

EVOLUTION OF CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN MAINTAINING PUBLIC ORDER IN THE POST-SOVIET SPACE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF RUSSIA, KAZAKHSTAN, BELARUS, AND TAJIKISTAN

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Abstract: *This article examines the evolution of civic participation in maintaining public order across four post-Soviet states – Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Tajikistan. The study traces the transformation of the Soviet legacy of voluntary people's militias (druzhiny) into contemporary models, identifying their differences and commonalities. Through a comparative analysis of legal frameworks (Russia's Federal Law No. 44-FZ, Kazakhstan's Law No. 590, Belarus's Law No. 214-Z, and Tajikistan's Law No. 1969) and historical data, the research explores the influence of political systems, democratic development, and socio-economic conditions on these models. Special attention is given to historical parallels, including the Timurid experience, and their relevance to modernizing these systems. The article concludes with recommendations for improving legislation and fostering regional cooperation. This work contributes to understanding state-society interactions in the post-Soviet space, emphasizing the need to adapt traditions to contemporary challenges to enhance public safety.*

Keywords: *civic participation, public order, post-Soviet space, people's militias, Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Tajikistan, political systems, socio-economic factors, historical legacy, Timurids, legislation, public safety.*

Introduction

The involvement of citizens in ensuring public safety and maintaining law

and order remains a significant aspect of governance in post-Soviet countries. Rooted in Soviet traditions, this practice has undergone notable changes since 1991, reflecting the political systems, levels of democratic development, and socio-economic conditions unique to each state [7]. This study analyzes the transformation of civic participation in public order maintenance in Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Tajikistan, focusing on its historical origins and modern forms. It examines how the Soviet legacy of people's militias has adapted to new realities and how political regimes and economic factors have shaped this process.

The Soviet system of voluntary people's militias, established in the 1950s, served as a tool of collective responsibility under strict state control [1]. Following the USSR's dissolution in 1991, this institution either retained centralized elements (e.g., Belarus), evolved into more flexible forms (Russia), lost significance (Kazakhstan), or took on an ideological hue (Tajikistan). The analysis draws on legal frameworks – Russia's Federal Law No. 44-FZ [2], Kazakhstan's Law No. 590 [3], Belarus's Law No. 214-Z [4], and Tajikistan's Law No. 1969 [5] – as well as historical data and theoretical studies [6, 7]. This approach not only traces the evolution of legal structures but also highlights their connection to state-building processes in the post-Soviet context.

Historical Background

The origins of civic participation in public order in these countries stem from Soviet practices, formalized by the CPSU Central Committee and USSR Council of Ministers' decree of March 2, 1959 [1]. By the 1980s, militias boasted around 13 million members, tasked with patrolling, preventing offenses, and supporting the police [21]. Coordinated by party organs, their activities underscored their subordinate role within an authoritarian system [13]. As V. Kozlov notes, militias served both practical and ideological purposes, reinforcing collective control [10]. However, the USSR's collapse in 1991 triggered a crisis: in Russia, militia membership plummeted to 50,000 by the mid-1990s [22]; in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, they nearly vanished [14]; while in Belarus, they persisted in a limited form due to a robust state hierarchy [16].

Contemporary Models of Civic Participation

Russia

Modern models of civic participation vary significantly across these states. In Russia, the 2014 legislation [2] governs militias and freelance police collaborators, emphasizing their auxiliary role and strict legal regulation. Citizens may demand cessation of violations and secure crime scenes, but their powers are limited to avoid supplanting police functions [9]. Regional variations – such as active militias in Moscow or Cossack patrols in the south [20] – reflect Russia's federal structure, though centralized control remains paramount [23]. Economic disparities influence participation: urban militias receive payments, while in poorer regions, involvement is often symbolic [18].

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan adopts a minimalist approach. The 2004 law [3] permits only individual assistance to internal affairs bodies, excluding collective forms like militias. This reflects a unitary governance system and low civic engagement, minimizing risks of state control loss [11]. Limited resources – GDP per capita in 2023 was approximately \$13,000 [18] – hinder the development of complex structures, and the lack of social protections renders participation sporadic [15].

Belarus

Belarus retains a centralized Soviet-style model, adapted to modern needs. The 2003 law [4] allows militias to use force and detain offenders, expanding their role beyond Russia's model. A rigid authoritarian system ensures tight control [29], while a relatively stable economy (GDP per capita around \$20,000 [18]) supports incentives like annual payments of up to \$500 [26]. A.A. Urazbaev's research highlights this model's efficacy during crises, such as the 2020 protests [6].

Tajikistan

Tajikistan offers a unique case, where civic participation hinges on patriotic ideology, enshrined in the 2023 law [5]. Post-civil war (1992–1997), militias and public councils became tools of national consolidation [12], though their powers remain vague. Low living standards (GDP per capita about \$4,000 [18]) and weak

institutions limit effectiveness, despite formal social protection guarantees [17].

Influencing Factors

Political Systems

Political systems decisively shape these models. Russia's federalism enables localized adaptation [27], while Kazakhstan's unitarism curtails participation [28]. Belarus integrates citizens into the state apparatus [16], and Tajikistan's post-conflict context imbues the process with ideological weight [25]. Democratic levels also affect autonomy: in Russia and Kazakhstan, it is constrained by weak civic activism [24]; in Belarus, it is state-subordinated [6]; and in Tajikistan, it is substituted by moral incentives [12].

Socio-Economic Conditions

Socio-economic factors further define the landscape. In Russia, regional inequality creates disparities in militia support [9]; in Kazakhstan, poverty impedes institutional growth [18]; in Belarus, economic stability encourages participation [26]; and in Tajikistan, limited resources are offset by patriotic appeals [17]. The Soviet militia legacy [19] and earlier Timurid traditions [30] underscore the enduring importance of centralization and social support, relevant to modernizing these systems.

Recommendations

Based on this analysis, several recommendations emerge. For Russia, expanding militias' preventive roles and standardizing incentives could address regional disparities [2]. Kazakhstan might pilot militias in major cities, leveraging international aid to overcome economic barriers [40]. Belarus could maintain its model while enhancing transparency through public reporting [4]. Tajikistan should clarify legal norms and integrate local traditions, engaging community leaders to boost legitimacy [5].

The Timurid experience, explored by Sirojov and Urazbaev [30], offers further insights. Centralized governance, discipline, and social protections from that era could be adapted via training, clear conduct codes, and minimal payments [33]. Regional cooperation – e.g., joint forums or training programs [40] – could

enhance system efficacy, particularly against transnational threats.

Conclusion

The evolution of civic participation in public order in the post-Soviet space reflects a complex interplay of historical legacy and modern challenges. Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Tajikistan exhibit distinct approaches to integrating citizens into safety systems, shaped by their political and economic realities [8]. The success of this institution's future development hinges on states' ability to blend past traditions with present needs, fostering trust between society and government.

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