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Zh. Tuimebayev^a

E-mail: turkology.ri@gmail.com

Zh. Abdiman^{a*}

E-mail: zhanyiya.abdyman@kaznu.edu.kz

*Corresponding author: zhanyiya.abdyman@kaznu.edu.kz

^a*Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan*

PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATIONS: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TRADITIONS AND PRACTICES

Abstract

This article examines the traditions and practices surrounding presidential inaugurations, comparing those in the United States and Kazakhstan. An inauguration marks the transition of power and the commencement of a new presidential term. The study investigates several important facets of the ceremony, such as its historical development, legal structure, venue, timing, and oath-taking procedure.

Inaugurations differ based on the cultural, historical, and political contexts of each nation. For example, the U.S. inauguration is typically a prominent public event with intricate ceremonies, while Kazakhstan's inaugural events mostly embody distinctive political heritage and traditions of the country. By exploring the political, cultural, and symbolic aspects of these ceremonies of both U.S. and Kazakhstan, this article seeks to demonstrate that the inauguration is not just a political transition but also a significant occasion for consolidating power and legitimizing authority.

Undoubtedly, the inauguration is vital for strengthening national identity and promoting unity, marking the commencement of a new chapter in a nation's governance. These ceremonies validate the legitimacy of the newly elected leader, fostering their authority both among the domestic populace and the international community.

Keywords:

Presidential Inauguration, Inaugural Ceremony, Political Culture, State Ceremony.

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Introduction

Inauguration (originating from the Latin "inauguro") is one of the most significant events in a country's political life; it signifies the appointment of a new head of state and marks the beginning of a new political era. This solemn ceremony that ratifies the rise to power of a newly elected president follows precise rules and a strict protocol.

Every detail is vital in the inauguration ceremony, and various elements—specific locations, dates, the oath, national symbols, and the participants of this solemn event—create a unique sense of symbolic celebration. The traditions and protocols differ from country to country because of

cultural, political, and social differences, as well as representations of worldviews and national ideals.

A ceremony of inauguration, no matter where it takes place, is a ritualistic event often accompanied by key elements. It includes an oath of office, an Inaugural Address, symbolic acts (raising a national flag, ringing a bell, or other traditions specific to the country or institution), high-ranking distinguished guests, special celebrations, and festivities that signify the transfer of power and responsibilities.

The roots of this ceremony can be traced back to the medieval period and the tradition of enthroning monarchs, whereas, in Kazakh culture, there was a tradition of the khan's enthronement, evidence of which can be found in historical sources. This is how the ceremony is described in *Siberian Herald*, published by Grigory Spassky in 1820 (cited from: Zh. Tuimebayev. "Gosudarstvennyy protokol Respubliki Kazakhstan):

"In 1771, the election of Abylai as khan took place in the presence of sultans and elders summoned from various volosts and with a great gathering of common people. Carpets and felt mats were laid out, upon which all those present sat in three or four rows. When Abylai himself took his place in the center of this gathering, seated on a white felt mat, he was showered with praise for his bravery and agility, and his past victories were recounted. Upon announcing Abylai's selection as khan, four of the eldest elders rose from their seats, lifted him above their heads, and then gently placed him back down. All those present followed this example. Finally, his rich outer garment was removed, torn into small pieces, and distributed among the people..." [Tuimebayev 2004: 29-30].

The ceremony of Inauguration, as it takes place in modern realia, where an elected leader takes a public oath, evolved from early parliamentary traditions in England and the American colonies, or early democratic States. The first U.S. presidential inauguration of George Washington in 1789 helped establish the practice of a formal transfer of power in democratic governments [Maier 2010].

In this article, we will examine each attribute of the ceremony of inauguration in the American and Kazakhstani political cultures, exploring the significance, interconnections, and influences of each attribute and ceremonial procedure to our overall understanding of the subject matter.

Methodology

The article employs a comparative qualitative methodology to analyze the traditions and practices of presidential inaugurations in the United States and Kazakhstan. It systematically compares the inauguration ceremonies of the two countries, highlighting similarities and differences in their historical evolution, legal framework, venues, oath-taking processes, and symbolic elements. This method helps in identifying cultural, political, and structural distinctions between the two systems.

In addition, the article investigates the national symbols used in inaugurations in order to identify the cultural significance of elements like the national anthem, official emblems, and public participation to understand their role in legitimizing leadership.

Results

The inauguration of the president occurs whenever a new presidential term begins. Constitutionally, in both U.S. and Kazakhstan, the ceremony has only one mandatory element: the president-elect taking the oath of office. However, each country added different celebratory elements to this ceremony over the years.

The first inauguration in the U.S. was the ceremonial procedure that commemorated President Washington's swearing-in on April 30, 1789, which gave rise to many traditions that continue today in American political culture.

The inauguration ceremony of the first President of Kazakhstan was held relatively recently, in 1991, after the collapse of the USSR and the independence of Kazakhstan. This first ceremony was full of Kazakh traditions and national symbolism of Kazakh culture.

Nowadays, the Joint Congressional Committee on Inauguration Ceremonies is responsible for planning and executing the Inaugural Ceremonies of the President-elect and Vice President-elect of the United States at the Capitol.

The Ceremony of Inauguration in American culture is a set of the following solemn events:

- 1) Procession to the Capitol;
- 2) the vice president's swearing-in ceremony;
- 3) the president's swearing-in ceremony;
- 4) the inaugural address;
- 5) the honorary departure of the outgoing president and vice president;
- 6) the signing ceremony, during which the new president signs nominations, memorandums, proclamations or executive orders;
- 7) the inaugural luncheon;
- 8) the pass in review, during which the president and vice president review military troops;
- 9) and the presidential parade [United States Senate. Inaugural Events 2025].

In Kazakhstani political culture, there is no specific body, responsible for preparing the ceremony; instead, the government oversees its organization. The State Protocol outlines the official ceremonial procedures of the inauguration and includes the following main events:

- 1) the procession to the Palace of Independence;
- 2) the entry of national emblems;
- 3) the announcement of the Presidency
- 4) the president's swearing-in ceremony;
- 5) the Inaugural Address;
- 6) report of the Minister of Defense of the Republic of Kazakhstan;
- 7) Departure [Tuimebayev 2004].

Throughout American history, the venue for presidential inaugural ceremonies has changed several times. The first president of the United States, George Washington, took his first oath at Federal Hall in New York City, which was the temporary capital of the U.S. at the time. His second inauguration ceremony took place in the Senate Chamber of Congress Hall in Philadelphia PA [United States Senate. Inaugural Events 2025].

It wasn't until John Adams that the swearing-in ceremony took place in Washington, D.C. The other changes to the location of the inaugural ceremonies occurred due to the deaths of predecessor presidents, as seen in the inaugurations of Chester Arthur, Theodore Roosevelt, Calvin Coolidge, and Lyndon Baines Johnson [Chasan 2025].

In all other cases, the U.S. Capitol remained the venue for the ceremony. However, in 1981, its exact location was moved from the East Portico to the West Portico of the Capitol building.

The location of the presidential inaugural ceremonies in Kazakhstan changed several times. The very first inauguration of President N. Nazarbayev in 1991 took place at the Palace of the Republic in the city of Almaty, the capital of Kazakhstan at that time. This ceremony is remarkable, not only because it was the first inauguration, but also because it was the only ceremony where the newly elected President of Kazakhstan received a special traditional blessing (bata) from the Kazakh poet Shaken Abenov [E-history.kz 2018].

After the capital of the Republic of Kazakhstan was moved from Almaty to Akmola in 1997 (later renamed to Astana), all inauguration ceremonies were held there.

The date of the Inauguration also plays an important role, in both countries the date of holding the Inauguration ceremony is indicated in the constitution. For instance, according to the 20th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, the inaugural ceremony in the United States is currently held on January 20th. The only exception was the very first inauguration, which took place on April 30th or was sometimes postponed to March 5th if the 4th fell on a Sunday [National Constitution Center 2025].

And in Kazakhstan, according to Section 3, Article 42, Item 2 of the Constitution, the President's oath is taken on the second Wednesday of January [Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2025].

However, the first inaugural ceremony was held on December 10th, and because all the elections were early elections, the dates of the ceremony varied each time.

The most significant, ceremonially and legally, in both political cultures is the President's Oath, which generally holds the same meaning in both countries but differs in its rituals. For instance, the oath of office of the American president-elect is traditionally administered during the Inauguration ceremony by the Chief Justice of the United States before the Inaugural Address. The text of the Oath, according to the U.S. Constitution, Article II, Section 1 states:

“I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the office of president of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States” [National Constitution Center 2025].

During the oath, the president places his hand on a Bible. George Washington began that tradition in 1789 [U.S. Department of State 2025].

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan the President enters the office after announcing the Oath:

«Торжественно клянусь верно служить народу Казахстана, строго следовать Конституции и законам Республики Казахстан, гарантировать права и свободы граждан, добросовестно выполнять возложенные на меня высокие обязанности Президента Республики Казахстан» [Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2025].

(I solemnly swear to faithfully serve the people of Kazakhstan, strictly follow the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan, guarantee the rights and freedoms of citizens, and conscientiously fulfill the high duties entrusted to me as the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan.)

Unlike U.S. presidents, who traditionally place their right hands on a Bible as they take the presidential oath of office, the president of Kazakhstan follows a different custom. In Kazakhstan, the president takes the oath by placing their right hand on the Constitution, a significant symbol that emphasizes the importance of the nation's legal framework and democratic principles. This distinct practice not only highlights the cultural differences between the two nations but also underscores the unique values that shape Kazakhstan's approach to governance. Additionally, the oath is not overseen by representatives of the Supreme Court or any other judicial branch of the Government of Kazakhstan. Instead, this procedure reflects the country's distinct separation of powers and the role of the Constitution as the foundational document that guides the president's responsibilities and the rule of law in Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstani and American cultures place significant importance on the individuals involved in ceremonial events, recognizing them not merely as spectators but as vital witnesses to empowering the newly elected president. These participants are seen as integral to the legitimacy and significance of the occasion, embodying the collective aspirations and hopes of the citizens. In this respect, the ceremonies act not only as a formal transition of power but also as a communal celebration of democracy and shared values, reinforcing the bond between the leaders and the nation.

In the United States, inauguration ceremonies are attended by the Chief Justice, the Vice President, other members of political institutions, and the public. In Kazakhstan, the President's inauguration can be attended by members of the Senate and Mazhilis, judges of the Constitutional Court and Supreme Court of the Republic of Kazakhstan, as well as former Presidents of

Kazakhstan, members of the Government, heads of foreign states and governments, and representatives of the accredited diplomatic corps. It also includes representatives of the Kazakh and international community.

Conclusion

Both ceremonies incorporate official symbols to highlight the significance of the power transition, yet they differ in their historical and cultural expressions. They both feature the performance of the national anthem, reinforcing national identity and unity. The national flag and emblem are prominently displayed during both inaugurations as national unity and power symbols.

The inauguration ceremony is a significant political event in the United States and Kazakhstan. It symbolizes the official transition of power and the beginning of a new leadership era. While both nations uphold the core element of the presidential oath, the traditions and rituals surrounding the event differ due to historical, cultural, and political contexts.

The inauguration ceremonies of Kazakhstan and the United States are deeply rooted in national traditions and symbolize statehood, sovereignty, and democratic values, highly structured events with strict protocol, historical continuity, and symbolic traditions.

Regardless of the differences, both ceremonies share a common goal: to reinforce democratic ideals, validate the legitimacy of the elected leader, and bring the nation together during a transitional period. The attendance of prominent political figures, government representatives, and citizens emphasizes the ceremony's importance as both a formal event and a national celebration. Ultimately, the inauguration is not just a change of leadership but also a restatement of each country's dedication to its constitutional values and democratic heritage.

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Ж. Түймебаев^а

E-mail: turkology.ri@gmail.com

Ж. Абдиман^{а*}

E-mail: zhanyiya.abdyman@kaznu.edu.kz.

*Байланыс үшін автор: zhanyiya.abdyman@kaznu.edu.kz

^аӘл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ ұлттық университеті, Алматы, Қазақстан

ПРЕЗИДЕНТТЕРДІ ҰЛЫҚТАУ РӘСІМІ: ДӘСТҮРЛЕР МЕН ТӘЖІРИБЕЛЕРДІҢ САЛЫСТЫРМАЛЫ ТАЛДАУЫ

Аңдатпа. Бұл мақалада президентті ұлықтау дәстүрлері мен тәжірибелері қарастырылып, Америка Құрама Штаттары мен Қазақстандағы рәсімдердің салыстырмалы талдауы жүргізілді. Ұлықтау рәсімі – бұл ресми билік пен жаңа басқару кезеңінің басталуын білдіретін маңызды саяси оқиға. Зерттеу барысында рәсімнің негізгі аспектілері, оның тарихи дамуы, құқықтық негізі, өткізілу орны, мерзімі және ант беру үдерісі қарастырылады.

Ұлықтау рәсімі әр елдің мәдени, тарихи және саяси дәстүрлеріне байланысты ерекшеленеді. Рәсімнің саяси, мәдени және символдық маңызын талдау арқылы бұл мақала оның көшбасшылықты заңдастырудағы және әртүрлі саяси жүйелердегі ұлттық бірегейлікті нығайтудағы рөлін көрсетеді.

Тірек сөздер: президенттік ұлықтау рәсімі, ұлықтау рәсімі, саяси мәдениет, мемлекеттік рәсім.

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Ж. Түймебаев^а

E-mail: turkology.ri@gmail.com

Ж. Абдиман^{а*}

E-mail: zhanyiya.abdyman@kaznu.edu.kz.

*Автор для корреспонденции: zhanyiya.abdyman@kaznu.edu.kz

^аКазахский национальный университет имени аль-Фараби, Алматы, Казахстан

ИНАУГУРАЦИЯ ПРЕЗИДЕНТОВ: СРАВНИТЕЛЬНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ ТРАДИЦИЙ И ПРАКТИК

Аннотация. В данной статье рассматриваются традиции и практики президентских инаугураций с акцентом на сравнительный анализ между Соединёнными Штатами Америки и Казахстаном. Инаугурация является значимым политическим событием, которое знаменует официальную передачу власти и начало новой эпохи руководства. В исследовании рассматриваются ключевые аспекты церемонии, включая её историческую эволюцию, правовую основу, место проведения, дату и процесс принесения присяги.

Церемония инаугурации различается в зависимости от культурных, исторических и политических традиций страны, в которой она проводится. Анализируя политическое, культурное и символическое значение составляющих элементов церемонии, данная статья подчёркивает роль инаугурации в легитимации лидерства и укреплении национальной идентичности в различных политических системах.

Ключевые слова: инаугурация президента, церемония инаугурации, политическая культура, государственная церемония.

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Information about the authors:

Tuimebayev Zhanseit, Doctor of Philological Sciences, Professor, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, 71 Al-Farabi ave, 050040, Almaty, Kazakhstan
ORCID: 0000-0001-5495-1686

Zhaniya Abdiman, PhD student of the Faculty of Philology, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, 71 Al-Farabi ave, 050040, Almaty, Kazakhstan
ORCID: 0000-0002-0690-5383

Авторлар туралы мәлімет:

Тұймебаев Жансейт, филология ғылымдарының докторы, профессор, Әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ ұлттық университеті, Әл-Фараби даңғылы, 71, 050040, Алматы, Қазақстан
ORCID: 0000-0001-5495-1686

Абдиман Жания, Әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ ұлттық университеті филология факультетінің (PhD) докторанты, Әл-Фараби даңғылы, 71, 050040, Алматы, Қазақстан
ORCID: 0000-0002-0690-5383

Сведения об авторах:

Тұймебаев Жансейт, доктор филологических наук, профессор, Казахский национальный университет имени аль-Фараби, пр. Аль-Фараби, 71, 050040, Алматы, Казахстан
ORCID: 0000-0001-5495-1686

Абдиман Жания, PhD-докторант факультета филологии Казахский национальный университет имени аль-Фараби, пр. Аль-Фараби, 71, 050040, Алматы, Казахстан
ORCID: 0000-0002-0690-5383

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