial control; it is equally a function of demographic sustainability, diaspora engagement, and the management of transnational flows of people and ideas.

Table 1. Comparative Overview of Identity Modernization and Stateness in Post-Soviet States

Country / Cluster	Dominant Identity Modernization Strategy	Key Mechanisms (Indicators)	Stateness Level (by Peace Index) / Resulting Stateness Trajectory	Illustrative Features / Notes
Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania)	Civic-inclusive modernization anchored in European integration	Language reform; memory de-Sovietization; pluralist civic education; minority naturalization	**Sustainable /High stateness** - strong legitimacy, cohesion, and administrative capacity	Rapid institutional Europeanization; balanced ethno-linguistic core with civic pluralism
Ukraine	Civic redefinition through conflict-driven consolidation	De-communization and de-Russification; inclusive citizenship; education reform	**Fragile/ Strengthening stateness** - legitimacy and cohesion increased after 2014 and 2022	Wartime civic nationalism and democratic resilience
Moldova	Identity ambivalence between Romanianization and Moldovanism	Bilingual policy; memory contestation; geopolitical oscillation	**Fragile/ Fragile stateness** - low legitimacy, divided cohesion	Persistent identity cleavage; limited consolidation of national narrative

[76] Hilary Pilkington, "Migration, Discourse, and Identity in the Baltic States," *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 1 (1999): 77–100.

Belarus	Neo-Soviet paternalism and symbolic continuity	Soviet nostalgia; linguistic Russification; media indoctrination	**Fragile/ Weakening stateness** - legitimacy crisis, low cohesion	Regime control sustains surface stability but erodes institutional trust
Russia	Civilizational and imperial identity reconstruction	"Russian World" doctrine; patriotic education; memory glorification	**Middle level of sustainability/ Authoritarian stateness** - high coercive capacity, fragile legitimacy	Identity instrumentalized for regime legitimation and expansionism
Kazakhstan	Balanced civic-ethnic modernization within elite-managed framework	Language Latinization; Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan; symbolic revival	**Middle level of sustainability/ Partial stateness** - stable legitimacy, moderate cohesion	Hybrid civic-ethnic model; moderate pluralism and international balancing
Uzbekistan	Personalized modernization through cultural revival	Mythic national founder (Tamerlane); selective reforms; centralized control	**Fragile / Controlled stateness** - stable capacity, limited legitimacy	Identity personalization under strong leadership; restricted pluralism
Turkmenistan	Cultic personalization of identity	Leader cult; ideological schooling; isolationist heritage policy	**Under the threat of failure / Brittle stateness** - coercive stability, low legitimacy	Identity monopolized by regime symbolism
Kyrgyzstan	Fragmented modernization under patronal pluralism	Competing regional elites; oscillating curricula; weak state capacity	**Fragile / Fragile stateness** - low cohesion and legitimacy	Identity fragmented along regional and tribal lines
Tajikistan	Post-conflict ethno-religious consolidation	Civil war memory; Islamic heritage framing; security-based legitimacy	**Fragile / Resilient authoritarian stateness** - strong control, limited pluralism	Identity shaped by war memory and regime securitization
Armenia	Heritage-based identity with civic transition attempts	Religious continuity; education reform; diaspora engagement	**Middle level of sustainability / Mixed stateness** - strong cohesion, moderate capacity	Deep civilizational identity; civic reinvention constrained by security trauma

Georgia	European civic modernization within historical tradition	Democratic reform; education/media pluralism; European alignment	**Middle level of sustainability / Evolving stateness** - high legitimacy, contested cohesion	Dual identity: Orthodox heritage vs civic modernity
Azerbaijan	State-manufactured nationalism with exclusionary framing	War memory; cult of leadership; education nationalism	**Middle level of sustainability / Stable but illiberal stateness** - strong capacity, low pluralism	Identity tied to territorial victory and regime consolidation

Conclusion

The comparative trajectories of identity modernization across the post-Soviet space demonstrate that national identity is a central instrument of statecraft rather than a mere cultural residue. Its articulation - through memory politics, civic inclusion, or instrumental authoritarianism directly influences state capacity, legitimacy, and resilience in the face of internal and external challenges.

Three key insights emerge. First, identity rooted in historical memory provides resilience against external threats but can entrench exclusivist narratives that limit pluralism. Second, civic-inclusive approaches, which balance historical consciousness with inclusive citizenship and responsive governance, strengthen state legitimacy and social cohesion. Third, the instrumental use of identity by authoritarian regimes secures short-term stability but often undermines long-term institutional capacity and societal trust.

Migration, whether voluntary or forced, plays a crucial role in shaping the trajectories of identity. Diaspora communities, remittances, and population mobility influence national narratives and state legitimacy, while displacement and resettlement can catalyze the rearticulation of collective identity, highlighting the dynamic interplay between demographic change and political cohesion.

Ultimately, post-Soviet experiences reveal that state sovereignty in the twenty-first century depends not solely on military or economic power but on the ability of states to construct, adapt, and sustain inclusive and coherent national identities. The success of identity modernization hinges on balancing memory with pluralism, tradition with civic inclusivity, and national narratives with global integration. States that achieve this balance are better positioned to consolidate authority, cultivate social cohesion, and navigate the uncertainties of a complex geopolitical environment.

While this article provides a panoramic comparative framework, future research will extend this inquiry through in-depth case studies of selected states to further explore the causal mechanisms identified here.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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