



OPEN DOORS
**WORLD
WATCH
LIST**
2023

Kazakstan

LANDSINFORMATION
JANUARI 2023

FÖR MER INFORMATION KONTAKTA:

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World
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Kazakhstan: Full Country Dossier

January 2023



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Open Doors International / World Watch Research

January 2023

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Introduction

World Watch List 2023

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	94	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.7	92	91	92	92	91
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	88	87	85	86
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.2	89	88	88	87	86
5	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.1	16.3	9.1	88	91	92	90	87
6	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.6	14.8	14.4	16.7	88	87	85	80	80
7	Pakistan	13.4	13.8	14.8	14.8	12.9	16.7	86	87	88	88	87
8	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.8	15.8	16.5	10.7	86	85	86	85	85
9	Afghanistan	15.4	15.7	15.4	16.1	16.6	4.6	84	98	94	93	94
10	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	9.4	83	79	79	85	87
11	India	12.3	13.1	13.0	14.8	13.3	15.7	82	82	83	83	83
12	Syria	13.2	14.1	13.6	14.1	14.1	11.3	80	78	81	82	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.9	15.8	16.7	2.4	80	81	78	79	77
14	Myanmar	12.5	11.6	13.9	13.9	12.9	15.4	80	79	74	73	71
15	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.8	16.0	16.4	0.2	77	77	77	78	78
16	China	12.9	10.0	12.7	14.5	15.6	11.1	77	76	74	70	65
17	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	10.3	15.1	15.0	76	70	67	66	68
18	Iraq	14.1	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	4.6	76	78	82	76	79
19	Algeria	14.1	14.1	11.5	13.7	15.1	4.8	73	71	70	73	70
20	Mauritania	14.5	14.2	13.3	14.1	14.2	1.3	72	70	71	68	67
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	13.9	12.7	15.6	1.5	71	71	71	73	74
22	Colombia	11.8	8.9	13.1	11.3	10.4	15.4	71	68	67	62	58
23	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.5	9.6	13.8	15.6	71	68	67	66	48
24	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	68	66	68	70
25	Vietnam	11.8	9.6	12.8	14.6	14.4	6.9	70	71	72	72	70
26	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	14.1	15.7	0.6	70	69	70	70	69
27	Cuba	13.1	8.3	13.1	13.2	14.9	7.0	70	66	62	52	49
28	Niger	9.4	9.5	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.4	70	68	62	60	52
29	Morocco	13.2	13.8	10.9	12.2	14.5	4.8	69	69	67	66	63
30	Bangladesh	12.6	10.7	12.8	11.3	10.6	10.7	69	68	67	63	58
31	Laos	11.7	10.2	13.3	14.2	14.0	5.0	68	69	71	72	71
32	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.6	68	65	63	43	43
33	Indonesia	11.3	12.0	11.6	11.1	9.2	12.8	68	68	63	60	65
34	Qatar	14.2	14.1	10.5	13.2	14.4	1.5	68	74	67	66	62
35	Egypt	12.7	13.5	11.6	12.1	10.8	7.0	68	71	75	76	76
36	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.4	12.0	13.5	6.5	67	66	67	64	63
37	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.6	67	66	64	56	55
38	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	11.0	10.5	13.9	67	65	64	60	61
39	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.4	12.1	10.6	66	66	65	63	65
40	Bhutan	13.2	12.3	11.6	13.9	14.2	1.1	66	67	64	61	64
41	Turkey	12.8	11.5	11.8	13.0	11.5	5.7	66	65	69	63	66
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.5	66	63	62	57	56
43	Malaysia	12.8	14.3	11.4	12.2	11.1	3.9	66	63	63	62	60
44	Tajikistan	13.8	12.2	12.3	12.8	13.4	1.1	66	65	66	65	65
45	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.9	65	65	64	60	54
46	Brunei	14.8	14.6	10.1	10.9	14.4	0.4	65	64	64	63	63
47	Oman	14.0	14.1	10.3	13.3	12.9	0.6	65	66	63	62	59
48	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.6	11.9	12.7	14.2	1.1	65	64	64	64	63
49	Jordan	13.0	14.0	10.5	12.3	12.7	2.0	65	66	64	64	65
50	Nicaragua	10.8	5.9	11.9	12.8	13.6	9.4	65	56	51	41	41

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.3	64	63	62	61	61
52	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	64	63	62	60
53	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.6	63	61	58	55	52
54	UAE	13.4	13.4	9.9	11.2	12.8	1.1	62	62	62	60	58
55	Nepal	12.0	9.8	9.4	13.0	12.6	4.4	61	64	66	64	64
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	0.6	60	59	56	56	56
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.3	9.7	10.3	12.0	2.0	60	59	58	60	57
58	Azerbaijan	13.2	10.0	9.5	12.0	13.6	0.6	59	60	56	57	57
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.2	11.0	10.4	12.0	2.0	59	58	58	57	56
60	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	7.6	58	55	53	56	48
61	Russian Federation	12.3	7.9	10.3	11.8	12.8	2.0	57	56	57	60	60
62	Sri Lanka	12.8	9.1	10.6	11.3	9.5	3.9	57	63	62	65	58
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	8.9	57	50	42	42	41
64	Venezuela	6.0	4.6	11.7	10.2	11.4	11.7	56	51	39	42	41
65	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	11.1	55	52	48	48	43
66	Bahrain	12.7	13.3	8.7	10.7	8.8	0.9	55	57	56	55	55
67	Honduras	7.1	5.0	11.9	7.6	9.8	11.9	53	48	46	39	38
68	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	51	46	43	42
69	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	9.2	14.8	51	48	47	48	47
70	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	5.4	49	44	43	41	42
71	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	3.0	48	43	47	45	46
72	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.0	46	43	43	44	44
73	El Salvador	7.7	4.2	10.6	7.4	9.1	6.7	46	45	42	38	30
74	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	42	42	42	43
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	1.1	44	44	43	43	43
76	Belarus	9.5	3.8	4.8	9.4	12.1	3.3	43	33	30	28	35

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2023 reporting period was 01 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Kazakhstan

Brief country details

Kazakhstan: Population (UN estimate for 2022)	Christians	Chr%
19,205,000	4,876,000	25.4

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

Map of country



Kazakhstan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	65	48
WWL 2022	64	47
WWL 2021	64	41
WWL 2020	64	35
WWL 2019	63	34

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Kazakhstan: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Political parties, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs
Islamic oppression	One's own (extended) family, Government officials, Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs
Clan oppression	One's own (extended) family, Government officials, Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs

Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.

Brief description of the persecution situation

Religious freedom is restricted by legislation dating back to September 2011 and the Kazakhstan government is constantly working at increasing its control over the whole of society, which means increased surveillance, raids on meetings and arrests. It is using the threat of militant Islam to restrict more areas of freedom. Russian Orthodox churches experience the least problems from the government as they do not usually attempt to make contact with the Kazakh population. It is the indigenous Christians with a Muslim background who are bearing the brunt of persecution both at the hands of the state and from family, friends and community. Some converts are locked up by their families for long periods, beaten and may eventually be expelled from their communities. Local imams also preach against them.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Kazakhstan has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in the following international treaties:

1. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR)
2. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR)
3. [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (CAT)
4. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

Kazakhstan is not fulfilling its international obligations by regularly violating or failing to protect the following rights of Christians:

- Churches from non-traditional denominations are raided and attendees arbitrarily arrested (ICCPR Arts. 9; 18 and 21)
- Ownership and consultation of religious literature is severely restricted beyond international permitted limitations (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)

- Christians and their activities are monitored by the authorities and surrounding community (ICCPR Art. 17)
- Christian female converts run the risk of being abducted and forcibly married to Muslim men (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- "In 127 known administrative prosecutions in 2021, 111 individuals (one twice), two charities, two schools and one company were punished for worship meetings, offering religious literature and items (including online), sharing or teaching faith, posting religious material online, or praying in mosques. Beimbet Manetov of the regime's Religious Affairs Committee insisted that individuals had to be fined if they break the law. Asked why courts punish individuals for exercising freedom of religion or belief, he responded: "I can't comment on court decisions." He said amendments his Committee has prepared to reduce these administrative punishments are now with the Justice Ministry, but refused to say why these punishments should not be abolished." (Source: [Forum 18, 2 February 2022](#))
- "'I have been continuously banned from leaving Kazakhstan since October 2013', Council of Churches Baptist Nikolai Novikov told Forum 18 from Oral on 1 February 2022. 'Of course I want to be able to travel abroad – I haven't been able to visit relatives in Russia. I've received many invitations but haven't been able to go to a single wedding.'" (Source: [Forum 18, 2 February 2022](#))

Specific examples of positive developments

- Baptist Nikolai Novikov, whose church's Christmas service on 8 January 2021 was raided by police, leading to two fines, told Forum 18 that 'it has been quieter in recent months', with almost no raids. (Source: [Forum 18, 2 February 2022](#))
- On 11 April 2022 Kazakhstan's President Tokayev announced that Pope Francis would visit Kazakhstan in September 2022 to participate in an interfaith dialogue. (Source: [UCAN, 12 April 2022](#))
- President Tokayev conveyed good wishes to the participants of the first plenary meeting of the newly created Catholic Bishops' Conference of Central Asia (CBCCA) held in the capital city, Nur-Sultan, on 27-29 April 2022. (Source: [UCAN, 29 April 2022](#))

External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Forum 18, 2 February 2022 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2715

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Forum 18, 2 February 2022 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2715
- Specific examples of positive developments: Forum 18, 2 February 2022 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2715
- Specific examples of positive developments: UCAN, 12 April 2022 - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/pope-francis-to-visit-kazakhstan-in-september-says-vatican/96880>
- Specific examples of positive developments: UCAN, 29 April 2022 - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/kazakhstan-president-greets-bishops-at-first-plenary-meeting/97089>

WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Kazakhstan

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries	AI country report 2021/22 (pp. 217-220)	https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf	23 June 2022
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-15263826	23 June 2022
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/KAZ	23 June 2022
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/kazakhstan/	23 June 2022
Crisis24 country report (Garda World) – covering 193 countries	Crisis24 country report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/kazakhstan	23 June 2022
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries	EIU 2021 (p.44)	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf	23 June 2022
FFP's Fragile States Index 2021 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2021	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	23 June 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index – covering 29 countries	Democracy Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/kazakhstan/nations-transit/2022	23 June 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom Index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/kazakhstan/freedom-world/2022	23 June 2022
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/kazakhstan/freedom-net/2022	18 January 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries	HRW 2022 country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/kazakhstan	23 June 2022
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022	https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#kz	23 June 2022
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	https://rsf.org/en/kazakhstan	23 June 2022
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2021	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/kaz	23 June 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries	HDI profile	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/KAZ	23 June 2022
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom (country profile)	IRFR 2021	https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/kazakhstan/	23 June 2022
USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 15 CPC / 12 SWL	USCIRF 2022	https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2022-05/2022%20Kazakhstan.pdf	23 June 2022
World Bank country overview – covering 178 countries	World Bank overview 2022	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kazakhstan/overview	23 June 2022
World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries	World Bank profile (2020 data)	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=KAZ	23 June 2022
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 – covering 147 countries (divided per region)	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 (pp. 18-19)	https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/macro-poverty-outlook	23 June 2022

Recent history

Like all other countries in the Central Asia region, Kazakhstan came into existence as an independent country in 1991. It was the last former Soviet republic to do so - at the end of August 1991. Of all the former Soviet Union states, Kazakhstan has managed the economic transition best. Contrary to all other Central Asian countries, the country's leaders have participated in the international community and are eager to cooperate and host international conventions. In March 2017, an international meeting was held in the Kazakh capital of Astana on the war in Syria. A highlight for Kazakhstan was to be honored with the rotating chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2010.

However, since 2010, the regime under President Nursultan Nazarbayev took on a more authoritarian character, bringing the country more in line with the other countries of Central Asia. Repressive policies, strict media control and legislative restrictions (also in religious affairs) were introduced and implemented – the purpose being to maintain the government's hold on power. A significant change occurred when President Nazarbayev resigned in March 2019 and Kassym-Jomart Tokayev was elected president on 9 June 2019 (see below: *Political and legal*

landscape). However, for Christians the new leader has brought little change to their situation so far.

According to HRW 2022 country chapter:

- "Kazakhstan was rocked in early January 2022 by nationwide anti-government protests and violence in Almaty, the country's largest city. As of January 11, official and media reports indicate that dozens of people had been killed, including two children, thousands injured, and approximately 10,000 people had been detained. Protests started on January 2 2022 in Zhanaozen, western Kazakhstan, in response to energy price rises, and quickly spread to other cities, with demands growing to include economic and political issues. On January 5, law enforcement used tear gas and stun grenades to break up protests, while unknown people in civilian clothes in Almaty started attacking police officers and public buildings and looting shops. President Kasym-Jomart Tokayev replaced his government, disrupted internet access, declared a state of emergency, and requested military help from the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, a six-country regional military alliance including Russia. On January 7 he ordered troops to "shoot to kill without warning." At time of writing, there were few details of the conditions facing those detained."

Kazakhstan is a close Russian ally and when war broke out between Russia and Ukraine on 24 February 2022, Kazakhstan's government held back from making any comment. This changed, however, in early April 2022 when the Kazakh Foreign Minister said his country - unlike Russia - did not recognize districts in Ukraine's eastern regions of Luhansk and Donetsk controlled by Russia-backed separatists as being independent. (Source: [Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty - RFE/RL, 5 April 2022](#)) This was [confirmed](#) by President Tokayev.

Political and legal landscape

Kazakhstan is officially a democratic, secular, unitary, constitutional republic with a diverse cultural heritage. From 1991 to 2019 its first and only president was Nursultan Nazarbayev. The president may veto legislation that has been passed by parliament and is also the commander in chief of the armed forces. The prime minister chairs the Cabinet of Ministers and serves as Kazakhstan's head of government. Although four parties are represented in the Kazakh parliament (Majilis), there is no real political opposition. This was particularly apparent during the presidential elections on 26 April 2015 when President Nazarbayev had no real opponents and won the elections with 97.7% of the votes, which enabled him to start his fifth five-year term as the country's president.

The question of who would succeed President Nazarbayev was answered by the 78 year old president himself. On 19 March 2019, he publicly announced out of the blue that he was resigning ([RFE/RL, 19 March 2019](#)). In a televised address to the nation he indicated that the speaker of the upper parliament chamber, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, would be acting president for the remainder of what would have been his term, in accordance with the Constitution. [Unsurprisingly](#), Tokayev was re-elected as president in the snap elections on 9 June 2019 with 70.76% of the vote (Asia News, 10 June 2019).

In May 2020, President Tokayev announced that he had removed Dariga Nursultanovna Nazarbayeva (i.e. the daughter of the former president) from her position as Senate speaker. This was totally unexpected as everyone believed Nazarbayeva would follow in her father's steps to govern Kazakhstan. (Source: [Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 9 July 2020](#))

In politics and economy Kazakhstan is increasingly linking up with Russia (and China). This is partly due to the large number of ethnic Russian citizens in the northern part of Kazakhstan. At the same time, Kazakhstan announced its plans to change from using the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet by 2025.

Parliamentary elections were held on 11 January 2021 and the Central Election Commission declared the overwhelming victory (with 71% of the vote) of the Nur Otan party, led by President Tokayev, who described Sunday's election as "a further step in the country's democratic development". (Source: [Agenzia Fides, 12 January 2021](#))

On 23 December 2021, the upper chamber of Kazakh's parliament approved a bill on abolishing the death penalty in the Central Asian nation. The Senate's approval of the bill came almost a year after President Tokayev signed off a parliamentary ratification of a UN human rights protocol aimed at abolishing the death penalty worldwide. (Source: [RFE/RL, 23 December 2021](#))

Kazakhstan held a [referendum](#) on 5 June 2022 on constitutional changes aimed at decentralizing decision-making. Encouraged by the clear majority approving the changes, the president now intends to make progress with the democratic reforms. (Source: Reuters, 6 June 2022).

The Religion Law

2011: The September 2011 legislation regulating religious affairs was [signed into law in October 2011](#) and contained the following restrictions:

- All religious communities need re-registration. This is a highly bureaucratic procedure which may result in only a fraction of all current communities passing the hurdle.
- Unregistered religious activity is banned. Leading, participating in or financing unregistered groups is punished. This has great effects for those Christian groups that refuse to register (like the Council of Baptist Churches), or those who do not pass the requirements of the new registration procedure.
- Compulsory religious censorship on religious materials is imposed. While the law states that everyone may acquire or own religious literature, importation and distribution of literature can only be done by registered communities. In-country production requires the full official name of the religious organization which produced it.
- New places of worship need approval from both local and central government.
- All founders or religious communities must be Kazakh citizens.
- Professional educational programs to prepare priests can only be done by organizations that are registered regionally or nationally. For Christians this means, in practice, that this can only be done by the Russian Orthodox Church.
- Religious organizations should take steps to prevent underage youth from taking part in their activities if one of the child's parents or legal guardians objects to this. Religious activities on children's holidays, sports and camps etc. are prohibited. Work among children

and youth thus became more difficult.

- Foreign citizens working as missionaries need to have an invitation from a registered community in Kazakhstan; they also need to have a personal registration as a missionary. Any granted permission has to be renewed annually.
- Social activities (such as work in hospitals, prisons or old people's homes) can only be done by registered communities.

2019: In January 2019, the government temporarily abandoned its plan to update the country's 2011 Religion Law. The legal amendments under consideration were more restrictive.

2021/2022: On 29 December 2021, President Tokayev signed into law amendments to the Religion Law to make holding religious events away from state-registered places of worship more difficult. (Source: [Forum 18, 5 January 2022](#)) The amendments came into force on 9 January 2022.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2021):

- "The constitution defines the country as a secular state and provides for freedom of religion and belief as well as the freedom to decline religious affiliation. The Committee for Religious Affairs (CRA), part of the Ministry of Information and Social Development (MISD), is responsible for religious issues. According to local and international observers, authorities continued to impose restrictions on and conduct additional scrutiny of what the government considered 'nontraditional' religious groups, including Muslims who practice a version of Islam other than the officially recognized Hanafi school of Sunni Islam, and some non-Lutheran Protestant Christian groups."
- "The government continued to raid religious services, prosecute individuals for 'illegal missionary activity', and refuse to register certain religious groups. Some religious minority groups faced attempts by local governments to seize their property. The government detained and fined members of Christian, Muslim, and Society of Krishna Consciousness groups for practicing their faith in ways authorities said violated religious laws."

According to USCIRF 2022:

- "In 2021, religious freedom conditions in Kazakhstan improved in some areas but remained problematic as the government failed to deliver on long-promised reforms. Since 2019, Kazakhstan has engaged in a religious freedom working group in consultation with U.S. government representatives, including USCIRF, and civil society stakeholders. At those sessions, and in numerous separate meetings between USCIRF and Kazakhstani officials, the government of Kazakhstan solicited and received recommendations for reforming the 2011 Religion Law to bring it into compliance with international standards. Despite repeated assurances that the recommendations would be considered and implemented in certain cases, the amendments passed on December 29, 2021, did not contain substantive reforms and seem likely to further restrict religious activity in Kazakhstan in some cases."

On 23 June 2022 Forum 18 released its [Religious Freedom Survey](#). The most important issues documented for Kazakhstan were:

- Religion Law changes to widen state religious censorship and to make holding religious meetings away from state-registered places of worship more difficult came into force on 9 January 2022, as nationwide protests against the regime and its policies broke out;
- An interlocking web of laws, including the Religion Law and the Criminal and Administrative Codes making the exercise of freedom of religion and belief illegal without state permission;
- All religious communities being required to have to state permission to exist in the form of state registration. State permission is also required for the places people meet for worship, as well as for activities such as sharing beliefs with others;
- The use of unclear allegations of "extremism" to jail people exercising their freedom of religion and belief and other fundamental freedoms;
- All public expressions of Islam being under the state-controlled Muslim Board, with a ban on all expressions of Islam that are not Sunni Hanafi. This control extends to controlling how people pray by prosecuting and fining Muslims for saying the word "Amen" aloud in mosques;
- Prisoners of conscience being jailed for exercising freedom of religion and belief, these prisoners being tortured with the use of techniques such as being banned from praying, physical violence, denials of medical care, refusals to allow them to visit dying close relatives or attend their funerals (such as the funeral of a prisoner's wife or father), and solitary confinement;
- Banning former prisoners of conscience from a wide and often unspecified "social activity", which can include activities including visiting a place of worship, driving a car, going to a restaurant, or being involved in any group or association;
- Adding those convicted for exercising freedom of religion or belief are added to the Financial Monitoring Agency List of individuals "connected with the financing of terrorism or extremism". Any bank accounts an individual may have are blocked, their families often finding out about the blocking of accounts only when they go to the bank. Individuals remain on the Financial Monitoring Agency List for six or eight years after their sentence has expired as they are deemed still to have a criminal record;
- A strict state censorship regime, imposing censorship of all religious literature (including in electronic form) and objects, strict restrictions on where such texts and objects may be sold or distributed, who may sell or distribute them, and court-ordered destruction - including book burning - of confiscated texts. This includes the use of state "expert analyses" to convict, fine, and jail people in unfair trials;
- State surveillance of all religious communities, one official claiming of surveillance including videoing of a Baptist Church and its congregation: "This isn't spying, this is monitoring, nothing more";
- The regime's use of claims aimed at foreigners of "religious tolerance" and "religious dialogue" to camouflage its serious violations of the freedom of religion and belief and other fundamental freedoms;

- The regime's election to the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council, despite ignoring multiple recommendations from the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Special Rapporteur on the rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, the UN Special Rapporteur for Protecting Human Rights while Countering Terrorism, and the UN Human Rights Committee, among others.

Christians in Kazakhstan play no role in the country's politics. There is no Christian political party.

Gender perspective

A 2019 CEDAW periodic report noted that Kazakhstan has introduced several positive laws and policies to combat gender inequality. It observed several ongoing issues however, such as: harmful gender norms and stereotypes, son-preference, child and/or forced marriage, and violence against women ([CEDAW, 2019](#)). Under Kazakh law, men and women have equal rights to enter marriage, must enter it freely, and be 18 years of age ([OECD, 2019](#)). Many continue to marry through religious or traditional marriages however, which offer individuals no legal protection. The practice of bride-kidnapping and forced marriages is reportedly on the rise, primarily in rural areas ([Kennan Institute, May 2020](#)). Legislation on domestic violence has tightened, but fails to criminalize it as a [stand-alone offence](#) (HRW, March 2022). It remains prevalent and underreported, and has reportedly risen in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic ([HRW, 2020](#)).

Military service is mandatory for all men between the age of 18 and 27 in Kazakhstan, although there are several circumstances whereby individuals can be exempted ([eGov, August 2022](#)). Christian men have reportedly experienced pressure due to their faith within this predominately Muslim context.

Religious landscape

Kazakhstan: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	4,876,000	25.4
Muslim	13,567,000	70.6
Hindu	920	0.0
Buddhist	21,400	0.1
Ethno-religionist	30,500	0.2
Jewish	5,500	0.0
Bahai	9,300	0.0
Atheist	93,800	0.5
Agnostic	587,000	3.1
Other - includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.	13,960	0.1

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

According to the World Christian Database (WCD 2022) 70.6% of the population of Kazakhstan is (predominantly Sunni) Muslim. However, it would be wrong to call Kazakhstan a Muslim country. 70 years of atheism during the Soviet era have left a deep influence; the government (the heirs of the atheist Soviets) is staunchly secular and seeks to keep Islam under control, while the overwhelming majority of the population merely follows Islamic traditions rather than strict Muslim teachings. Nevertheless, “to be a Kazakh is to be a Muslim” is the belief of many Kazakhs. As a result, converts to Christianity experience much pressure from family, friends and local community. This pressure is much stronger in rural areas than in the major cities. Relatives will oppress converts to Christianity, sometimes using physical abuse, in attempts to make them turn back to Islam. Sometimes this is also done by the local police.

Kazakhstan has by far the biggest Christian presence in Central Asia. According to WCD 2022, 25.4% of the population are Christians. The reason for this is not that Kazakhs have converted on a large scale to Christianity, but is due to the presence of a large Russian minority in the country’s northern provinces. As a result, more than 90% of all Christians in Kazakhstan belong to the Russian Orthodox Church. In contrast to other countries in Central Asia, Kazakhstan has not experienced a mass emigration of ethnic Russians.

Although the regime has imposed many restrictions on the production, importation and distribution of religious materials, the very long and open border with Russia means that access is less problematic than into other Central Asian countries.

Economic landscape

According to the World Bank data profile:

- **GDP (current US\$):** 171.08 billion (in 2020)
- **GDP annual growth:** -2.5% (in 2020)

According to the CIA World Factbook:

- "Kazakhstan's vast hydrocarbon and mineral reserves form the backbone of its economy. Geographically the largest of the former Soviet republics, excluding Russia, Kazakhstan possesses substantial fossil fuel reserves and other minerals and metals, such as uranium, copper, and zinc. It also has a large agricultural sector featuring livestock and grain. The government realizes that its economy suffers from an overreliance on oil and extractive industries and has made initial attempts to diversify its economy by targeting sectors like transport, pharmaceuticals, telecommunications, petrochemicals and food processing for greater development and investment. It also adopted a Subsoil Code in December 2017 with the aim of increasing exploration and investment in the hydrocarbon, and particularly mining, sectors."
- "Kazakhstan's oil production and potential is expanding rapidly. A \$36.8 billion expansion of Kazakhstan's premiere Tengiz oil field by Chevron-led Tengizchevroil should be complete in 2022. Meanwhile, the super-giant Kashagan field finally launched production in October 2016 after years of delay and an estimated \$55 billion in development costs. Kazakhstan's total oil production in 2017 climbed 10.5%."

- "Kazakhstan is landlocked and depends on Russia to export its oil to Europe. It also exports oil directly to China. In 2010, Kazakhstan joined Russia and Belarus to establish a Customs Union in an effort to boost foreign investment and improve trade. The Customs Union evolved into a Single Economic Space in 2012 and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in January 2015. Supported by rising commodity prices, Kazakhstan's exports to EAEU countries increased 30.2% in 2017. Imports from EAEU countries grew by 24.1%."
- "The economic downturn of its EAEU partner, Russia, and the decline in global commodity prices from 2014 to 2016 contributed to an economic slowdown in Kazakhstan. In 2014, Kazakhstan devalued its currency, the tenge, and announced a stimulus package to cope with its economic challenges. In the face of further decline in the ruble, oil prices, and the regional economy, Kazakhstan announced in 2015 it would replace its currency band with a floating exchange rate, leading to a sharp fall in the value of the tenge. Since reaching a low of 391 to the dollar in January 2016, the tenge has modestly appreciated, helped by somewhat higher oil prices. While growth slowed to about 1% in both 2015 and 2016, a moderate recovery in oil prices, relatively stable inflation and foreign exchange rates, and the start of production at Kashagan helped push 2017 GDP growth to 4%."
- "Despite some positive institutional and legislative changes in the last several years, investors remain concerned about corruption, bureaucracy, and arbitrary law enforcement, especially at the regional and municipal levels. An additional concern is the condition of the country's banking sector, which suffers from poor asset quality and a lack of transparency. Investors also question the potentially negative effects on the economy of a contested presidential succession as Kazakhstan's first president, Nursultan NAZARBAYEV, turned 77 in 2017."

Kazakhstan is blessed with vast resources of oil, gas and various minerals. The current regime has promoted market reforms and has transformed Kazakhstan into the second largest economy of the former Soviet empire (after Russia). Despite the fact that the country was hit hard by the financial crisis that started in 2008 (and later by the economic sanctions imposed by the West on Russia after it had annexed the Ukrainian peninsula of the Crimea in early 2014), Kazakhstan remains the wealthiest country in the region. As a result, Kazakhstan is the only country in the region that has few labor migrants abroad, but hosts many labor migrants from other Central Asia countries (such as Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan). This offers opportunities for Christian outreach among these people. When the COVID-19 crisis struck, thousands of these migrant were stranded in Kazakhstan's southern region of Turkistan because they were unable to travel back home due to restrictions imposed to combat the pandemic. (Source: [RFE/RL, 3 July 2020](#))

A key challenge for Kazakhstan is to diversify its economy while overcoming the geographic constraints of being a landlocked country. The difficulties of diversifying an oil-dependent economy are many. As was seen in Kazakhstan's negotiations to join the World Trade organization, the country's leaders are also acutely aware of the "distance tax" (i.e. the extra costs involved in being a landlocked country) which creates a markup on its export goods that make them more difficult to market. Kazakhstan's strategies for economic reform should be seen against this background. The development of agriculture, an economy of "simple things" and a major emphasis on digitalization are all economic strategies congruent with Kazakhstan's

geographical constraints. Their success will depend, in part, on whether Kazakhstan's political reforms gain traction. Most importantly, the efforts to combat corruption will be key to make Kazakhstan attractive for foreign investment, and to reduce the burden on Kazakh entrepreneurs trying to compete in foreign markets. (Source: [Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 14 December 2021](#))

Kazakhstan holds a strategic position in the East-West connection between China and the West. A new version of the Silk Road is under construction, which is being pushed by both China and Turkey. This means that there are large-scale construction activities underway to build highways for trucks and tracks for trains. China has also been particularly active in Kazakh oil and gas exploration.

The COVID-19 crisis hit the Kazakh economy badly. Oil, gas and copper prices went down. A suspension of work at any of the major oil fields or major copper mines meant an additional loss of revenue the state could ill afford. (Source: [RFE/RL, 3 June 2020](#))

Gender perspective

Just like the rest of the population, Christians are also suffering from the deteriorating economy. Women are, broadly speaking, more economically vulnerable in Kazakhstan as they are more likely to assume traditional domestic responsibilities in the home. Whilst education rates and participation rates in the labor force are both relatively high, more men act as the primary breadwinners and financial decision-makers, and fewer high-responsibility jobs (such as parliamentary positions) are available for women ([UNDP, 2020, p.361](#)). Under inheritance laws, men and women have equal rights, and failure to access inheritance is not understood to be a widespread issue of concern ([OECD, 2019](#)). Christian men may face economic discrimination on the grounds of their faith, often through State fines and imprisonment, job loss, or being forced to pay bribes to operate their business.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Kazakh (Qazaq) 68%, Russian 19.3%, Uzbek 3.2%, Ukrainian 1.5%, Uighur 1.5%, Tatar 1.1%, German 1%, other 4.4% (2019 est.)
- **Main languages:** Kazakh (official, Qazaq) 83.1% (understand spoken language) and trilingual (Kazakh, Russian, English) 22.3% (2017 est.); Russian (official, used in everyday business, designated the "language of inter-ethnic communication") 94.4% (understand spoken language) (2009 est.)
- **Urban population:** 58% of total population (2022)
- **Literacy rate:** 99.8% (male: 99.8%, female: 99.7%)

According to the UN Global Human Development Indicators (HDI profile):

- **HDI score and ranking:** 0.825 (0.807 for females, 0.823 for males), ranking 51
- **Total population:** 18.6 million (2019)
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 73.6 years (77.7 for females, 69.2 for males) (2019)
- **Expected years of schooling:** 15.6 years (15.8 for females, 15.1 for males) (2019)

- **Gender Inequality index:** 0.19 (2019)
- **Labor Force Participation Rate (% ages 15 years and older):** Female: 62.7, Male: 75.5 (2019)

The government is successfully promoting the use of the Kazakh language and the renaissance of traditional Kazakh culture. According to RFE/RL reporting on [12 April 2017](#), President Nazarbayev ordered the authorities to come up with a Latin-based alphabet for the Kazakh language by the end of 2017, marking a major shift after nearly 80 years with a Cyrillic-based alphabet. Despite this, 95% of the population of Kazakhstan is still capable of communicating in Russian. According to RFE/RL reporting on [26 April 2019](#): "Nazarbayev announced in April 2017 that all publications, documents, and street signs in Kazakhstan will switch from a Cyrillic-based alphabet to a Latin-based alphabet by 2025." Already in November 2018, the country held a nationwide exam to test students' proficiency with the Latin alphabet, part of the former Soviet republic's shift away from Cyrillic (RFE/RL, [14 November 2018](#)).

Thanks to the former Soviet system of education, practically every citizen in Kazakhstan is literate. This means that people who are interested in the Christian message can read materials in their own language. However, the restrictions imposed by the government (all materials must be approved and only registered groups may be active) mean that most distribution etc. must be done unofficially.

The COVID-19 crisis also hit Kazakhstan in 2020. At first, not all COVID-19 cases were registered. This led to the curious situation that the number of graves in a cemetery in Almaty that were set aside for the burial of COVID-19 victims exceeded those that were in the official records ([RFE/RL, 25 May 2020](#)). Later on, the country's main economic sectors (oil and natural gas winning and copper mining) were shown to have more COVID-19 infections than average. This meant that the Kazakh government found itself in dire straits: On the one hand it could not allow the income from the oil, gas and copper resources to be lost, but neither could it afford to have recurrent outbreaks of infections at work sites which threatened to spread to local populations. Workers found themselves in a similar conundrum: Stay home and lose one's income, or go to work and run the risk of catching the virus ([RFE/RL, 3 June 2020](#)).

In general, Christians experience the same problems as all other people in the country and are not especially targeted economically or socially. The only exception to this is the pressure from the social environment (family, local imams, villagers) on Christians with a Muslim background.

Gender perspective

On 16 November 2021, three Kazakh activists, acting on behalf of five feminist groups and activists - KazFem, Feminita, FemPoint, Svet, and FemAgora - requested permission to hold a peaceful march and rally in Almaty on 8 March 2022. The Almaty city administration, in written responses, denied the requests on 26 November, citing a conflict with "cultural and entertainment events" and "repair and installation works" allegedly scheduled on that day at the exact same location and time. (Source: [HRW, 10 December 2021](#))

According to a report by the Asian Development Bank, cultural norms are generally positive towards the concept of gender equality ([ADB, 2018, p.17](#)). A public opinion study published in 2016 revealed that most men and women believed that the situation for women had improved over the last 10 years ([EBRD, 2016](#)). Women are viewed as active members of society, although are expected to assume more of the traditional domestic duties and are less likely to be granted positions with decision-making power. There remains significant stigma around divorce, such that even sisters of divorcees may struggle to marry ([OECD, 2019](#)). Domestic violence also remains an ongoing area of concern, particularly as it reportedly worsened in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic ([HRW, 9 April 2020](#)).

President Tokayev has repeatedly stated that domestic violence is an acute problem and protection of women's rights is key. Yet in January 2022, parliament suspended the review of a new draft domestic violence law and has not, since then, proposed any new legislation offering strengthened protection to women from family abuse. Meanwhile, police and service providers lack appropriate training to identify, prevent, and adequately respond to domestic violence. (Source: HRW 2022 country chapter)

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2022):

- **Internet usage:** 76.6% penetration - survey date: July 2022
- **Facebook usage:** 72.9% penetration - survey date: July 2022

According to World Bank data profile:

- **Mobile cellular subscriptions:** 129.4 per 100 people (2020)

According to [NapoleonCat](#) December 2022 data, there were more women (56.3%) using Facebook than men (43.7%). [Georgetown](#) (2021) also reported that women's cell phone rose to 100% from 90.7% in 2017 (GIWPS, 2021, p. 77).

According to [BuddeComm Research](#) (Publication date: January 2023):

- "Kazakhstan has one of the most developed telecommunications sectors in the Central Asian region. This is especially true of the mobile segment, where widespread network coverage has enabled very high penetration rates – reaching 180% as far back as 2012. Since those heydays, the mobile and fixed-line segments have both pared back their subscriber numbers to more modest levels. The telcos have still been successful in terms of improving their margins and revenues by growing value-added services along with exploiting the capabilities of their higher-speed networks (4G LTE as well as fibre) to drive significant increases in data usage."
- "In earlier days, Kazakhstan also enjoyed a relatively high fixed-line teledensity thanks to concerted efforts to invest in the fixed-line infrastructure as well as next-generation networks. But as with most developed telecom markets around the world, demand for traditional voice services is on the wane as customers take a preference for the flexibility and ubiquity of the mobile platform for voice as well as data services."

- Mobile clearly dominates the telecom sector in Kazakhstan, yet 2020 saw a sharp drop in subscriber numbers for both mobile voice and mobile broadband services as the Covid-19 crisis took hold. Even so, data usage (and revenue) went up at a faster rate as more people started working from home – or found they had more ‘downtime’ to spend on the Internet."
- "With the exception of fixed-line voice services, Kazakhstan's telecom market is expected to return to moderate growth from 2022 onwards. The extensive deployment of LTE networks across the country (along with the prospect of 5G services being added to the mix in 2023) points towards an even greater uptake of lucrative mobile broadband services, in particular."

According to Freedom House's Freedom on the Net report 2022:

- "Internet freedom in Kazakhstan declined during the coverage period, largely because the government restricted internet access as protests took place across the country and ensuing violence—which it portrayed as a coup attempt —broke out in Almaty in January 2022. More than 200 people died during the protests, including six people who were tortured to death by law enforcement, though rights groups claim the number is higher. Government officials compelled some outlets to remove their protest coverage, while journalists covering the events and Kazakhstani citizens faced unlawful detention and physical attack."
- "Later media reports indicated the government initially tried to use Russian deep packet inspection (DPI) technology to filter internet resources in a “more pointed” manner, but when this attempt failed, the authorities decided to block access totally."
- "The authorities use various nontechnical means to enforce the removal of content, including direct pressure on outlets to take down specific material and similar requests aimed at international social media platforms. There was a noticeable increase in cases of forced removal, particularly concerning political content, during the coverage period." (B2)
- "According to Freedom Now, a human rights group, eight men were arrested in October 2018 for participation in a WhatsApp group where they shared religious materials. They were given five-to-eight-year sentences for inciting religious discord and promoting terrorism, and six of them remained imprisoned as of April 2022." (C3)
- "In May 2022, the Prosecutor General's Office reported that the Ministry of Internal Affairs had obtained special equipment and software to monitor social networking sites and identify users of social media and messaging applications." (C5)

According to Freedom House's Freedom on the Net report 2021:

- "[T]he government continued to restrict internet access. At the end of 2020, the government tested the controversial National Security Certificate, a machine-in-the-middle (MITM) technology enabling it to monitor users' online activities, leaving users who refused to install it unable to access a number of websites.
- Media freedoms were further restricted during the January 2021 parliamentary elections, with DDoS attacks* and social media blocks. Local internet disruptions were reported during protests, including those with official sanction. Freedoms of speech and assembly remain restricted, and corruption is endemic." (* DDoS is "Distributed Denial-of-Service. An attacker floods a server with internet traffic to prevent users from accessing connected online services and sites.)

Satellite dishes provide a good alternative for many people in Kazakhstan to access international information. The media that are under state control offer only very limited independent information, if at all.

There are many options for Christians to communicate aspects of the Christian faith - via (foreign) websites, via SD cards in smartphones, and via radio and television programs through satellite broadcasts. The situation for books, magazines and DVDs is more problematic since these can be more easily confiscated during raids and searches.

Security situation

Radical Islamic attacks have not occurred in Kazakhstan for roughly a decade. There was a sudden spike at the end of 2011 when there were bombings and killings in Atyrau (western Kazakhstan) and Taraz (southern Kazakhstan); but since then, the government has stepped up its suppression of radical Islamic influence. However, officials have admitted that hundreds of Kazakhs went to Iraq and Syria to join Islamic State group (IS) fighters in recent years. According to RFE/RL, it is said that many were killed fighting as IS militants (Source: [RFE/RL, 10 May 2019](#)). In the first days of May 2019, the authorities repatriated 231 Kazakh citizens from Syria many of whom were believed to be IS family members. On 13 May 2019, Kazakh Deputy Foreign Minister Yerzhan Ashikbayev told a press conference that the group included 16 men, 59 women and 156 children, most under six with 18 orphans ([Asia News, 16 May 2019](#)).

From time to time there are border tensions between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In March 2019 Kazakh authorities started conducting elaborate checks of all trucks entering Kazakhstan from Kyrgyzstan. As a result, Kyrgyzstan lashed out at neighboring Kazakhstan over what they saw as burdensome bureaucratic procedures that slowed the movement of trucks across the border to a crawl for the second time in two years ([RFE/RL, 3 April 2019](#)).

On 8 February 2020, there were ethnic clashes in a southern Kazakh district, with mobs torching houses, overturning cars and sending hundreds fleeing into neighboring Kyrgyzstan. At least eight people were killed. This was the worst ethnic violence in the Zhambyl region (130 kilometers west of Almaty) for some years ([RFE/RL, 8 February 2020](#)).

On 28 October 2021, street clashes struck Pidzim, a Kazakh town in the province of Panfilovo. The local authorities spoke of a "fight between young people" that began with verbal clashes and ended in a brawl with the use of sticks and improvised weapons. At a meeting of the municipal assembly, however, it became clear that this was a real inter-ethnic conflict. Pidzim is located 15 kilometres from the Chinese border, and has 12,000 inhabitants: 7,000 Kazakhs and 5,000 Uyghurs, almost all of whom are farmers. Villagers said that 'the conflict did not start yesterday, the youth has long been divided between the different nationalities', calling on the local government to establish a real policy of tolerance. The aim of the meeting was to calm things down, but the videos show that the situation remained very tense. Several residents called for the renaming of the town and the local schools. (Source: [Asia News, 2 November 2021](#))

In general, Christians experience the same problems as all other people in the country and have not been especially targeted as far as national security issues are concerned.

Trends analysis

1) The change in presidential leadership has made little change to the running of the country

When President Nazarbayev abruptly announced his resignation in March 2019, he did not intend to disappear from the political scene. He handed over his public tasks to his chosen candidate (who was then elected in June 2019), but behind the scenes Nazarbayev continued to exert his influence. No major changes have occurred in Kazakhstan since then, with one exception - the removal of Nazarbayev's daughter as Speaker of the Senate.

2) The situation for Christians has deteriorated since 2011

Since the passing of a new law on religion in October 2011 (see *Political and legal landscape*), Christians have been facing very high levels of pressure. The situation has not improved since amendments came into force in January 2022.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty - RFE/RL, 5 April 2022 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/31787134.html>
- Recent history: confirmed - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-toqaev-respect-ukraine-integrity/31789173.html>
- Political and legal landscape: RFE/RL, 19 March 2019 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakh-president-nursultan-nazarbaev-says-he-is-resigning-/29830123.html>
- Political and legal landscape: Unsurprisingly - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Tokayev-elected-president-amid-protests-and-arrests-with-almost-71-per-cent-of-the-vote-47242.html>
- Political and legal landscape: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 9 July 2020 - <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13629-dariga-nazarbayevas-political-ambitions-effectively-ended-by-president-tokayev.html>
- Political and legal landscape: Agenzia fides, 12 January 2021 - http://www.fides.org/en/news/69374-ASIA_KAZAKHSTAN_Legislative_elections_Nur_Otan_party_of_former_president_Nazarbayev_wins
- Political and legal landscape: RFE/RL, 23 December 2021 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-approves-law-abolishing-death-penalty/31623072.html>
- Political and legal landscape: referendum - <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/kazakhstan-votes-amend-constitution-referendum-results-2022-06-06/>
- Political and legal landscape: signed into law in October 2011 - http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1624
- Political and legal landscape: Forum 18, 5 January 2022 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2709
- Political and legal landscape: Religious Freedom Survey - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2753
- Political and legal landscape: CEDAW, 2019 - https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/KAZ/CO/5%20&Lang=En
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WWL 2023: Church information / Kazakhstan

Christian origins

In the 7th and 8th centuries, Nestorian Christianity spread through southern Kazakhstan. In the year 1009, Nestorian missionaries baptized one of the numerous groups of Mongol-speaking ethnic Kereiti whose Khan took the Christian name Mark, Marguz. In the same period, Nestorian Christianity spread among other peoples of Central Asia, and Metropolitan sees were established.

Timur Lenk (also called Tamar Lane: 1336-1406) eradicated Christianity in the 14th century. Stalin (1878-1953) ordered the deportation of many politically unreliable and religious citizens of the USSR to Kazakhstan during the “Great Purge” in the 1930s. During those years many Russian Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant Christians were sent to Central Asia and many of them settled in Kazakhstan. Many church leaders were deported and sent to concentration camps in Kazakhstan. After their release, they started a clandestine ministry among the people. The church grew mainly among the non-Kazakh people.

After the country gained independence in 1991, the new religious liberty allowed missionary and evangelistic efforts to reach thousands of ethnic Kazakhs who embraced Christianity. The indigenous Church (i.e. Christians with a Muslim background), which was practically non-existent in 1990, is now estimated to number around 15,000. The church is not growing rapidly, due to pressure from both the Muslim environment (family, friends and community) and the local authorities.

Church spectrum today

Kazakhstan: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	4,508,000	92.5
Catholic	131,000	2.7
Protestant	52,000	1.1
Independent	146,000	3.0
Unaffiliated	50,000	1.0
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-10,200	-0.2
Total	4,876,800	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	42,900	0.9
Renewalist movement	114,000	2.3

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

According to the World Christian Database data of April 2022 the largest official church denominations in Kazakhstan are:

- The Russian Orthodox Church
- The Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- The Roman Catholic Church

The overwhelming majority of Christians in Kazakhstan are ethnic Russians and Ukrainians. They live mainly in the north of the country.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Rights violations targeting all Christian communities and carried out by government officials can occur all over the country. Pressure from family, friends and community on converts is stronger outside the urban areas.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians in Kazakhstan are not isolated from other Christian groups and are therefore not classed as a separate category in WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities: These groups, of which the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is by far the largest, are not involved in evangelism among Kazakhs. They can function relatively freely since the Kazakh regime does not consider them a threat. Also, the Kazakh government has no interest in provoking Russia by making difficulties for the ROC – the events in eastern Ukraine have set an example.

Converts to Christianity: Christian converts with a Muslim background bear the brunt of the persecution in Kazakhstan. Apart from certain state restrictions, they are also under strong pressure from family, friends and community. For them the latter is by far the more powerful.

Non-traditional Christian communities: The unregistered groups of this category (which include Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations) experience increasing persecution, especially where they are active in evangelism. All Christians in this category risk facing raids, threats, arrests and fines by the authorities.

WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Kazakhstan

Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

Position on the World Watch List

Kazakhstan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	65	48
WWL 2022	64	47
WWL 2021	64	41
WWL 2020	64	35
WWL 2019	63	34

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

Kazakhstan scored one point higher in WWL 2023, reaching 65 points. This was mainly caused by increases in the scores of the *Community* and *Church spheres of life*. The latter reached the extreme level of 14.2 points; all other *spheres of life* scored very high. The two main Persecution engines in Kazakhstan (*Dictatorial paranoia* and *Islamic oppression*, the latter blended with *Clan oppression*) are active in all *spheres of life*, but *Islamic oppression* (blended with *Clan oppression*) dominates in the *Private* and *Family spheres of life*, while *Dictatorial paranoia* dominates in the *National* and *Church spheres of life*. Both engines 'meet' each other in the *Community sphere of life*. Muslim families, friends and villagers exert pressure on converts in particular, while the government imposes many restrictions on church activities. Religious freedom is restricted by legislation dating back to September 2011 and the Kazakhstan government has been working at increasing its control over the whole of society, which has led to increased surveillance, raids on meetings and arrests. The government has also used the threat of militant Islam to restrict more areas of freedom, which also affects the Church.

Persecution engines

Kazakhstan: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Medium
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Medium
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Very weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Not at all

The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong)

No religious activities beyond state-run and state-controlled institutions are allowed. Pressure from the authorities has been stepped up since 2015 and raids and arrests have continued. Members of Protestant churches are particularly targeted since they are regarded as a foreign influence aiming to destroy the current political system. Hence their need to be severely controlled.

Islamic oppression (blended with Clan oppression) (Medium)

If indigenous citizens (who are Muslim) convert to Christianity, they are likely to experience pressure and occasionally physical violence from their families, friends and local community to force them to return to their former faith. Some converts are locked up by their families for long periods, beaten and may eventually be expelled from their communities. Local imams preach against them, so adding pressure. As a result, converts will do their best to hide their faith – they become so-called secret believers.

Drivers of persecution

Kazakhstan: Drivers of Persecution									
	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	MEDIUM	-	-	MEDIUM	VERY WEAK	-	-	STRONG	-
Government officials	Medium	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	Strong	-
Ethnic group leaders	Medium	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Medium	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	Very weak	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Very weak	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Medium	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	Medium	-
One's own (extended) family	Strong	-	-	Strong	Very weak	-	-	-	-
Political parties	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Strong	-

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". For more information see WWL Methodology.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

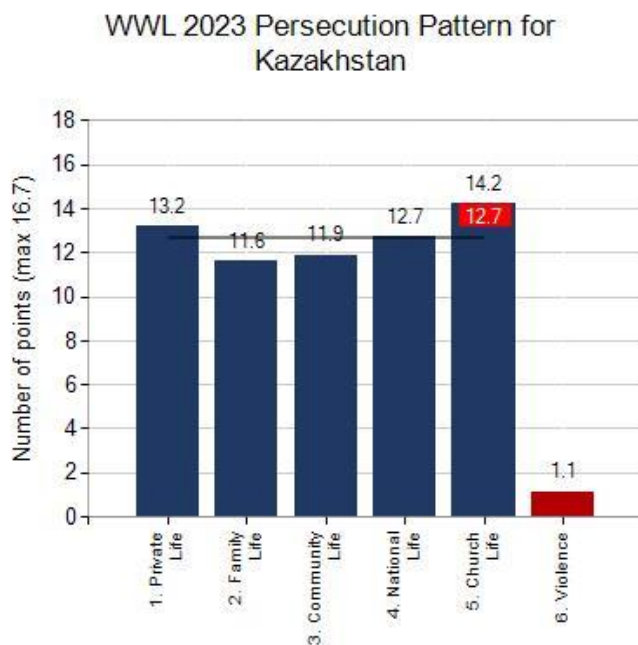
Government officials (Strong): The government suppresses all religious activity taking place independently of state control. Protestants have been fined, arrested and had their churches raided. Registration has been denied for years to several Christian groups. It is illegal for non-registered churches to gather, forcing them to go underground and leading to police raids. Religious literature must be approved by the government. Unapproved religious meetings can result in fines and imprisonment, with members being interrogated.

- **Political parties (Strong):** The ruling party functions as a driver since much of the persecution is government-sanctioned.
- **Normal citizens (Medium):** 71% of the population are Muslims. They will protest against any conversions and report Christian activities to the local authorities.

Drivers of Islamic oppression (blended with Clan oppression)

- **Extended family (Strong):** Pressure on converts is exerted by family, friends and community to make them recant their Christian faith and return to Islam. This pressure can be intense and lead to violence.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Local officials will have connections to the Muslim community, affecting their dealings with Christians.
- **Ethnic or Clan group leaders (Medium):** Kazakh leaders (with the support of the authorities) see conversion as an assault against Kazakh identity.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Medium):** Muslim clerics are open in their hostility towards non-Orthodox Christians and particularly against converts from Islam.
- **Normal citizens (Medium):** At the local level, citizens are mostly Muslim and will oppose conversion and have a negative attitude toward Christian activities.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2023 Persecution pattern for Kazakhstan shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (12.7 points), increasing from 12.4 in WWL 2022. There were pressure increases in the *Community*, *National* and *Church spheres of life*.
- Pressure is very high in all spheres of life and is at an extreme level in the *Church spheres of life*. The next highest level of pressure is found in *Private life*. This is an indication that pressure on Christians in Kazakhstan comes from two main sources: *Islamic oppression blended with Clan oppression (Private sphere of life)* and *Dictatorial paranoia (National and Church spheres of life)*.
- The score for violence is very low, decreasing from 1.7 points in WWL 2022 to 1.1 in WWL 2023. As in all other countries in Central Asia, reports of violent incidents tend to be few in number.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2023 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://openodoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (3.50 points)

Christian materials are considered as hard evidence for conversion. For converts at home in the countryside, if such materials are discovered, persecution comes from family and local community. The government of Kazakhstan distinguishes between approved and non-approved materials, and between registered and unregistered Christians. The ROC does not seem to experience problems in this respect.

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.25 points)

Conversion is the issue that triggers the fiercest reaction from family, friends and community in Kazakhstan. Conversion is viewed as betrayal of the family and culture, as well as of Islam. This can lead to physical violence too. This only affects converts in the countryside. Officially, there is no hindrance to conversion - the laws are secular. But the government is concerned that conversions could lead to tension among the population.

Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.25 points)

Converts in the countryside have a problem in this respect as openly showing their new faith will draw negative reactions from their families, friends and the community, but any Christian wearing Christian symbols will draw attention from the Muslim environment. Any non-Orthodox Christian wearing Christian symbols also draws unwanted attention from the state.

Block 1.7: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with immediate family members. (3.25 points)

Converts in the countryside are strongly suppressed from practicing their religion from their family so would definitely be afraid to discuss it with them. It can also affect Russian Protestants as they are traditionally considered sects.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.50 points)

Baptisms are regarded as the final farewell to the faith of the fathers - the final sign of conversion. Family, friends and community will oppose this. Baptisms are regarded by the state with hostility as they are automatically connected to evangelism and conversion - two activities opposed by the state.

Block 2.6: Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith. (3.25 points)

Muslim families and communities will block adoption and fostering procedure if it is known that a person is a Christian. The adoption of a Kazakh child into a Christian family is not permitted.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.25 points)

The Muslim environment (family, friends, community) will pressurize children of converts in particular to attend Islamic instruction - sometimes even against the wishes of their parents. The administration of schools and institutes periodically organize state-funded public meetings about combating "sects". These meetings spread negative propaganda against religious minorities, including against Evangelical churches. These meetings are supposedly voluntary, but everyone is strongly urged to attend.

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.25 points)

Christian children are frequently slandered and Muslim children are kept from having close contact with them. Children of converts are seen as outsiders and so often experience harassment from their Muslim peers.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.50 points)

Converts are monitored by their family and surrounding community. Unregistered Christian churches are monitored by the local authorities.

Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.25 points)

Threats are very common. Converts are threatened by the family, friends and community (including the local imam). Local state officials regularly threaten unregistered Christian groups.

Block 3.12: Christians have been fined for faith-related reasons (e.g. jizya tax, community tax, protection money). (3.25 points)

This occurs frequently and all over the country. Christians are fined for illegal religious activities such as worshiping at a non-registered church, distributing religious literature or sharing their faith. Worst hit are converts and unregistered churches.

Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

Known converts will be harassed and interrogated harshly by their family and community. When a meeting is raided, people present will be interrogated, fined and sometimes detained, while all materials found on the spot are confiscated. Once they have been recorded in police records, Christians are required to report regularly.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (3.75 points)

The amendment to the existing Constitution recognizes two religious organizations that are not required to re-register: i) the state-supported Muslim Board and associated religious communities, and ii) the Russian Orthodox Church, as a cultural representative of Russian Federation. Other religious organizations and communities are required to re-register. The registration process is complicated and limits the opportunities for non-traditional religious organizations to operate on an official basis. Islam has no impact on legislation in Kazakhstan. The role of the Muslim community does not reach to this level.

Block 4.3: Christians have been forced by law or in practice to act against their conscience, e.g. regarding military service or in certain professions. (3.75 points)

Military service is obligatory and those Christians who for religious reasons do not want to take up arms, are still forced to join the armed forces.

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.50 points)

It is prohibited to express religious views in public, without official authorization, according to the law regulating religious life. In practice, such permission is only given to state-supported religious organizations.

Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.50 points)

There are no Christian political parties in Kazakhstan. There are no Christian civil organizations as they would be falling under the category 'religious' (Kazakhstan is a secular country). There are charity organizations and rehabilitation centers run by Christians, but Muslims regard such activity as a form of outreach and will often oppose them.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (4.00 points)

The law on religion is very restrictive about literature which can only be distributed in registered church buildings, recognized religious educational institutions and special places appointed by the state. In December 2016 President Nazarbayev signed amendments to anti-terrorism legislation which requires compulsory censorship of all religious literature produced and distributed in Kazakhstan. New, more restrictive legal amendments are presently under consideration by parliament. Muslims regard most Christian materials as evangelism tools.

Block 5.18: Churches have been hindered in establishing, managing, maintaining and conducting schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural organizations, institutions and associations. (4.00 points)

According to the law, no religion-based organizations, institutions or schools are allowed. The Muslim community will regard any social work by Christians as a form of outreach and will oppose it.

Block 5.12: Churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in printing Christian materials or owning printing presses. (3.75 points)

The law on religion puts restrictions on printing and distributing religious literature. Since January 2017, more restrictions came into force under the law on anti-terrorist activities. (See Block 5.8 above)

Block 5.13: Churches have been hindered in importing Christian materials from abroad. (3.75 points)

For all imported materials approval is needed from the Religious Affairs Agency (RAA). Only registered churches can apply for this. And even then it may take a very long time for the RAA to give permission. Muslims have no influence at this level.

Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following 5 points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced. Possible reasons for this may be:

- Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.
- In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.
- If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.
- In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.

2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons:

- Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).
- In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.
- Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.

3. For further discussion (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor's article dated 13 November 2013 available at:
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

4. The use of symbolic numbers: In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10*, 100* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000*, 100,000* and 1,000,000*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

5. The symbol "x" in the table: This denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security concerns.

Kazakhstan: Violence Block question		WWL 2023	WWL 2022
6.1	How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2	How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.3	How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	2	8
6.4	How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	3
6.5	How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	0	0
6.6	How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	1	0
6.7	How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8	How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	25	31
6.9	How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	1
6.10	How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	1
6.11	How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.12	How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	0

In the WWL 2023 reporting period:

- **Christians arrested:** At least 2 Christians were arrested; It is known that Christians get detained and interrogated (especially those belonging to non-registered churches) but the number remains unreported.
- **Christians raped:** A young female Christian was raped and beaten by a taxi driver.
- **Christians harassed:** Sources reported that 25 converts (both men and women) had faced harassment at the hands of their Muslim relatives and communities. Most were living in rural areas.

5 Year trends

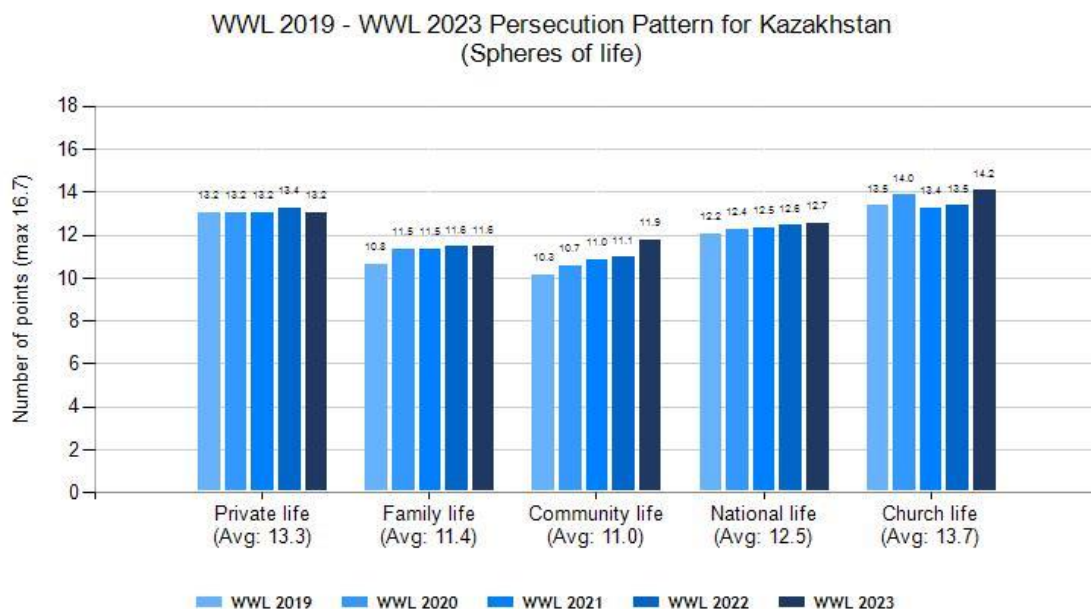
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Kazakhstan: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern history		Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023		12.7
2022		12.4
2021		12.3
2020		12.4
2019		12.0

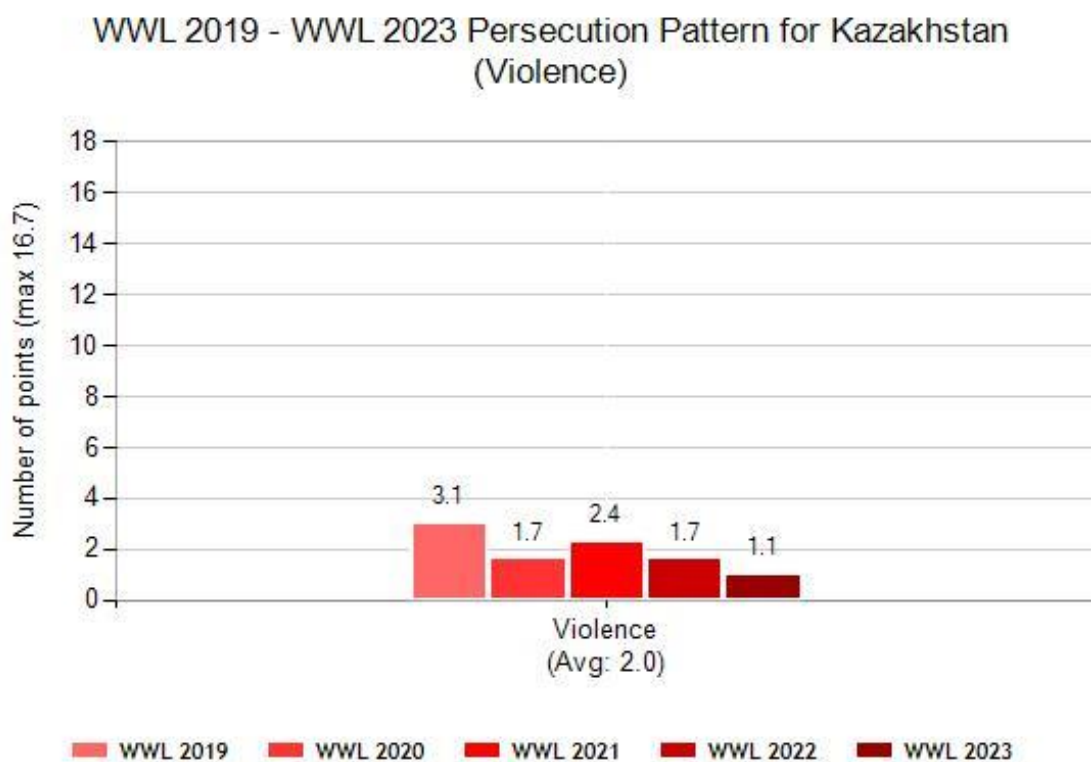
As can be seen from the table above, the average pressure over the 5 spheres of life in Kazakhstan has been constantly very high. After a stabilisation during WWL 2020-WWL 2022 at the 12.3/12.4 point mark, there was an increase to 12.7 in WWL 2023.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



Pressure is highest throughout in the *Church* and *Private spheres of life*, reflecting the two dominant Persecution engines operating in Kazakhstan. Pressure has more or less levelled off in the *Private* and *Family* spheres. and Although at a lower level, there has been a steady increase in pressure every reporting period in *Community life*.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



As in many other former Soviet republics, the number of violent incidents in Kazakhstan tends to be low or very low. Over the past five WWL reporting periods, the score for violence has generally followed a downward tendency, with the score for WWL 2019 being the highest (3.1 points) and that of WWL 2023 being the lowest (1.1 points).

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

In Kazakhstan the daily life of indigenous people is based on traditional Islamic culture, which disadvantages women and requires total submission. A country expert summarizes: “Traditional culture puts women lower than men and requires obedience to men in the family. For that reason, a woman cannot choose her own religion and will be persecuted if she converts to Christianity.” This makes female converts from Islam more vulnerable to persecution, both as

Christians and as women who challenge the existing order.

Converts risk suffering physical and verbal abuse, harassment, threats and being put under house arrest. One female convert reported that she had been regularly beaten by her husband a few years previously, and that he kicked her in her stomach while she was pregnant. Despite a strong relationship with her parents, she felt too ashamed to report the beatings to them for fear that she would be viewed as a bad wife. Her husband has since left her to provide for their children by herself, compounding her sense of shame.

Facilitating such domestic violence, there has been a notable lack of effective measures to address gender-based violence against women, which is understood to have increased as a result of COVID-19 measures ([HRW 2021 country chapter](#)).

While there have been no reported cases, the risk of being forcibly married to a Muslim remains an ongoing risk for converts. This is sometimes linked to abduction, as part of “bride kidnapping” practices ([RFE/RL, 21 April 2021](#)). Women and girls living in rural areas are most at risk of falling victim to this tradition. Christian women are also vulnerable to sexual assault, and in the WWL 2023 reporting period, there was at least one report of a young Christian woman being raped.

Spouses and children of converts in the countryside have also experienced pressure from their families who try to keep them within Islam. It is difficult for a woman to escape such pressure as she stands little chance of living on her own, due to high unemployment and a lack of financial independence ([Open Democracy, 19 June 2018](#)).

The persecution of Christian women serves to create fear and anxiety in families and Christian communities. Targeting women can also be used as an instrument for persecuting their husbands.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

While Kazakhstan has gradually been closing the gap in terms of gender inequality, men continue to assume roles of higher responsibility than women; the religious persecution which Christian men experience reflects this socio-cultural structure. As men are normally the leaders of families and churches, when they become a target of persecution the wider family or church congregation will suffer. If a man loses his job, his wider family suffers. Likewise, if a church

leader is interrogated or imprisoned, fear soon spreads in the church he serves.

Pressure on Christian men comes from both the State, as well as the family and community spheres. State-based persecution has included interrogations, fines, detention and imprisonment. When a Christian gathering is raided, the leaders bear the brunt of the raid, because they are perceived as responsible for conversions taking place. Church leaders have also been imprisoned following these interrogations. Furthermore, obligatory military service for young men provides an extra potential risk of persecution because it is a highly controlled environment in a Muslim-majority state. Further, those Christians, who for religious reasons, do not want to take up arms are still forced to join the army.

Family-based persecution affects converts from a Muslim background. They face harsh verbal harassment, physical beatings and being expelled from the family. Young men who are still students and need financial support, risk losing this support upon conversion.

Earning a living remains complicated for Christian men since they are directly affected by the bribes required of Protestants in order to run their businesses. Converts in the countryside are especially under this pressure at this point. Some business owners keep their Christian beliefs a secret. Reports indicate that Protestants are persecuted in this way but not Orthodox Christians, and that converts face pressure on their businesses from the local authorities and local community. Converts and church leaders particularly risk losing employment due to their faith.

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2021):

- "According to the international religious freedom NGO Forum 18, 24 Sunni Muslims were serving sentences connected to their religious activities or beliefs at the end of the year, the same number as in 2020. Eight other individuals were serving 'restricted freedom' sentences that consisted of probation plus compulsory community service, and in some cases, court-imposed restrictions on their freedom of movement. Sixteen individuals who had completed their prison terms remained banned from religious activities."
- "Jehovah's Witnesses reported that some of their members who were conscientious objectors encountered difficulties in obtaining exemption from military service, although all cases were eventually resolved through dialogue with authorities."
- "According to Jehovah's Witnesses, in 2020 (most recent information), authorities detained 63 members of the community on charges of illegal missionary activity between January and October. Authorities issued oral warnings to 38 members, written warnings to 14, and took 11 to court for allegedly violating the religion law. Of those 11, nine were acquitted and two were found guilty under the country's administrative code and fined 277,800 tenge each (\$640)."
- "Jehovah's Witnesses continued to report the appearance of defamatory articles in private and government-run media outlets during the year. The Church of Scientology also received negative media coverage."

- "The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community remained unregistered during the year; the group had attempted to register with authorities six times since 2011 and was last rejected in 2016. Government experts had previously concluded the community's teachings were not Islamic and that it must remove the word 'Muslim' from its registration materials."
- "The Kordai District Court fined three ethnic Dungan (ethnic Chinese) Muslims, Sherba Yuburov, Kharsan Yasyrov, and Kelir Nusyrov, 291,700 tenge (\$671) each in February, March, and July, respectively, for illegal religious teaching after finding them guilty of instructing children about the Quran at unsanctioned gatherings in Kordai District of Zhambyl Region. Religious freedom observers noted that Kordai District, on the country's southeastern border with Kyrgyzstan, experienced a disproportionate number of religious freedom prosecutions, with Forum 18 stating that half of all illegal religious instruction cases in the country from 2018 to 2021 were from the district."
- "On September 30 and October 14 [2021], government authorities administratively extended without delay for an additional year (the maximum time allowed by law) the asylum status of four Muslim ethnic Kazakh Chinese citizens who fled persecution in Xinjiang. The four individuals first received asylum status in Kazakhstan in October 2020 on the grounds of credible fear of persecution if they returned to China. On January 21, however, unidentified persons attacked two of these individuals nearly simultaneously in the cities of Nur-Sultan and Almaty. The victims stated publicly that local authorities and PRC contacts had warned them repeatedly not to speak about the situation in Xinjiang."

According to Forum 18 reporting on [19 May 2022](#) and [26 May 2022](#):

- Five of the nine known prisoners of conscience jailed for exercising freedom of religion or belief were punished for participating in an online Islamic discussion group. The other four are also Sunni Muslims. Dadash Mazhenov and Abdukhalil Abduzhabbarov are facing torture by being held in prolonged solitary confinement. Mazhenov has been physically tortured, most recently in a January 2022 beating with truncheons which broke his jaw. Abduzhabbarov was not allowed to attend his father's funeral, while Galymzhan Abilkairov was not allowed to attend his wife's funeral.
- Those currently known to be serving sentences or post-prison restrictions and punishments:
 - 9 individuals (all of them Sunni Muslim men) serving prison sentences;
 - 4 individuals (all of them Sunni Muslim men) freed early from prison and serving the rest of their sentences at home under restrictions;
 - 8 former prisoners of conscience with bans on unspecified or specified activities - including exercising freedom of religion or belief - after completing their jail terms;
 - 35 individuals who have completed prison terms or restricted freedom sentences still have access to any bank accounts blocked.

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Dictatorial paranoia

The current government exerts a high level of control over the country. Government officials at all levels are the main persecutors of Christians in Kazakhstan, imposing all kinds of legal restrictions, monitoring all religious activities, carrying out raids on meetings and blocking the availability of religious materials. This is not likely to change in the near future.

Islamic oppression/Clan oppression (blended)

Islam is not the state religion but it is the traditional religion of most of the population. Muslims are treated in the same manner as other religions. Muslim pressure on Christians in Kazakhstan does not come from radical Islamic movements but rather from the far-reaching cultural influence of Muslim family, friends and community on converts. The chances that this will change soon are as good as non-existent.

Due to the stability of these two main Persecution engines, Christians in Kazakhstan will continue to face considerable levels of surveillance and pressure.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: HRW 2021 country chapter - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/kazakhstan#ce2d83>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: RFE/RL, 21 April 2021 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-bride-kidnapping-victim-fights-for-justice/31215297.html>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Open Democracy, 19 June 2018 - <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/fighting-patriarchy-in-kazakhstan/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: 19 May 2022 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2742
- Persecution of other religious minorities: 26 May 2022 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2744

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the new Research & Reports page of the website od.org. As in earlier years, they are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) using the following links:

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Kazakhstan>