

World  
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Research

# Kazakhstan: Full Country Dossier

December 2021



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Man in Kazakhstan (c) Alamy

# Introduction

## World Watch List 2022

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
1	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	15.0	98	94	93	94	93
2	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	13.1	96	94	94	94	94
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.5	91	92	92	91	91
4	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.2	16.3	11.5	91	92	90	87	86
5	Yemen	16.7	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	5.2	88	87	85	86	85
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.6	11.1	88	88	87	86	86
7	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.3	14.5	14.4	16.7	87	85	80	80	77
8	Pakistan	13.6	14.0	15.1	14.9	13.1	16.7	87	88	88	87	86
9	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.6	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	86	85	85	85
10	India	12.7	12.7	12.9	14.7	13.3	15.6	82	83	83	83	81
11	Saudi Arabia	15.1	15.1	15.0	15.9	16.7	3.1	81	78	79	77	79
12	Myanmar	12.4	11.5	13.8	13.4	13.1	14.8	79	74	73	71	65
13	Sudan	13.4	13.4	14.3	13.6	15.7	8.5	79	79	85	87	87
14	Iraq	14.0	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	6.9	78	82	76	79	86
15	Syria	12.9	13.8	13.5	14.3	13.9	9.3	78	81	82	82	76
16	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.4	77	77	78	78	78
17	China	12.6	9.8	12.2	14.4	15.5	11.1	76	74	70	65	57
18	Qatar	14.2	14.1	11.1	13.0	14.3	7.2	74	67	66	62	63
19	Vietnam	11.3	9.7	12.7	14.1	14.5	8.7	71	72	72	70	69
20	Egypt	12.7	13.2	11.5	12.7	10.8	10.0	71	75	76	76	70
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	14.1	11.8	15.6	1.7	71	71	73	74	73
22	Algeria	14.0	14.0	11.1	13.4	14.1	4.1	71	70	73	70	58
23	Mauritania	14.3	13.9	13.1	14.0	14.1	0.9	70	71	68	67	57
24	Mali	9.4	8.2	13.9	10.3	12.8	15.0	70	67	66	68	59
25	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	13.3	15.7	0.6	69	70	70	69	68
26	Laos	12.0	10.3	13.2	13.3	14.1	5.9	69	71	72	71	67
27	Morocco	13.1	13.8	10.8	12.8	14.2	3.9	69	67	66	63	51
28	Indonesia	11.3	11.5	11.5	11.0	9.6	13.5	68	63	60	65	59
29	Bangladesh	11.8	10.7	12.9	11.3	10.2	11.3	68	67	63	58	58
30	Colombia	11.5	8.8	13.1	11.0	9.9	13.3	68	67	62	58	56
31	CAR	9.0	8.6	13.6	9.6	11.4	15.6	68	66	68	70	61
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.6	12.1	14.8	68	67	66	48	-
33	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.9	7.2	12.8	14.8	68	62	60	52	45
34	Bhutan	13.4	12.4	11.7	13.7	13.8	1.7	67	64	61	64	62
35	Tunisia	11.9	12.7	10.6	11.3	13.4	6.5	66	67	64	63	62
36	Oman	13.8	14.0	10.3	13.2	13.4	1.5	66	63	62	59	57
37	Cuba	12.3	8.1	12.6	13.2	14.0	5.9	66	62	52	49	49
38	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.3	12.3	9.8	66	65	63	65	62
39	Jordan	12.9	14.0	11.0	12.3	12.5	3.0	66	64	64	65	66
40	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	12.0	15.6	66	64	56	55	33
41	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	11.3	7.9	12.5	15.6	65	63	43	43	-
42	Turkey	12.6	11.5	11.4	13.2	11.6	4.6	65	69	63	66	62
43	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	10.8	10.3	12.6	65	64	60	61	59
44	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.4	65	64	60	54	38
45	Tajikistan	13.8	12.3	12.0	12.6	13.2	0.7	65	66	65	65	65
46	Brunei	14.8	14.5	10.3	11.0	13.2	0.6	64	64	63	63	64
47	Kazakhstan	13.4	11.6	11.1	12.6	13.5	1.7	64	64	64	63	63
48	Nepal	12.4	9.8	9.9	13.6	12.7	5.2	64	66	64	64	64
49	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	63	62	60	61
50	Malaysia	12.5	14.3	11.5	11.6	10.2	3.3	63	63	62	60	65

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
51	Kenya	11.7	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	11.1	63	62	61	61	62
52	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.9	11.4	11.3	9.4	7.8	63	62	65	58	57
53	Comoros	12.7	11.1	11.2	12.4	14.2	0.9	63	62	57	56	56
54	UAE	13.4	13.6	10.1	11.8	12.2	1.3	62	62	60	58	58
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	13.7	61	58	55	52	53
56	Azerbaijan	13.1	9.9	9.3	11.0	13.4	3.3	60	56	57	57	57
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.4	9.8	10.2	12.0	0.9	59	58	60	57	60
58	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	11.1	10.0	12.2	0.7	59	56	56	56	56
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.1	11.1	10.4	12.0	1.5	58	58	57	56	54
60	Bahrain	12.5	13.2	9.1	11.1	10.2	0.9	57	56	55	55	57
61	Nicaragua	9.1	5.6	11.1	11.8	11.3	7.6	56	51	41	41	-
62	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.6	12.3	2.2	56	57	60	60	51
63	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	5.6	55	53	56	48	40
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.1	52	48	48	43	-
65	Venezuela	5.6	4.5	11.2	9.4	11.1	9.6	51	39	42	41	34
66	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	10.1	11.4	7.8	51	46	43	42	-
67	Rwanda	8.1	5.5	6.7	10.3	10.1	9.3	50	42	42	41	-
68	Honduras	7.2	5.1	10.5	7.7	9.2	8.7	48	46	39	38	-
69	Uganda	8.1	4.6	7.4	6.7	9.1	11.7	48	47	48	47	46
70	El Salvador	7.7	4.6	10.7	5.7	9.1	7.2	45	42	38	30	-
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	2.4	44	43	41	42	-
72	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	1.7	44	43	43	43	-
73	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	2.0	43	47	45	46	-
74	South Sudan	5.7	0.9	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	43	44	44	-
75	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	7.9	2.0	42	42	42	43	-
76	Israel	9.8	8.4	5.6	6.6	6.6	4.3	41	40	38	39	40

## Copyright note

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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 2022 reporting period was 01 October 2020 - 30 September 2021.
- 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).

## Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic

In the WWL 2022 reporting period, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of In-country networks, Open Doors country researchers, External experts, WWR analysts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that – as in the previous reporting period – WWL 2022 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

## External Links - Introduction

- Sources and definitions: World Watch List Documentation - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>

# WWL 2022 Situation in brief / Kazakhstan

## Brief country details

Kazakhstan: Population (UN estimate for 2021)	Christians	Chr%
18,957,000	4,847,000	25.6

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

## Map of country



Kazakhstan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	64	47
WWL 2021	64	41
WWL 2020	64	35
WWL 2019	63	34
WWL 2018	63	28

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 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 131 known administrative prosecutions in 2020, 112 individuals, three charities and one company were punished for holding worship meetings, making religious literature and items available (including online), teaching about faith and posting religious content online. At least 7 fines were imposed in January 2021. Deputy Chair Anuar Khatiyev of the government's Religious Affairs Committee refused to discuss why individuals should face prosecution and punishment for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief. (Source: [Forum 18, 2 February 2021](#))
- The Information and Social Development Ministry is proposing various amendments to the Religion Law and the Administrative Code. One Religion Law amendment would impose new bureaucratic procedures on state-registered religious communities wanting to hold religious meetings away from state-registered places of worship. This would affect any religious community which does not own its own building, as well as communities that want to hold a pilgrimage or other event away from their place of worship. The Prime Minister's Office ordered the Religion Law amendments be removed from the proposed Law on Social Control, but the provision remains in draft amendments from July 2021. (Source: [Forum 18, 20 August 2021](#))
- Courts across Kazakhstan have fined at least 26 people so far in 2021 for offering religious literature or other religious objects (such as icons, vinyl records and Koran stands) for sale without state permission. Almost all the fines were of three weeks' average wage for those in formal work. Courts gave two other people verbal reprimands. (Source: [Forum 18, 8 September 2021](#))

### Specific examples of positive developments

- The Catholic Caritas NGO project, which promotes the social and professional reintegration of children with Down syndrome in Kazakhstan, is to be expanded to include people with other disabilities. (Source: [Fides, 12 November 2020](#))
- The Catholic Church carried out an evangelistic summer program especially dedicated to children and young people run by the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) in Kazakhstan. (Source: [Fides, 16 September 2021](#))



## 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 2021 - [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2634](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2634)
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Forum 18, 20 August 2021 - [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2680](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2680)
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Forum 18, 8 September 2021 - [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2683](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2683)
- Specific examples of positive developments: Fides, 12 November 2020 - [http://www.fides.org/en/news/69009-ASIA\\_KAZAKHSTAN\\_Caritas\\_extends\\_project\\_for\\_children\\_with\\_Down\\_syndrome\\_to\\_people\\_with\\_other\\_disabilities](http://www.fides.org/en/news/69009-ASIA_KAZAKHSTAN_Caritas_extends_project_for_children_with_Down_syndrome_to_people_with_other_disabilities)
- Specific examples of positive developments: Fides, 16 September 2021 - [http://www.fides.org/en/news/70809-ASIA\\_KAZAKHSTAN\\_Young\\_people\\_meet\\_the\\_living\\_Christ](http://www.fides.org/en/news/70809-ASIA_KAZAKHSTAN_Young_people_meet_the_living_Christ)

## WWL 2022: Keys to understanding / Kazakhstan

### Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International country report	AI 2021	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/kazakhstan/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/kazakhstan/</a>	29 July 2021
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-15263826">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-15263826</a>	29 July 2021
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2020	BTI 2020	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard-KAZ.html">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard-KAZ.html</a>	29 July 2021
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/kazakhstan/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/kazakhstan/</a>	29 July 2021
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2020	EIU 2020	<a href="https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf">https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf</a>	29 July 2021
FFP's Fragile States Index 2021	FSI 2021	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	29 July 2021
Freedom House's 2021 Democracy index	Freedom House/Democracy 2021	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/kazakhstan/nations-transit/2021">https://freedomhouse.org/country/kazakhstan/nations-transit/2021</a>	29 July 2021
Freedom House's 2021 Global Freedom index	Freedom House/Global Freedom 2021	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/kazakhstan/freedom-world/2021">https://freedomhouse.org/country/kazakhstan/freedom-world/2021</a>	29 July 2021
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2020 report	Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2020	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/kazakhstan/freedom-net/2020">https://freedomhouse.org/country/kazakhstan/freedom-net/2020</a>	29 July 2021
Garda World country report	Garda World	<a href="https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/kazakhstan">https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/kazakhstan</a>	29 July 2021
Human Rights Watch World Report 2021	HRW 2021	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/kazakhstan">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/kazakhstan</a>	29 July 2021
Internet World Stats 2021	IWS 2021	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#kz">https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#kz</a>	29 July 2021
RSF's 2020 World Press Freedom Index	World Press Freedom 2020	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/kazakhstan">https://rsf.org/en/kazakhstan</a>	29 July 2021
Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index	CPI 2020	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/kaz">https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/kaz</a>	29 July 2021
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators	HDI	<a href="http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/KAZ">http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/KAZ</a>	29 July 2021
US State Department's 2020 International Religious Freedom country reports	IRFR 2020	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/kazakhstan/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/kazakhstan/</a>	29 July 2021
USCIRF 2021 country reports	USCIRF 2021	<a href="https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/Kazakhstan%20Chapter%20AR2021.pdf">https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/Kazakhstan%20Chapter%20AR2021.pdf</a>	29 July 2021
World Bank country report	World Bank	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kazakhstan">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kazakhstan</a>	29 July 2021

## 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 rulers 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.

## 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 ([Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty - 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 huge 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 Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, who described Sunday's election as "a further step in the country's democratic development". (Source: [Fides, 12 January 2021](#))

In January 2019, the government abandoned its plan to update the country's 2011 religion law. Religious freedom conditions in Kazakhstan have thus possibly begun to move in a positive direction, since the legal amendments under consideration were more restrictive. The September 2011 legislation regulating religious affairs was signed into law in October 2011 and contains the following restrictions, which are currently still in place:

- 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.

As stated by IRFR 2020:

- "The constitution defines the country as a secular state and provides for freedom of religion. 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 and additional scrutiny on 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 Protestant Christians. Authorities continued to arrest, detain, and im-

prison individuals on account of their religious beliefs or affiliation; restrict religious expression; prevent unregistered groups from practicing their faith; restrict assembly for peaceful religious activities; restrict public manifestation of religious belief; restrict religious expression and customs, including religious clothing; criminalize speech ‘inciting religious discord’; restrict proselytism; restrict the publication and distribution of religious literature; censor religious content; and restrict acquisition or use of buildings used for religious ceremonies and purposes. The government again raided religious services, prosecuted individuals for ‘illegal missionary activity’, and refused to register certain religious groups. ... Religious minority groups stated that the authorities used COVID-19 pandemic restrictions to discriminate against them. Five pastors and two church workers were detained, tried, jailed, fined, or warned for reportedly violating pandemic restrictions."

As stated by USCIRF 2021:

- Despite noteworthy signs of improvement (see above: *Specific examples of positive developments*), "ongoing religious freedom violations and allegations of abuse continued to plague Kazakhstan. Legislation that restricts religious freedom was the primary source of such systematic and ongoing violations. Before it enacted the 2011 religion law, Kazakhstan was one of the least repressive post-Soviet Central Asian states with regard to freedom of religion or belief. That law, however, set stringent registration requirements with high membership thresholds, and it banned or restricted unregistered religious activities, including those related to offering education, distributing literature, and training clergy."
- "Other vague criminal and administrative statutes enable the state to punish most unauthorized religious or political activities, and religious groups have since been subject to ongoing and intrusive state surveillance. The total number of registered religious groups plummeted after 2011 as a result of that law— especially "non-traditional" groups, which declined from 48 to 16. Government experts can deny registration in a closed process, which applicant groups have no ability to appeal. ... Without a clear legal framework in place to protect religious freedom for all, such abuses are likely to persist and the overall situation could deteriorate once again."

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

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 2021). 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, April 2021](#)). Christian men have reportedly experienced pressure due to their faith within this predominately Muslim context.

## Religious landscape

Kazakhstan: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christian	4,847,000	25.6
Muslim	13,477,000	71.1
Hindu	850	0.0
Buddhist	20,200	0.1
Ethno-religionist	29,200	0.2
Jewish	5,500	0.0
Bahai	9,700	0.1
Atheist	75,600	0.4
Agnostic	479,000	2.5
Other	13,210	0.1
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

Islam is the main religion in Kazakhstan (predominantly Sunni). 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. 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:

- **GDP (current US\$):** 179.34 billion (in 2018)
- **GDP annual growth:** 4.1%. Kazakhstan's GDP growth has been declining since 2000

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](#))

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 would represent an additional loss of revenue the state can ill afford. (Source: [RFE/RL, 3 June 2020](#))

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 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 HDI 2020). 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 [UNDP's full 2020 report](#) (page 343 onwards) and 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:** 57.8% of total population (2021)
- **Literacy rate:** 99.8%

According to UNDP HDI 2020:

- **HDI score and ranking:** 0.825, ranking 51
- **Total population:** 20.6 million
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 73.6 years
- **Expected years of schooling:** 15.6 years (15.8 for girls and 15.1 for boys)
- **Population in multidimensional poverty, headcount (thousands – for the year of the survey):** 80
- **Gender inequality index:** 0.980. This score is a composite measure reflecting inequality in relation to reproductive health, empowerment and the labor market. Providing an indication of how it performs, Kazakhstan ranks 44 out of 177 countries.

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.

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, 2020](#)).

## Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2021):

- **Internet usage:** 77.2% penetration - survey date: June 2021
- **Facebook usage:** 62.3% penetration - survey date: June 2021

According to World Bank:

- **Mobile cellular subscriptions:** 142.3 per 100 people

According to 2015 data, men and women used the Internet at an equal rate in Kazakhstan ([World Bank, 2017](#)). Data indicates that more Instagram and Facebook users are registered as female than male ([Statista, 2017](#); [NapoleonCat, 2018](#)). [Georgetown 2019/20](#) also reports that women's cell-phone use rose from 90.7% in 2017 to 93.4% in 2019.

According to [BuddeComm Research](#) (updated 30 June 2020):

- Kazakhstan has developed one of the most advanced telecoms sectors in Central Asia, supported by the largest economy in the region which itself has benefited from abundant oil and natural gas reserves.
- The fixed broadband market in Kazakhstan remains relatively underdeveloped, due to the dominance of the mobile broadband sector, which is in turn driven by the strong mobile sector.
- The number of fixed telephone lines in Kazakhstan is declining steadily, again related to the preference for the mobile platform for voice services. The rate of decline began to accelerate in 2015, and further decline is anticipated in coming years.



- Kazakhstan's mobile market was once highly competitive but has since been consolidated and is effectively a duopoly between Kazakhtelecom and Beeline Kazakhstan. Both operators have developed extensive LTE infrastructure to support mobile broadband services and have trialled 5G though commercial launches are not anticipated until 2021.

According to Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2020:

- "Internet freedom in Kazakhstan remains under threat. In July 2019, the government rolled out its national security certificate, a machine-in-the-middle (MITM) technology enabling it to monitor users' online activities. Facing outcry, President Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev halted the certificate's rollout after a few weeks, but its basis in legislation remained untouched, which means that it can be reintroduced at any time. The government also moved during the coverage period to implement advanced video surveillance technologies, even as multiple high-profile data breaches raised concerns over the security of citizens' personal data. In the fall of 2019, numerous users were temporarily disconnected from the internet when the government disabled unregistered mobile devices, while throughout the coverage period, emergency situations and unauthorized political gatherings were accompanied by localized internet shutdowns. Online content continued to be censored, while users—in particular, journalists who work online—continued to face legal and extra-legal attacks."

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](#)). During the reporting period for WWL 2022, no clashes between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were reported.

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. In January 2019, however, planned additional restrictions were shelved. It is too early yet to conclude whether the situation for Christians in Kazakhstan has improved as a result.

## External Links - Keys to understanding

- Political and legal landscape: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty - 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: Fides, 12 January 2021 - [http://www.fides.org/en/news/69374-ASIA\\_KAZAKHSTAN\\_Legislative\\_elections\\_Nur\\_Otan\\_party\\_of\\_former\\_president\\_Nazarbayev\\_wins](http://www.fides.org/en/news/69374-ASIA_KAZAKHSTAN_Legislative_elections_Nur_Otan_party_of_former_president_Nazarbayev_wins)
- Political and legal landscape: CEDAW, 2019 - [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/KAZ/CO/5%20&Lang=En](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/KAZ/CO/5%20&Lang=En)
- Political and legal landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/KZ.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: Kennan Institute, May 2020 - <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-rise-non-consensual-bride-kidnapping-kazakhstan-developing-culturally-informed-and>
- Political and legal landscape: HRW 2020 - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/09/lack-refuge-kazakhstans-domestic-violence-survivors>
- Political and legal landscape: eGov, April 2021 - [https://egov.kz/cms/en/articles/military\\_service/exemption\\_from\\_army](https://egov.kz/cms/en/articles/military_service/exemption_from_army)
- Economic landscape: RFE/RL, 3 July 2020 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbek-tajik-migrant-workers-stranded-in-kazakhstan/30704986.html>

- Economic landscape: RFE/RL, 3 June 2020 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-takes-another-economic-hit-as-coronavirus-infects-oil-fields-copper-mines/30650397.html>
- Economic landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/KZ.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNDP's full 2020 report - <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2020.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: 12 April 2017 - <http://www.rferl.org/a/kazakh-president-orders-shift-from-cyrillic/28425590.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: 26 April 2019: - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-issues-new-coins-featuring-latin-based-alphabet/29905954.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: 14 November 2018 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-holds-nationwide-exam-in-shift-away-from-cyrillic-alphabet/29600469.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: RFE/RL, 25 May 2020 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakh-covid-cemetery-has-more-graves-than-reported-coronavirus-victims/30634039.html>
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- Technological landscape: World Bank, 2017 - <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/chart-these-countries-internet-use-higher-among-women-men>
- Technological landscape: Statista, 2017 - <https://www.statista.com/statistics/827392/kazakhstan-distribution-instagram-users-gender/kazakhstan%20kaza>
- Technological landscape: NapoleonCat, 2018 - <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-kazakhstan/2018/11#:~:text=There%20were%202%20283%20000,them%20were%20women%20-%2053.7%25.>
- Technological landscape: Georgetown 2019/20 - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/kazakhstan/>
- Technological landscape: BuddeComm Research - <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Kazakhstan-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses>
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- Security situation: Asia News, 16 May 2019 - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Nur-Sultan,-231-Kazakhs-repatriated-from-Syria-over-feared-links-with-the-Islamic-State-47031.html>
- Security situation: RFE/RL, 3 April 2019 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-trucks-border-kazakhstan-delays-ees/29858576.html>
- Security situation: RFE/RL, 8 February 2020 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-/30423629.html>

## WWL 2022: 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	4,485,000	92.5
Catholic	130,000	2.7
Protestant	51,500	1.1
Independent	135,000	2.8
Unaffiliated	50,100	1.0
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-5,400	-0.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,846,200</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	42,000	0.9
Renewalist movement	112,000	2.3

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

**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 (WCD 2021) the biggest denominations in Kazakhstan are the Russian Orthodox Church, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church in Kazakhstan. The overwhelming majority of Christians in Kazakhstan are ethnic Russians and Ukrainians. They live mainly in the north of the country.

# WWL 2022: Persecution Dynamics / Kazakhstan

## Reporting period

1 October 2020 - 30 September 2021

## Position on the World Watch List

Kazakhstan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	64	47
WWL 2021	64	41
WWL 2020	64	35
WWL 2019	63	34
WWL 2018	63	28

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 reporting periods

Kazakhstan scored the same as in WWL 2021: 64 points. Practically nothing has changed regarding the persecution situation for Christians. Pressure is at a very high level in the *Private* and *Church spheres of life*. 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.

## 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	-
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Kazakhstan:									
Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	MEDIUM	-	-	MEDIUM	VERY WEAK	-	-	STRONG	-
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

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.

## 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

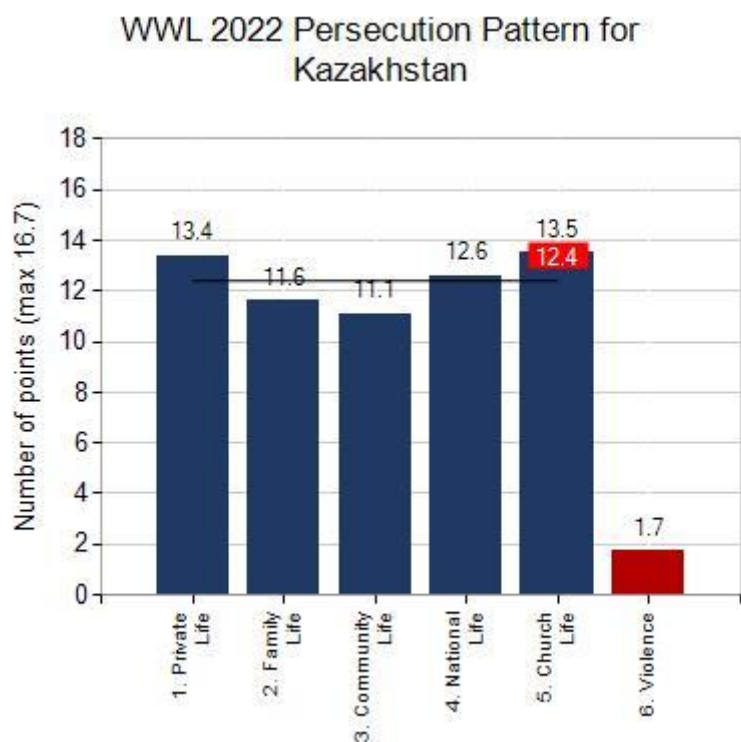
**Communities of expatriate Christians:** Expatriate Christians in Kazakhstan are not isolated from other Christian groups and are therefore not classed as a separate category in WWL analysis.

**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.

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2022 Persecution pattern for Kazakhstan shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high high level (12.4 points), increasing from 12.3 in WWL 2021. Pressure increased (very) slightly in all five *spheres of life*.
- Pressure is very high in all *spheres of life* and is highest in the *Church and Private spheres of 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 low, decreasing from 2.4 points in WWL 2021 to 1.7 in WWL 2022. 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 2021 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://opendoorsanalytical.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 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.50 points)**

Converts living in rural areas 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. (3.50 points)**

Converts in the countryside are strongly hindered by their family from practicing their Christian faith and so would definitely be afraid to discuss it with family members. It can also affect Russian Protestants as they are traditionally considered sects.

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

Leaving Islam 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 rural areas. Officially, there is no hindrance to conversion since the laws are secular. But the government is concerned that conversions could lead to tension among the population.

## 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 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 worshipping 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, all Christians 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 the 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 currently under consideration by parliament. Muslims regard most Christian materials as evidence for missionary work.

### **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 above: 5.8)

### **Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (3.75 points)**

When the instigators of persecution are state agents at any level, it is dangerous to speak out against them and they can more or less act with impunity. And since the judiciary in Kazakhstan is not independent, any complaints will result in detention or a fine. Speaking out against incidents of persecution committed by members of Muslim communities in rural parts of the country is also risky and will be swiftly blocked.

## 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 2022	WWL 2021
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	2
6.3	How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	8	10
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?	3	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?	0	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)?	31	0
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?	1	0
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?	1	0
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	3

In the WWL 2022 reporting period, at least 8 Christians were arrested, mostly for distributing Christian literature or for holding meetings during the COVID-19 lockdown measures. At least one business run by a Christian was closed down in November 2020 and a pastor's house was damaged during a raid in January 2021.

## 5 Year trends

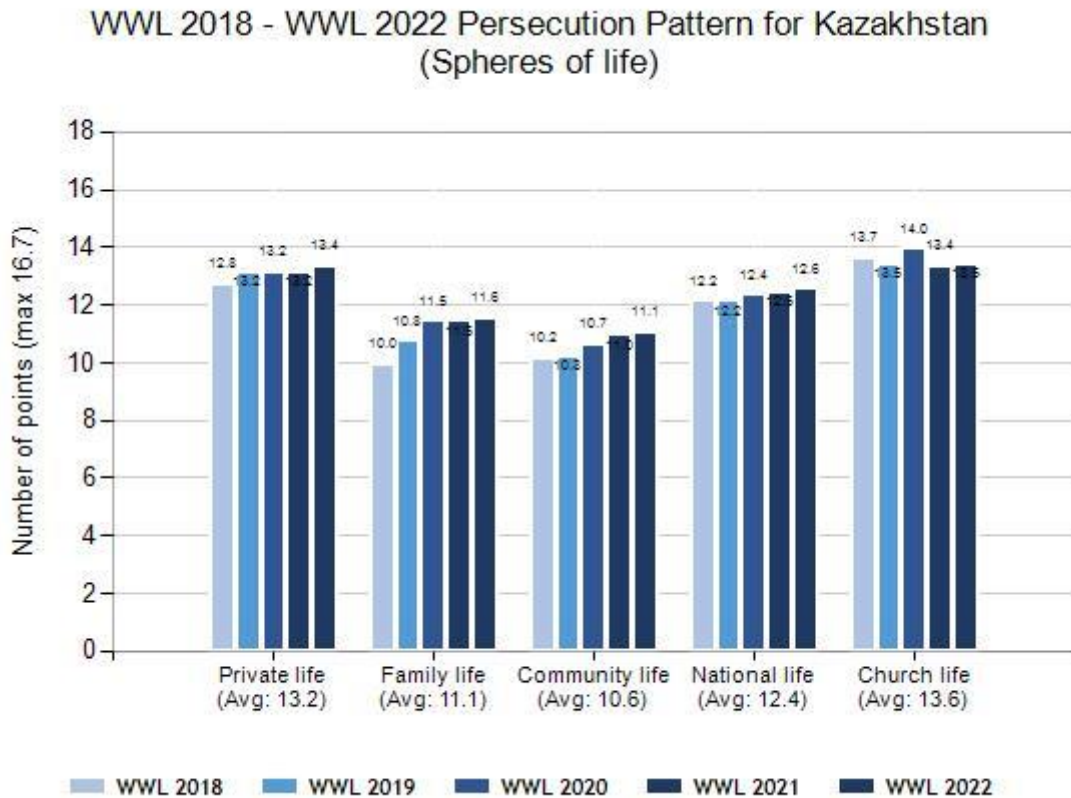
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Kazakhstan: WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2022	12.4
2021	12.3
2020	12.4
2019	12.0
2018	11.8

As can be seen from the table above, the average pressure over the 5 spheres of life in Kazakhstan has been constantly very high. In the last three WWL reporting periods, the average pressure seems to have stabilized at the 12.3/12.4 point mark.

### 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

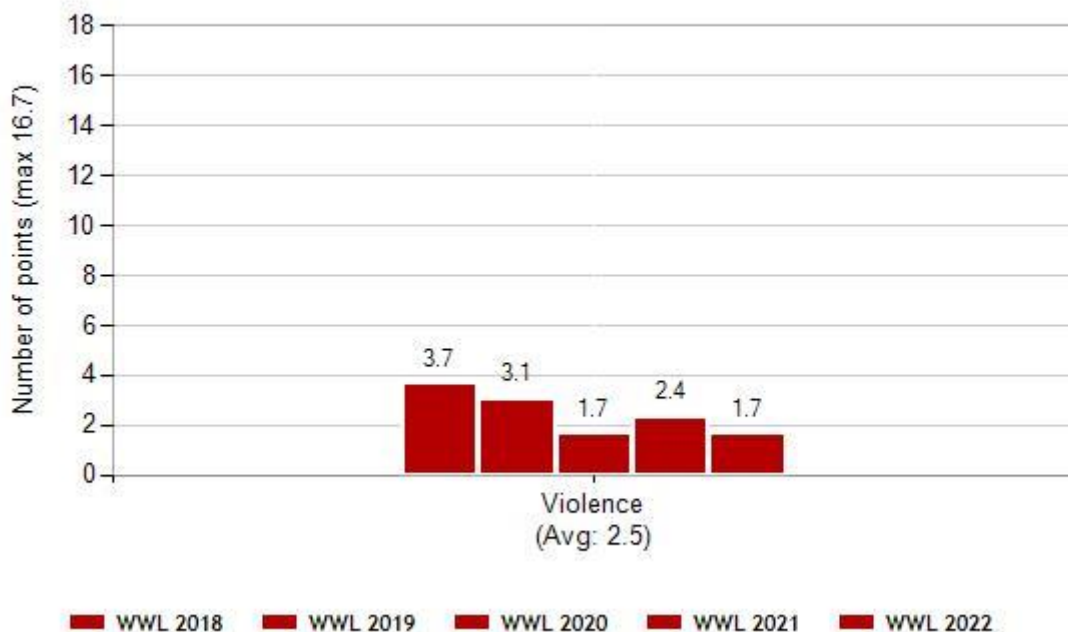


Pressure increased in each *sphere of life* (with a few exceptions) in each of the first three WWL reporting periods shown. In WWL 2021 the scores went down slightly, but the increase continued again after this. Pressure is highest throughout in the *Church* and *Private spheres of life*, reflecting the two dominant Persecution engines operating in Kazakhstan.

### 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 varied between 3.7 points at the highest and 1.7 points at the lowest (as in WWL 2022). See chart below.

### WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern for Kazakhstan (Violence)



### Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

In Kazakhstan the daily life of indigenous people is based on Islamic culture which puts women in an inferior position compared with men. They are expected to totally submit to their parents, and if married, to their husbands. 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).

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. While also rare (or at least, rarely reported) Christian female converts may also be vulnerable to sexual assault.

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 dependency (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	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Economic harassment via fines; Imprisonment by government
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 (UNDP, Gender Equality). 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 builds in his church.

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. This is in part, a country expert explains, “because Muslims view church leaders as primarily responsible for the conversion of their people.” 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 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 converts most definitely 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

- Despite serious heart problems, 42-year-old Muslim prisoner of conscience Zhuldyzbek Taurbekov failed to gain early release from prison. On 26 November 2020, North Kazakhstan Regional Court rejected his appeal against an earlier denial. His lawyer stated: "The court should have freed Taurbekov as his illness is on the list of illnesses for which prisoners should be freed." (Source: [Forum 18, 4 December 2020](#))
- Kordai District Court fined two ethnic Dungan Muslims seven weeks' average wages each for teaching the Quran to children. The court issued eight such fines between 2018 and 2020, all to Dungan Muslims. More than half the administrative fines for teaching religion to children in Kazakhstan are in Kordai District. Police chief Maksat Erezhepov denied any "ethnic factor" in the prosecutions. (Source: [Forum 18, 15 April 2021](#))
- Claims that reading Jehovah's Witness texts harms mental health has led to Jehovah's Witness communities being ordered to pay over 3 years' average wages to plaintiffs. A Justice Ministry "expert analysis" was used to make the claims, which succeeded despite 63 per cent of the "analysis" being plagiarised and an academic analysis finding it "cannot be accepted as comprehensive, complete, scientifically based, or in accordance with the normative demands presented to the specialists for investigation". (Source: [Forum 18, 24 September 2021](#))

## 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: 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/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: UNDP, Gender Equality - <https://www.kz.undp.org/content/kazakhstan/en/home/gender-equality.html>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18, 4 December 2020 - [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2621](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2621)
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18, 15 April 2021 - [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2652](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2652)
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18, 24 September 2021 - [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2686](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2686)

## Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on World Watch Research's Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) and on the World Watch Monitor website:

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