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**ҚАЗАҚСТАН ТАРИХЫ
ИСТОРИЯ КАЗАХСТАНА
HISTORY OF KAZAKHSTAN**

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**WRITING THE POST-SOVIET NATION: SCRIPT REFORM, HISTORICAL MEMORY,
AND UZBEK IDENTITY IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE WITH KAZAKHSTAN
(1991–2026)**

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Abstract: This article examines how alphabet policy and historical memory have jointly organized post-Soviet nation-building in Uzbekistan, with Kazakhstan used as a focused comparative case. It develops the concept of temporal governance to describe how script reform allocates authority among a usable past, an administratively unsettled present, and a projected national future. The study combines structured comparison of legislation and scholarship with a time-bounded audit of central state websites conducted on 10 September 2026. Uzbekistan's Latinization, initiated in 1993, has produced a Latin-first but persistently dual-script institutional order; Kazakhstan's 2017 transition remained, by 2026, a revised project whose principal state interfaces still used Cyrillic Kazakh. The comparison also reveals a shared effort to reconcile titular historical repair with territorial civic inclusion. The article argues that scripts do not simply symbolize geopolitical orientation: they govern access to archives, education, public services, and the historical narratives through which citizens recognize the nation.

Keywords: Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, script reform, Latinization, historical memory, national identity, language policy, digraphia, post-Soviet nation-building

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**ПОСТКЕҢЕСТІК ҰЛТТЫҢ ЖАЗУЫ:
ЖАЗУДЫ РЕФОРМАЛАУ, ТАРИХИ ЖАДЫ ЖӘНЕ ҚАЗАҚСТАНМЕН
САЛЫСТЫРҒАНДА ӨЗБЕК БІРЕГЕЙЛІГІ (1991-2026 ЖЖ.)**

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Түйін: Мақалада әліпби саясаты мен тарихи жадтың Өзбекстандағы посткеңестік ұлт қалыптастыру үдерісін қалай бірлесіп ұйымдастырғаны қарастырылады; Қазақстан нысаналы салыстырмалы жағдай ретінде алынады. «Уақыттық басқару» ұғымы жазу реформасының қолданыстағы өткен, институционалдық тұрғыдан аяқталмаған бүгін және жобаланған ұлттық болашақ арасындағы беделді қалай бөлегінін түсіндіреді. Зерттеу

заңнаманы, ғылыми әдебиетті және 2026 жылғы 10 қыркүйекте тексерілген орталық мемлекеттік веб-сайттарды құрылымдық салыстыруға негізделген. 1993 жылы басталған Өзбекстандағы латындандыру латын жазуы басым, бірақ тұрақты қосжазулы тәртіп қалыптастырды. Қазақстанда 2017 жылы жарияланған көшу бірнеше рет қайта қаралып, 2026 жылы негізгі мемлекеттік интерфейстер қазақ тілін кирилл жазуында ұсынды. Екі елде де титулдық тарихты қалпына келтіру аумақтық-азаматтық инклюзиямен ұштастырылады. Әліпби геосаяси бағдардың нышаны ғана емес, мұрағатқа, білімге, мемлекеттік қызметтерге және ұлттық тарихты тануға қолжетімділікті реттейтін инфрақұрылым екені дәлелденеді.

Кілт сөздер: Өзбекстан, Қазақстан, әліпби реформасы, латындандыру; тарихи жад, ұлттық бірегейлік, тіл саясаты, қосжазулылық, посткеңестік ұлт қалыптастыру

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ПИСЬМЕННОСТЬ ПОСТСОВЕТСКОЙ НАЦИИ: РЕФОРМА ПИСЬМЕННОСТИ, ИСТОРИЧЕСКАЯ ПАМЯТЬ И УЗБЕКСКАЯ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТЬ В СРАВНЕНИИ С КАЗАХСТАНОМ (1991-2026 ГГ.)

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Аннотация. В статье исследуется, как алфавитная политика и историческая память совместно организуют постсоветское нациестроительство в Узбекистане; Казахстан используется как целенаправленно выбранный сравнительный случай. Понятие «темпоральное управление» обозначает распределение авторитета между востребованным прошлым, институционально незавершенным настоящим и проектируемым национальным будущим. Исследование сочетает структурированное сравнение законодательства и научной литературы с проверкой центральных государственных веб-сайтов, проведенной 10 сентября 2026 года. Начатая в 1993 году латинизация Узбекистана сформировала преимущественно латинский, но устойчиво двухалфавитный институциональный порядок. Объявленный в Казахстане в 2017 году переход к 2026 году оставался пересматриваемым проектом, тогда как основные государственные интерфейсы продолжали использовать казахскую кириллицу. В обеих странах восстановление титульной истории сочетается с территориально-гражданской инклюзивностью. Делается вывод, что письмо не только символизирует геополитическую ориентацию, но и регулирует доступ к архивам, образованию, государственным услугам и национальным историческим нарративам.

Ключевые слова: Узбекистан, Казахстан, реформа письменности, латинизация, историческая память, национальная идентичность, языковая политика, диграфия, постсоветское нациестроительство

Introduction

The disintegration of the Soviet Union left Central Asian states with sovereign borders, titular languages, and institutions whose classificatory habits remained substantially Soviet. Nation-building therefore did not begin on empty ground. It proceeded by reordering inherited repertoires: rulers, anniversaries, victims, maps, literary canons, and scripts. Comparative scholarship has shown that the region's states combine nationalizing projects with claims to civic inclusiveness, and that authoritarian institutions do not eliminate contestation over cultural meaning [1, 2]. Yet alphabet reform and historical memory are usually studied in separate literatures. This separation obscures their common work. Both decide which past can be read with ease, which historical actors

appear as predecessors of the nation, and what kind of future the state presents as normal.

Uzbekistan is the primary case. Its post-independence Latin alphabet was legislated in 1993, revised in 1995, taught to successive school cohorts, and repeatedly assigned new implementation deadlines. Cyrillic nevertheless remains part of publishing, adult literacy, family communication, state information, and the twentieth-century Uzbek archive. Kazakhstan offers a revealing contrast. It postponed post-Soviet Latinization until 2017; subsequent alphabet designs were revised while Cyrillic retained its position in the principal institutions of the state. The comparison is not intended to rank two reforms against an ideal endpoint. It asks why one policy generated implemented digraphia while the other produced prolonged anticipatory transition, and how each condition interacts with national memory.

The article pursues three objectives. First, it reconstructs the institutional sequence of script reform in Uzbekistan between 1991 and 2026. Second, it identifies how Uzbek memory politics links pre-Soviet statehood, Jadid reformism, Soviet repression, and post-independence sovereignty. Third, it uses Kazakhstan to distinguish general post-Soviet patterns from features specific to Uzbekistan. The central argument is that alphabet policy is a form of temporal governance. It allocates practical and symbolic authority among a recoverable past, a stratified present, and a promised national future. Uzbekistan's reform has made Latin the forward-facing norm without closing Cyrillic domains; Kazakhstan has repeatedly projected a Latin future while continuing to administer the Kazakh-language present in Cyrillic. In both cases, historical repair is moderated by territorial and civic narratives rather than reduced to an exclusively ethnic account of victimhood.

Materials and methods

Theoretical Analysis

Script, Memory, and National Time. The nation is not written only in constitutions and histories. It is reproduced through mundane standards that make some names, documents, and narratives immediately legible. Script is one such standard. It is simultaneously a graphic code, a pedagogical technology, an administrative convention, and an index of political time. Central Asian nationhood is especially well suited to this approach because successive changes of Arabic, Latin, and Cyrillic did not merely alter letters; they redistributed access to religious, reformist, Soviet, and post-Soviet textual worlds [3-5].

Temporal governance refers here to the institutional management of those textual worlds. It has three dimensions. The first is retrospective: a script can open or narrow access to inherited literature and archives. The second is distributive: reform assigns unequal conversion costs to generations, professions, regions, and institutions. The third is prospective: official discourse attaches a writing system to modernization, sovereignty, digital compatibility, or a wider civilizational community. This formulation avoids treating Latin as inherently modern or Cyrillic as inherently foreign. Such associations are political achievements, not properties of graphic signs.

Historical memory operates through a comparable selection. State commemoration does not reproduce the past in full; it identifies exemplary ancestors, foundational achievements, catastrophes, and recoverable traditions. In Uzbekistan, post-Soviet narratives have connected contemporary statehood to a deep territorial history while also reorganizing memories of the Soviet period [6;7]. In Kazakhstan, literature and official culture have drawn on the Kazakh Khanate, Alash, repression, and the famine of 1931-1933, while negotiating the relation between an ethnic Kazakh core and a multi-ethnic citizenry [8;9]. The important question is therefore not whether memory is "invented," but how its institutional forms distribute belonging.

Script reform and memory meet at the archive. A political community may canonize Jadid or Alash intellectuals while rendering their Arabic-script texts inaccessible to most citizens. It may condemn Soviet repression while depending on Cyrillic catalogues, editions, and case files to document it. A replacement alphabet can thus proclaim historical recovery and simultaneously create a new threshold to the recent past. This tension is not evidence of false national identity. It is

a structural problem of states whose twentieth-century literacy expanded through several compulsory graphic regimes.

Research Methods

The study uses a structured, focused comparison in which Uzbekistan receives approximately seventy per cent of the analysis and Kazakhstan functions as an analytical comparator. Four bodies of evidence are combined: legislation and official policy documents; peer-reviewed historical, sociolinguistic, and nation-building scholarship; memory institutions as analyzed in that scholarship; and a small digital interface audit. The chronological frame begins with independence in 1991 and ends on 10 September 2026.

The comparison uses five questions. When was Latinization legally initiated? How stable was the adopted alphabet and timetable? Which script was materially present at central state interfaces in 2026? Which historical repertoires were privileged in national memory? How did script policy affect access to the national archive? These questions separate enacted rules from announced intentions and visible interfaces from claims about citizens' competence or preferences.

The digital component extends an earlier audit of Uzbek institutional non-closure, which covered eleven public-sector endpoints in July and August 2026. For the present comparison, the core state platforms were rechecked on 10 September 2026: the presidential, government, and legislation portals of Uzbekistan, and the presidential and unified government portals of Kazakhstan [10-14]. For each site, the audit recorded the initial Kazakh or Uzbek script, the presence of an alternative script, and the visible language labels. It did not measure traffic, content parity, reading proficiency, or user preference. Platform evidence is therefore used only to identify how state policy was instantiated at a particular interface and date.

No interviews or experiments with human participants were conducted. The conclusions concern institutional configurations, not the identities of individual readers. Website results are time-bounded, and the legal status of pending reforms should be rechecked immediately before publication.

Experimental Part

Historical and Digital Evidence Uzbekistan: an enacted reform without closure

Uzbekistan moved quickly after independence. Law No. 931-XII of 2 September 1993 introduced an Uzbek alphabet based on Latin script and associated it with entry into global communication, while the accompanying implementation act originally envisaged completion by 2000 [15]. A new parliamentary law substantially revised the alphabet in May 1995 and extended the transition deadline to 1 September 2005; Resolution No. 339 then approved the orthographic rules [5, 15, 16]. First-grade instruction in Latin began in 1996. These decisions created a durable asymmetry: new cohorts learned Latin at school, but most adults, libraries, publishers, and administrative offices remained invested in Cyrillic.

Latin meanwhile became normal in textbooks, signage, identity documents, commercial branding, and official web interfaces. The persistent difficulty was coordination among systems that renew at different speeds. A school curriculum changes by cohort; a library catalogue, legal database, or professional archive cannot be replaced by the same mechanism. Recurrent deadlines treated the transition as a finite substitution, whereas implementation produced a layered literacy order.

The 2021 government road map illustrates both ambition and incompleteness. Resolution No. 61 instructed institutions to establish unified transliteration requirements, digitize Cyrillic holdings in Latin form, develop conversion software, make official websites load initially in Latin by December 2022, and conduct official documentation in Latin from 2023 [17]. Each task acknowledges a separate infrastructure: standards, archives, software, interfaces, and administration. The road map therefore supplies evidence that alphabet reform had become a problem of institutional interoperability rather than merely public acceptance.

The question of the alphabet itself also remained open. On 7 July 2026 the Legislative Chamber adopted Resolution No. 2299-V concerning draft law QL-236, which proposed *Ö, Ğ, Ç*, and *Ş* in place of the current forms *o', g', ch*, and *sh* [18]. The official LexUZ record classified the resolution as consideration of a draft law, not as the promulgated amending law. As of 10 September, the available record did not justify describing the proposed characters as legally operative. The distinction matters: another redesign would affect textbooks, keyboards, databases, personal names, search, and every corpus already converted into the 1995 standard.

The 2026 population census also places a limit on cultural diagnosis. Preliminary results reported that 35.7 million residents, or 91.3 per cent of the population, named Uzbek as their native language; this was 1.9 percentage points above the ethnic-Uzbek share [19]. A native-language response does not measure literacy in either script. It does show why unfinished Latinization cannot be treated as evidence of weak attachment to Uzbek. Language affiliation, graphic competence, and geopolitical preference are different variables.

The September web check found Latin-first, dual-script provision on the President's site: */oz* displayed Latin Uzbek and */uz* Cyrillic Uzbek [10]. The government portal used the same paired convention [11]. LexUZ opened in Latin and offered Cyrillic through its language selector [12]. These interfaces demonstrate substantial institutionalization of Latin alongside the continuing public function of Cyrillic. By 2026, Uzbekistan had developed an implemented but asymmetric digraphia: Latin occupied the default position, while Cyrillic retained designated access routes.

Historical memory and Uzbek identity

Alphabet policy acquired national meaning within a broader reorganization of history. The post-independence canon located sovereignty in a long territorial past and elevated figures and periods that could stand outside Soviet chronology. Timurid statecraft and cultural achievement provided one register of grandeur; Jadid reformers supplied another, linking education, print, and cultural renewal to the moral genealogy of the modern nation [1, pp. 36–63; 3; 6]. Askarov's earlier study of identity categories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries places this genealogy within a layered field of pre-national affiliations rather than assuming a timeless, unitary Uzbek identity [20]. The two commemorative strands were never identical: one emphasized deep statehood and civilizational accomplishment, the other an early twentieth-century programme of intellectual reform.

The commemoration of repression brought the Soviet period into this narrative. Malikov identifies three broad phases: limited rehabilitation and commemoration in the 1990s; institutional consolidation around the turn of the century; and a wider rehabilitation agenda after 2016 [7]. Museums, memorial days, publications, and legal rehabilitation recast repressed intellectuals as national predecessors. The official category of victim was generally territorial rather than exclusively ethnic Uzbek, encompassing those persecuted within the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic. Research tracing interethnic accommodation through Uzbekistan's longer history likewise underscores the civic register available to this territorial framing [21]. Together, these elements complicate accounts that reduce Uzbek nation-building to ethnic homogenization.

The archive exposes a productive contradiction. Jadid recovery depends on specialists capable of reading Arabic-derived orthographies; the social history of the Soviet republic depends heavily on Cyrillic print and records. Latinization can mark sovereign distance from Soviet linguistic engineering, but it cannot make the Cyrillic Uzbek corpus external to national culture. The archive produced under Soviet rule includes Uzbek literature, scholarship, journalism, and testimony. Treating that material as foreign residue would impoverish precisely the historical memory that independence made newly discussable.

The 2026 letter proposal reinforces this point. *Ö, Ğ, Ç*, and *Ş* belong to a recognizable repertoire across Latin-script Turkic languages. Their adoption could be interpreted as a graphic convergence with a wider Turkic space. That interpretation, however, should remain analytically distinct from the bill's legal and technical rationale. The symbols do not carry one fixed identity.

Their effects would depend on institutional implementation and on whether readers can traverse the textual layers they are asked to inherit.

Kazakhstan: a projected transition under managed plurality

Kazakhstan shared the twentieth-century sequence from an Arabic-derived script to Soviet Latin and then Cyrillic, but its post-1991 trajectory diverged sharply. The state promoted Kazakh while retaining the constitutional use of Russian in state institutions. The demographic and linguistic setting made script change inseparable from the management of a large Russian-speaking public and from the uneven command of Kazakh among citizens, including ethnic Kazakhs [4; 22].

Latinization entered an active governmental phase through the *Rukhani Zhangyru* (Spiritual Renewal) programme and Presidential Decree No. 569 of 26 October 2017. The decree approved a Latin alphabet, established a national commission, and ordered a phased transition by 2025 [23]. The approved design was then revised, while further proposals sought a better fit between Kazakh phonology, orthography, keyboards, and public usability. Scholarly analysis of the reform's legitimation identifies modernization and linguistic authenticity as central arguments, but also warns that the distribution of costs could produce educational and social exclusion [22].

The original target year passed without conversion of the state's principal Kazakh-language interfaces. On 10 September 2026, the Akorda website presented Kazakh in Cyrillic and offered Russian and English as language alternatives; it did not display a parallel Latin-script Kazakh option [13]. The unified government portal likewise rendered its Kazakh interface in Cyrillic [14]. This does not prove that Latin forms were absent from every educational, cultural, or experimental domain. It establishes a narrower and more consequential fact: at the central digital interface of the state, Cyrillic remained the unmarked script of Kazakh.

Kazakhstan's memory politics supplies the historical context for this caution. The national narrative has foregrounded the Kazakh Khanate, the Alash intelligentsia, famine, collectivization, and Stalinist repression. Literary and elite narratives have worked to restore Kazakh historical agency [8]. At the same time, official commemoration of repression has often emphasized victims of different ethnicities deported to or persecuted in Kazakhstan, using shared suffering to support a civic account of the country [9]. The script project therefore operates inside a dual commitment: strengthening the titular language and avoiding a public definition of the state that excludes Russian speakers or other minorities.

Comparative findings

Figure 1 places the two reforms on a common institutional chronology. It records enacted milestones and observed state-interface outcomes, rather than estimating social acceptance or script proficiency.

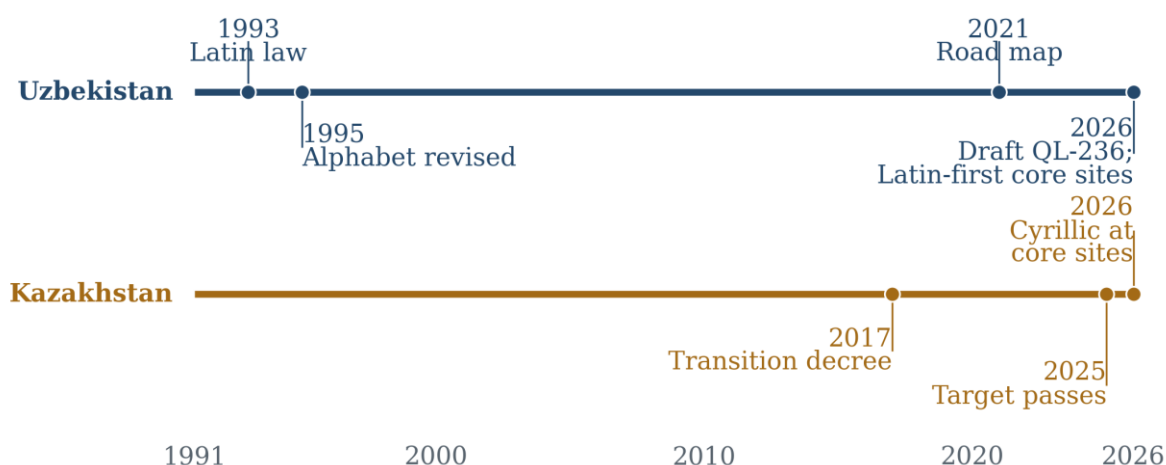


Figure 1. Institutional chronology of script reform in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, 1991–2026

Source: compiled by the author from legislation and central state interfaces [10–18; 23].

Table 1. Script reform, memory, and institutional time in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, 1991–2026

Dimension	Uzbekistan	Kazakhstan	Comparative implication
Post-Soviet initiation	Latin alphabet legislated in 1993; revised in 1995	Transition decreed in 2017; design subsequently revised	Timing created different sunk costs and public expectations
Institutional position in 2026	Latin-first state communication with continuing Cyrillic access	Central Kazakh-language state interfaces remained Cyrillic	Uzbekistan exhibits implemented digraphia; Kazakhstan exhibits deferred conversion
Main memory anchors	Deep territorial statehood, Timurids, Jadids, repression	Kazakh Khanate, Alash, famine, repression	Both join historical repair to post-Soviet sovereignty, using different repertoires
Civic qualification	Victims often framed territorially, not only ethnically	Repression often commemorated as shared multi-ethnic suffering	Neither national narrative is reducible to exclusive ethnonationalism
Archival problem	Immediate: a Latin-schooled generation encounters a large Cyrillic corpus	Prospective: wholesale transition would reproduce a similar access problem	Conversion must preserve originals and teach archival literacy
Temporal logic	The promised future has been partly built but not closed	The promised future remains ahead of core administration	“Delay” describes two institutionally distinct conditions

The comparison yields two cautions. First, the same outcome label—an unfinished transition—conceals different processes. In Uzbekistan, Latin is already embedded in education and public administration, while Cyrillic remains functional. In Kazakhstan, institutional redesign preceded large-scale replacement, and Cyrillic still structures core state communication. Second, neither country can be understood through a simple opposition between national Latin and colonial Cyrillic. Both states need the Cyrillic archive to narrate twentieth-century suffering, cultural achievement, and political development.

Results and Discussion

Four findings follow. First, script reform governs national time. Uzbekistan’s sequence makes Latin the script of schooling and official direction, Cyrillic the script of much living memory and inherited expertise, and Arabic-derived writing the specialized gateway to earlier intellectual traditions. Kazakhstan’s sequence places Latin in the register of planned modernization while Cyrillic continues to carry both present administration and the recent archive. Scripts do not merely represent these periods; their institutional distribution makes the periods differently accessible.

Second, non-closure and deferral should not be conflated. Uzbekistan’s non-closure is the by-product of implementation across institutions that changed at unequal speeds. Kazakhstan’s deferral reflects prolonged standard-setting before the state transfers its core interfaces. The Uzbek experience helps explain Kazakh caution: every alphabet revision multiplies conversion costs once a school generation, legal corpus, and digital ecosystem have adopted an earlier version.

Conversely, Kazakhstan shows that technical consultation without a stable implementation threshold can leave reform in a permanent future tense.

Third, historical memory moderates the politics of script. In both countries, official narratives restore titular historical agency, but the commemoration of repression often uses territorial and civic categories. This duality is not simply rhetorical inconsistency. It is a mode of governing post-Soviet societies in which national language promotion coexists with citizens whose linguistic biographies do not match a single ethnic template. A durable alphabet policy must therefore avoid using script competence as a test of national loyalty.

Fourth, digital defaults are substantive policy. A law may announce a transition, but citizens encounter the state through search results, portals, forms, and databases. Uzbekistan's paired Latin and Cyrillic interfaces convert transitional accommodation into public infrastructure. Kazakhstan's Cyrillic defaults show that the 2017 decree had not displaced the existing administrative standard by 2026. Website auditing cannot explain users' attitudes, but it can reveal what institutions have actually made routine.

For Uzbekistan, the policy implication is not an indefinite suspension of standardization. It is a more exact definition of completion. A stable Latin standard should be established only after legal, pedagogical, publishing, and software testing. Essential public information should remain discoverable in both Uzbek scripts during a measured transition. Cyrillic originals should be preserved, while verified Latin versions and transliteration tools are linked to them rather than substituted silently. Arabic-script training should be strengthened where the recovery of Jadid and earlier texts is a declared national priority. Finally, route labels and metadata should distinguish language from script so that *uz-Latn* and *uz-Cyrl* resources can be indexed and maintained predictably.

Conclusions

Between 1991 and 2026, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan used script reform to write sovereignty into the visible form of the titular language. They did so through different institutional chronologies. Uzbekistan enacted Latinization early and produced a Latin-first order that still relies on Cyrillic readers, archives, and interfaces. Kazakhstan decreed the transition later, revised its design, and retained Cyrillic as the ordinary script of central state communication beyond the original 2025 target. These are not two points on a single scale of success. They are distinct ways of managing the relation between national future and inherited literacy.

Historical memory clarifies why the relation cannot be solved through graphic replacement alone. Uzbek identity has been articulated through deep statehood, Jadid reform, and the rehabilitation of victims of repression; Kazakh narratives have privileged the Khanate, Alash, famine, and repression. Both states also temper titular restoration with territorial accounts of shared suffering. Their nation-building projects are consequently nationalizing and civic at the same time.

The concept of temporal governance captures the joint effect. An alphabet makes some historical layers routine and others costly to enter. A memory regime tells citizens why those layers matter. Sound policy must coordinate the two: standardize future communication without disowning the scripts in which the national archive was produced. The study is limited by its documentary design and time-bounded website audit. Survey and reading-performance research is needed to measure how age, education, region, occupation, and multilingualism shape actual biscriptal competence. Even so, the comparative evidence supports a clear conclusion: the post-Soviet nation is written not by choosing between memory and modernization, but by governing access to both.

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