

NATIONAL HOLIDAYS

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Abstract

This scholarly article analyzes the complex role of national holidays in contemporary society. They are examined not merely as sources of leisure, but as crucial socio-cultural mechanisms that preserve collective memory, reinforce social solidarity, and continually regenerate national identity. The article explores the theoretical foundations of holidays within sociological and anthropological frameworks, scrutinizing their functions in upholding state ideology, transmitting cultural heritage, and serving as a stabilizing factor against the influences of globalization.

Keywords; National Holidays, Social Solidarity, National Identity, Collective Memory, Cultural Heritage, Social Action, Globalization, Patriotism.

National holidays occupy a central place in the life of any sovereign state and its citizens. They are not simply a collection of calendar dates, but rather vital social institutions that connect a society's past, present, and future, commemorating critical historical turning points and reinforcing a shared system of values. Holidays embody state ideology, national pride, and communal civilizational achievements. Their essence is characterized by a collective nature; during these days, the rhythm of individual life pauses, and society unites within a single, shared experience.

The **aim** of this research is to analyze the theoretical underpinnings of national holidays, study their practical functions in socio-cultural life, and evaluate their evolving significance amidst globalization. This study is **relevant** because in an era where the risk of cultural loss is heightened globally, national holidays remain one of the most effective and massive tools for preserving that unique identity.

I. Theoretical Foundations and Functions of National Holidays

1.1. Theoretical Approaches to the Concept of Holiday

To understand national holidays, it is essential to consult sociological and anthropological theories. The classical sociologist **Émile Durkheim**, in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, defined holidays and rituals as periods of "collective effervescence." During this time, society feels its singular spirit, collective

consciousness is strengthened, and the social structure is reaffirmed. National holidays perform a similar function of **social reintegration**, through which various classes and ethnic groups within society connect as a single nation.

In his ritual theory, anthropologist **Victor Turner** views holidays as *liminal* (transitional) periods where ordinary hierarchies and structures are temporarily suspended, giving way to a state of *communitas* (oneness). National holidays create this *communitas* on a national scale, demonstrating the social equality of citizens and their unity around common goals.

1.2. Primary Functions of National Holidays

A functional analysis of national holidays reveals four key roles they perform for society:

1. **Preservation and Revitalization of Historical Memory:** Holidays serve as a continuous mechanism for remembering the most significant dates in state-building (e.g., Independence Day, Victory Day, heroic anniversaries). This collective memory allows the nation to recall its roots, its experience of overcoming hardships, and its achievements.
2. **Ensuring Social Solidarity:** National holidays facilitate the unification of citizens from diverse regions, social groups, and ethnic backgrounds around common symbols (flag, anthem) and shared ceremonies (parades, concerts, public festivities). This, in turn, prevents social fragmentation and ensures internal stability.
3. **Formation of National Identity:** Through holidays, national values, traditions, and cultural distinctiveness are most brightly displayed. They constitute the most simple and powerful visual answer the state provides to its citizens regarding the question, "Who are we?" The display of national costumes, specific dishes, and national sports reinforces this identity.
4. **Political Legitimation:** Governments often use national holidays to assert the legitimacy of their power and the correctness of state policies. Holidays provide an opportunity to showcase the state's stability and its support by the people.

II. National Holidays - An Expression of Cultural Heritage and Traditions

2.1. Cultural Transformation of Holidays

National holidays often emerge from traditional rituals rooted in deep historical contexts. They can be formed through the elevation of religious or seasonal ceremonies to a national level. The **Navruz** holiday is a striking example. Although initially a seasonal ritual associated with the New Year and the arrival of spring for the peoples of the East, its universal cultural, national, and civilizational significance has been emphasized in countries like Uzbekistan, elevating it to an object of national pride.

The symbolic meanings within holiday rituals hold great importance. For instance, holiday parades demonstrate power and order; wearing national attire signifies respect for cultural heritage; and the performance of specific music and dances revitalizes art passed down through generations. These symbols serve as a universally understood language for members of the society.

2.2. The Educational Role of National Holidays

National holidays are invaluable in educating the younger generation and cultivating civic responsibility. Holiday events—especially those organized in schools and higher educational institutions—are the most effective means of conveying historical events to young people in an emotional and practical manner. Whether celebrating Independence Day or a Day of Remembrance, students directly experience the difficulty with which their homeland was built and the values upon which it must rely. This also provides an opportunity to transform the feeling of patriotism from theoretical knowledge into practical experience. The education system must promote holidays not merely as days off, but as lessons possessing deep spiritual and educational significance.

The major **National Holidays (Public Holidays/Days Off)** in Uzbekistan are:

Fixed-Date National Holidays

Date	Holiday Name (English)	Holiday Name (Uzbek)	Significance
January 1	New Year's Day	Yangi Yil Bayrami	Celebrated with festive meals, parties, and the traditional New Year tree.
March 8	International Women's Day	Xalqaro Xotin-Qizlar Kuni	Celebrated as a day of love, beauty, and appreciation for women, often referred to as "Mother's Day."
March 21	Navruz	Navro'z Bayrami	An ancient festival marking the Persian New Year and the Spring Equinox . It is the most colorful holiday, celebrated with traditional customs, folk games, and the preparation of <i>sumalak</i> (a sweet paste made from sprouted wheat).

May 9	Day of Remembrance and Honor	Xotira va Qadirlash Kuni	Honors the memory of those who defended the Motherland, particularly veterans of World War II, and is a day to show respect to the elderly.
September 1	Independence Day	Mustaqillik Kuni	The main national holiday, marking Uzbekistan's declaration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Celebrated with large-scale concerts, fireworks, and official ceremonies.
October 1	Day of Teachers and Instructors	O'qituvchi va Murabbiylar Kuni	A day to show deep respect and gratitude to teachers and mentors, celebrated with flowers and gifts from students.
December 8	Constitution Day	Konstitutsiya Kuni	Marks the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 1992.

⌚ Religious Holidays (Variable Dates)

These holidays are official days off, but their exact dates change each year as they are based on the **Hijri (lunar) calendar**:

- **Ramadan Hayit (Eid al-Fitr / Ruza Hayit)**: Marks the successful completion of the holy month of **Ramadan** (fasting).² It is a celebration of spiritual and moral purification.
- **Qurban Hayit (Eid al-Adha / Feast of Sacrifice)**: Celebrated 70 days after Ramadan Hayit, it is one of the greatest Muslim holidays, marking the culmination of the Hajj pilgrimage and involving the ritual of sacrifice.³

Significant Observances (Not Always Public Holidays)

- **January 14 – Day of Defenders of the Motherland (Vatan Himoyachilari Kuni)**: This day honors the creation of Uzbekistan's Armed Forces in 1992.⁴ While widely celebrated with military parades and men being congratulated (often informally referred to as "Men's Day"), it is **not always a public day off** unless decreed by the government to create a long weekend.
- **August 31 – Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Political Repression**: This is a day of national observance and remembrance, but it is **not a public holiday (day off)**.

III. Modern National Holidays: Globalization and New Threats

3.1. National Holidays in the Context of Globalization

The current era of globalization poses new, complex challenges for national holidays. On one hand, some national holidays may gain international recognition and become part of the world's cultural heritage (e.g., Navruz being inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List). This contributes to the nation's culture reaching the global stage and enhancing its prestige.

On the other hand, under the strong influence of global culture (particularly Western culture), the distinctiveness of local and national holidays risks being compromised. International holidays disseminated through mass media and the internet (e.g., Halloween, Valentine's Day) can reduce the prominence of local traditions and divert the younger generation's attention from national values. Therefore, preserving national holidays and adapting them to contemporary formats is a pressing task.

3.2. The Commercialization of National Holidays

Another significant issue arising in the organization of national holidays is their excessive **commercialization**. When holidays become a means of boosting economic activity and stimulating consumption, there is a risk that their initial spiritual, historical, and social significance may recede into the background. Focus can shift from the essence of the holiday to the money spent, the gifts purchased, and the entertainment services provided.

The main challenge facing state and public organizations is maintaining a balance between the spiritual values of holidays and their economic potential. To prevent holidays from losing their socio-moral function, priority must be given to the spiritual and educational component during their organization.

Conclusion

The findings of this research confirm that national holidays are not merely a formal part of societal life, but a crucial element of a complex socio-cultural system. They demonstrate the Durkheimian principle of collective effervescence in practice, serving as a mechanism that unites the nation, revitalizes historical memory, and continuously regenerates national identity. They play a fundamental role in ensuring social solidarity and educating the youth in the spirit of patriotism.

Key Recommendations include:

1. Prioritizing public projects that ensure the **active participation** of all segments of the population, especially youth, in holiday celebrations, rather than focusing solely on formal events.
2. Continuously promoting the **spiritual and historical essence** of holidays to counteract the effects of globalization and commercialization.
3. Introducing specialized educational modules in institutions to study the significance of national holidays.

Future Research Directions should involve a comparative analysis of national holidays in different countries and a deeper empirical study of their socio-psychological impact.

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