



Jana Kazakhstan: Constitution, Kurultay, and Institutional Transformation

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Since the 1990s, Kazakhstan has largely maintained its political and economic stability while pursuing gradual reforms aimed at transitioning to a market economy, restructuring its economic system, accelerating development, and improving social welfare. In this respect, it has emerged as one of the notable countries in its region. Under President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, however, this reform trajectory has acquired a more comprehensive character, extending beyond economic and social transformation to encompass the restructuring of the country's political and institutional framework. Particularly since 2022, the reform agenda shaped around the concepts of "Jana Kazakhstan" (New Kazakhstan) and, subsequently, "Just Kazakhstan" has introduced far-reaching measures aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of public administration, restructuring mechanisms of political representation, and strengthening state–society relations (Akorda, 2022).

One of the most significant stages of this process was the adoption of the new Constitution with 87.15% of the vote in the referendum held on 15 March 2026, followed by its entry into force on 1 July (Central Election Commission of Kazakhstan, 2026a). Subsequently, with the elections held on 23 August for the new legislative body, the Kurultay, the constitutional transformation entered the stage of institutional implementation. While bringing to an end the constitutional order that had been in force since 1995, the new Constitution placed the 145-member unicameral Kurultay at the centre of the political system, replacing the previous bicameral Parliament (Akorda, 2026a). Voter turnout exceeding 74%, together with the representation of five political parties, indicates that the new institutional structure commenced its operations with a strong degree of political participation. The Adilet Party's attainment of a constitutional majority with 110 seats provides substantial room for manoeuvre in advancing the legislative dimension of the reforms; at the same

time, however, it places greater legislative and political responsibility on the majority party (Central Election Commission of Kazakhstan, 2026b).

The establishment of the Kurultay represents not merely a change in the structural composition of parliament, but also a redefinition of the legislature's position within the state system. Tokayev's address at the Kurultay's inaugural session on 28 August clearly articulated the rationale underlying this reform. Under the new institutional arrangement, the Kurultay's role in the formation of key bodies such as the Constitutional Court, the Central Election Commission, and the Supreme Audit Chamber has been strengthened, while its mechanisms for overseeing government activities and the state budget have been expanded. Tokayev's characterization of these changes as strengthening the system of "checks and balances" between the branches of government demonstrates that the reform is intended not simply to streamline governance, but to recalibrate the distribution of authority and responsibility among state institutions (Akorda, 2026b).

One of the complementary elements of the new constitutional framework is the office of the Vice President. Designed to strengthen coordination between the President and the Kurultay, the government, and other state institutions, while also placing continuity in governance on a more clearly defined constitutional footing, the office was entrusted on 31 August to Erlan Karin, who had previously served as State Secretary. Oljas Bektenov, meanwhile, was reappointed as Prime Minister (Akorda, 2026c). These initial appointments point to a process of controlled renewal based less on sweeping personnel changes than on adapting existing experience and institutional continuity to the new political structure.

Erlan Karin's appointment as Vice President is particularly noteworthy from the perspective of future-oriented policymaking and institutional

restructuring. Trained in history and geography and subsequently pursuing academic studies in political science, Karin has accumulated extensive experience in strategic research, domestic politics, and the presidential administration. This background has made him one of the figures most closely acquainted with, and actively involved in, the reform processes undertaken during the Tokayev presidency. In addition, his role in the preparation of the seven-volume History of Kazakhstan project demonstrates that Karin's profile is also closely associated with debates surrounding national history, identity, and traditions of statehood (E-history.kz, 2025). From this perspective, the appointment is significant not only because it places an experienced figure at the centre of the coordination of political and institutional reforms, but also because it reflects continuity in bringing expertise on history and traditions of statehood into high-level processes of governance.

At the same time, the institutional arrangements introduced in 2026 should not be considered in isolation from the broader modernization agenda. Tokayev's statement in his address to the Kurultay that the reform process would not be completed with the adoption of the new Constitution and the establishment of new institutions, but would instead accelerate further, clearly reflects this approach. The President's message that there would be "no turning back" positions the changes of 2026 not as the culmination of the reform process, but rather as the institutional foundation for a long-term transformation. The economic dimension of this agenda encompasses the acceleration of industrialization, the expansion of productive capacity, the modernization of transport, energy, water, and public-service infrastructure, and the alignment of investment with long-term development objectives. The emphasis placed on education, science, and human capital further demonstrates that the modernization agenda is not conceived solely in terms of material and physical investment (Akorda, 2026b; Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2026).

Looking at recent state policies, it is possible to identify digital transformation as one of the key components of this broader approach. The Digital Qazaqstan Strategy, extending to 2029, positions data and artificial intelligence as fundamental instruments in public administration, economic production, and service delivery. This suggests that

digitalization has evolved beyond a technology policy confined to particular sectors and has instead become part of a comprehensive and integrated vision of state development (Ministry of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Development of Kazakhstan, 2026). Tokayev's proposal to employ artificial intelligence in legislative and legal analysis, together with his call for the further development of the E-Parliament system, likewise demonstrates an intention to integrate technological transformation directly into the country's new institutional architecture (Akorda, 2026b).

It can also be argued that this broader search for reform and renewal is driven, at least in part, by the need to build a more resilient state structure capable of responding to the growing uncertainties and crises of the contemporary global system. Indeed, in his address at the inaugural session of the Kurultay, where he referred to the historical role of Kurultays convened at critical junctures in Kazakh history, Tokayev drew attention to an international environment characterized by declining trust among major powers, growing debate over the effectiveness of global institutions, and the increasing importance of regional organizations. In the same speech, his observation that "middle powers" are becoming increasingly visible, and his inclusion of Kazakhstan within this category, highlights the connection between domestic institutional renewal and the pursuit of a more active and resilient role in foreign policy (Akorda, 2026b). This approach may be interpreted not as a departure from Kazakhstan's traditional multi-vector foreign policy, but rather as an adaptation of that policy to changing geopolitical conditions. Indeed, while the principles of multi-vectorism, pragmatism, proactivity, and multilateralism set out in the 2020–2030 Foreign Policy Concept have been preserved, the objectives of expanding the country's strategic room for manoeuvre and strengthening its foreign-policy autonomy have become more pronounced (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2020).

There is therefore a close relationship between domestic reform and the country's positioning in foreign policy. A middle power seeking greater strategic room for manoeuvre must underpin its diplomatic flexibility with strong institutions, a diversified economy, advanced infrastructure, technological capacity, and highly qualified human capital. Tokayev's assessment that sovereignty

should be strengthened through concrete measures that enhance the economy, science, diplomacy, and human potential further underscores this connection (Akorda, 2026b). Institutional restructuring, economic diversification, and technological transformation should therefore be understood not merely as instruments of domestic development, but as necessary conditions for Kazakhstan's ambition to emerge as a more resilient and effective actor within the changing geopolitical landscape of Eurasia.

This trajectory is also significant for Central Asia and the Turkic world. Kazakhstan's policies aimed at strengthening regional cooperation, diversifying transport routes, and expanding the capacity of the Middle Corridor reinforce the country's regional role. The growing cooperation within the framework of the Organization of Turkic States in areas such as transport, trade, investment, science, digitalization, and artificial intelligence also aligns closely with Kazakhstan's objectives of economic and technological modernization. Accordingly, the institutional and economic capacity developed through domestic reforms can be expected to contribute both to regional cooperation in Central Asia and to deeper integration with the Turkic world. In summary, the new Constitution adopted in 2026, the establishment of the Kurultay, the creation of new coordination mechanisms, and the reconfiguration of the country's senior leadership in accordance with the new system constitute a new phase in the modernization process pursued under Tokayev. The defining feature of this phase is the attempt to bring together institutional effectiveness, economic development, technological capacity, historical continuity, and foreign-policy autonomy within a coherent vision of the state. Tokayev's insistence that there is "no turning back" on the reforms further indicates that this transformation is conceived as a long-term state strategy. Although the success of the new system will ultimately depend on its performance in practice, the developments of 2026 suggest that the discourse of "New Kazakhstan" is increasingly taking shape as a more clearly defined political, institutional, and strategic architecture.

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