



## KAZAKHSTAN: Country Dossier

May 2018



**Open Doors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research Unit

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# World Watch List 2018

		1. Private Life	2. Family Life	3. Community Life	4. National Life	5. Church Life	6. Violence	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2018	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2017	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2016	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2015	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2014
Rank	Country	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	92	92	92	90
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.0	93	89	88	81	78
3	Somalia	16.0	16.2	16.1	16.3	16.4	10.4	91	91	87	90	80
4	Sudan	14.2	14.5	14.3	15.6	16.0	12.0	87	87	84	80	73
5	Pakistan	14.4	13.5	13.8	15.0	13.1	16.7	86	88	87	79	77
6	Eritrea	15.2	14.5	15.8	16.1	15.2	9.4	86	82	89	79	72
7	Libya	15.2	15.3	14.2	15.7	15.5	10.4	86	78	79	76	71
8	Iraq	14.7	14.7	14.9	14.9	15.1	11.3	86	86	90	86	78
9	Yemen	16.7	16.6	16.4	16.5	16.7	2.6	85	85	78	73	74
10	Iran	14.0	14.1	14.5	15.8	16.4	10.0	85	85	83	80	77
11	India	12.6	12.7	13.2	14.7	12.9	14.4	81	73	68	62	55
12	Saudi Arabia	14.9	13.7	14.2	15.5	16.4	4.1	79	76	76	77	78
13	Maldives	15.2	15.5	13.5	15.8	16.7	1.1	78	76	76	78	77
14	Nigeria	11.8	11.5	13.1	12.1	12.1	16.5	77	78	78	78	70
15	Syria	14.4	14.3	14.1	14.5	14.7	3.7	76	86	87	83	79
16	Uzbekistan	15.5	12.1	13.0	13.1	16.0	3.5	73	71	70	69	68
17	Egypt	11.3	12.8	12.2	11.7	9.5	12.4	70	65	64	61	61
18	Vietnam	12.4	8.4	12.7	14.2	13.8	7.4	69	71	66	68	65
19	Turkmenistan	15.2	10.3	12.9	12.8	15.2	1.9	68	67	66	63	62
20	Laos	12.9	8.6	13.6	13.9	14.9	3.5	67	64	58	58	62
21	Jordan	13.2	13.3	11.5	10.9	13.0	4.3	66	63	59	56	56
22	Tajikistan	13.3	11.3	11.8	11.8	12.9	4.3	65	58	58	50	47
23	Malaysia	12.0	14.9	12.8	12.4	9.3	3.9	65	60	58	55	49
24	Myanmar	11.6	11.1	13.2	10.4	11.0	7.8	65	62	62	60	59
25	Nepal	12.6	11.9	10.7	11.5	12.4	4.6	64		(not in WWL)		
26	Brunei	14.3	14.2	10.7	10.2	13.5	0.9	64	64	61	58	57
27	Qatar	13.4	12.9	11.7	11.3	14.1	0.0	63	66	65	64	63
28	Kazakhstan	12.8	10.0	10.2	12.2	13.7	3.7	63	56	55	51	49
29	Ethiopia	9.8	10.0	10.8	10.9	10.5	10.4	62	64	67	61	65
30	Tunisia	11.9	13.2	10.6	10.7	12.0	3.9	62	61	58	55	55
31	Turkey	12.5	9.7	9.8	11.7	9.6	8.7	62	57	55	52	(not in WWL)
32	Kenya	12.0	10.9	10.0	7.9	11.7	9.4	62	68	68	63	48
33	Bhutan	11.9	11.6	12.4	11.4	13.1	1.1	62	61	56	56	54
34	Kuwait	13.4	12.6	11.6	10.9	12.3	0.4	61	57	56	49	50
35	Central African Republic	9.0	8.1	10.1	8.9	8.8	16.1	61	58	59	67	67
36	Palestinian Territories	12.1	12.8	10.7	10.5	12.6	1.1	60	64	62	58	53
37	Mali	11.4	9.6	11.2	8.1	9.2	9.6	59	59	55	52	54
38	Indonesia	10.3	11.0	11.5	10.0	9.3	6.9	59	55	55	50	46
39	Mexico	8.3	7.6	12.1	10.7	9.7	10.4	59	57	56	55	(not in WWL)
40	United Arab Emirates	13.6	12.2	10.0	10.4	11.8	0.2	58	55	55	49	51
41	Bangladesh	10.4	8.8	11.4	9.6	7.5	10.0	58	63	57	51	46
42	Algeria	12.3	13.1	7.5	10.4	12.4	2.0	58	58	56	55	54
43	China	9.2	7.2	8.0	10.7	13.3	9.1	57	57	57	57	51
44	Sri Lanka	11.1	7.6	10.5	11.3	10.1	6.9	57	55	(not in WWL)	51	55
45	Azerbaijan	13.1	9.1	9.3	11.1	12.4	2.4	57	(not in WWL)	57	50	(not in WWL)
46	Oman	12.1	12.2	9.9	9.4	12.6	1.1	57	53	53	55	56
47	Mauritania	11.5	11.3	11.1	12.2	11.0	0.0	57	55	(not in WWL)	50	51
48	Bahrain	12.9	13.1	10.2	9.9	10.3	0.2	57	54	54	(not in WWL)	48
49	Colombia	7.9	7.6	11.9	8.6	8.5	11.9	56	53	55	55	56
50	Djibouti	12.2	12.2	10.3	9.9	11.7	0.0	56	57	58	60	46

## WWL 2018 Persecution Watch Countries<sup>1</sup>

		1. Private Life	2. Family Life	3. Community Life	4. National Life	5. Church Life	6. Violence	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2018
Rank	Country	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score
51	Comoros	11.7	11.5	9.1	9.4	13.9	0.4	56
52	Kyrgyzstan	11.7	9.5	10.0	8.1	11.6	2.8	54
53	Tanzania	10.1	10.3	10.1	9.5	9.0	3.9	53
54	Russian Federation	11.1	8.4	10.1	8.9	10.7	2.0	51
55	Morocco	10.4	11.5	7.6	8.8	12.0	0.6	51
56	Cuba	8.5	4.9	10.7	10.4	12.2	2.4	49
57	Uganda	10.9	8.7	9.5	8.7	4.8	3.9	46
58	Niger	9.9	9.7	9.0	7.0	7.1	2.6	45

<sup>1</sup> These countries reached a score of 41 points or more but did not receive enough points to be included in the WWL Top 50.

# KAZAKHSTAN – Country Dossier (May 2018)

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## Introduction

This country report is a collation of documents based around [Open Doors World Watch List \(WWL\)](#)<sup>1</sup> including statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations, and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database ([WCD](#))<sup>2</sup>. Further news and analysis is supplied by [World Watch Monitor](#)<sup>3</sup> and WWR staff.

KAZAKHSTAN		
World Watch List	Score	Rank
WWL 2018	63	28
WWL 2017	56	43
WWL 2016	55	42
WWL 2015	51	42
WWL 2014	49	39

<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/countries/>

<sup>2</sup> WCD website: <http://www.brill.com/publications/online-resources/world-christian-database>

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/>

# WWL 2018: Keys to understanding KAZAKHSTAN

## Link for general background information:

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-15263826>

## Recent country history

Like all other countries in the Central Asia region, Kazakhstan came into existence as an independent country at the end of August 1991. It was the last former Soviet republic to do so. 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 participate in the international community and are eager to cooperate and host international talks. In March 2017, an international meeting was held in the Kazakh capital of Astana on the war in Syria. So far, the highlight for Kazakhstan has been to be honored with the rotating chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2010.

Since 2010 the regime under President Nursultan Nazarbayev has taken a much more dictatorial character which brought Kazakhstan in line with the other countries in Central Asia. Repressive policies, strict media control and legislative restrictions (also in the religious sphere) were introduced and implemented – with the purpose to maintain power.

## The religious landscape

According to the World Christian Database (WCD, May 2017) 70.2% of the population is Muslim – 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 the countryside than in the major cities. Relatives will oppress a Christian, sometimes using physical abuse, in attempts to make him\her turn back to Islam. Sometimes this is also done by local police. Only about 15,000 indigenous Kazakhs are Christians.

The end of the year 2011 saw a wave of radical Islamic attacks in Kazakhstan. In October 2011 Islamic militants carried out bomb attacks in Atyrau, in western Kazakhstan. In November 2011 a suspected Islamic militant killed seven people in the city of Taraz in southern Kazakhstan. In December 2011 five Islamic militants and two members of an elite police force were killed in operations in southern Kazakhstan. Since then, the government of Kazakhstan has stepped up its oppression of Islamic fundamentalism.

Another indication that some Muslims in Kazakhstan have radicalized is the number of Kazakhs fighting with radical groups like Islamic State, Hizb-ut-Tahrir or the Islamic Movement of

Uzbekistan. In late [September 2014](#),<sup>4</sup> the director of the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies, presented a report on Central Asians fighting for the Islamic State group (IS) entitled "Our People in an Alien War: Central Asian Fighters in the Syrian conflict." According to the report, there were 250 nationals from Kazakhstan in 2014 among the foreign jihadists within IS. This poses the same problem for the regime in Kazakhstan as for the other countries in the region: What will happen when these radical Muslims return home?

The Christian share of the population of Kazakhstan is 25.4% (WCD, May 2017). This means that Kazakhstan has by far the biggest Christian presence in the region. 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.

## The political landscape

Kazakhstan is officially a democratic, secular, unitary, constitutional republic with a diverse cultural heritage. Its first and only president to date is 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 obvious again during the latest 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 will succeed Nazarbayev has still not been answered - Nazarbayev will turn 77 on 6 July 2017.

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.

## The socio-economic landscape

Kazakhstan is blessed with vast resources of oil, gas and other ores. 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 that country 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 many labor migrants from other Central Asia countries (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan). This offers opportunities for Christian outreach among these people.

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 huge construction activities going on to build

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<sup>4</sup> See: <https://jamestown.org/program/our-people-in-an-alien-war-kazakhstanis-fighting-for-the-islamic-state/>, last accessed July 2017.

highways for trucks, and tracks for trains. China has also been particularly active in Kazakh oil and gas exploration.

The government is successfully stimulating the use of the Kazakh language and the renaissance of the Kazakh traditional culture. On [12 April 2017](#), President Nazarbayev ordered 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. Due to the old Soviet educational system, practically all Kazakh citizens are literate. This offers great opportunities for the Church to spread the Gospel. Though the regime has imposed many restrictions in the production, importation and distribution of religious materials, the very long and open border with Russia means that getting much needed materials into Kazakhstan is less problematic than into other Central Asian countries.

In November 2014 the government said it would start a 10-year campaign to combat corruption – a phenomenon that permeates every aspect of Kazakh society and that the Church is facing on an almost daily basis. On 26 December 2014 President Nursultan Nazarbayev signed a decree introducing the new anti-corruption strategy for 2015–2025.

## Concluding remarks

The government of President Nazarbayev ruled mildly in comparison to most other countries in Central Asia until 2010. Since then, the government has clearly stepped up surveillance and repression. The government has been successful in combating radical Islamic militancy by arresting and sentencing numerous suspects. Two major issues will dominate the agenda of the Kazakh government for the coming years:

- a) The succession of President Nazarbayev.
- b) The return of Kazakh participants from the Islamic jihad abroad.

## WWL 2018: Church History and Facts

### How many Christians?

Pop 2017	Christians	Chr%
18,064,000	4,580,000	25.4

Source: WCD, May 2017

### How did Christians get there?

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 priests were deported and sent to concentration camps in Kazakhstan. Having been released, 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 15,000.

## What church networks exist today? <sup>5</sup>

Orthodox	Catholic	Protestant	Independent	Unaffiliated	Double-aff	Evangelical	Renewalist
4,207,000	141,000	57,200	144,000	54,300	-22,900	44,400	128,000

Source: WCD, May 2017

**The communities of expatriate Christians** are very diverse, consisting of Russians, Americans, Koreans, Germans and many other nationalities. Many speak Kazakh and are committed to long-term work in Kazakhstan. They are often active in serving Christians with a Muslim background via training, discipling, tentmaking and business-as-mission. The government is wary and sometimes even hostile to the presence of people who are openly active as missionaries. The threat of intimidation, expulsion and even violence exists, even if it is not common. The exact size of the expatriate community is not known, but it is much smaller currently than it was in the 1990s because of the tightening of immigration rules and visa regulations for foreigners.

**The historical Christian communities** make up by far the largest group of Christians in Kazakhstan: Russian Orthodox Christians are about 9.8% of the total population. Other denominations in this group are the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Old Believers, and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Historical Protestant churches include the Lutheran church (mostly German), the Presbyterian Church and the Methodist Church. In all, these churches account for more than 11% of the Kazakh population.

<sup>5</sup> **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:** Believers 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. **Evangelicals:** 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. **Renewalists:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal movements.

**The communities of converts to Christianity** are very small. These Christians from a Muslim background experience a lot of pressure from family, friends and community. One source (reporting in 2010) alleges that there are at least 15,000 known converts in Kazakhstan who come from an ethnic Kazakh, Muslim background. Most of them now attend non-traditional Protestant churches, many of them being home fellowships.

**The non-traditional Christian communities** are most active in outreach activities and their numbers have increased greatly over the last 25 years, probably numbering around 100,000 Christians today.

According to the Agency on Religious Affairs (ARA), there are 3,563 registered religious associations or branches thereof in the country, representing 18 groups. (Source: [IRF 2015](#))<sup>6</sup>

## Religious context (selection)

Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Ethno-religionist	Jewish	Bahai	Atheist & others <sup>7</sup>
4,580,000	12,688,000	870	20,200	29,100	-	8,400	724,700

Source: WCD, May 2017

According to World Christian Database 70.2% of the population are Muslim and 25.4% Christian.

According the official census of 2009<sup>8</sup>, ethnic Kazakhs are 63.1% of the population and ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan are 23.7% (living mostly in the northern provinces). Other groups include Tatars (1.3%), Ukrainians (2.1%), Uzbeks (2.8%), Belarusians, Uyghurs (1.4%), Azerbaijanis, Poles, and Lithuanians. Some minorities such as Germans (1.1%), Ukrainians, Koreans, Chechens, Meskhetian Turks, and Russian political opponents of the regime had been deported to Kazakhstan in the 1930s and 1940s by Stalin. Some of the largest Soviet labour camps (Gulags) existed here.

Most Christians belong to ethnic minorities - mainly Russian. Of the 4,580,000 Christians in the country only an estimated 15,000 are ethnic Kazakhs. In contrast to other countries in Central Asia, Kazakhstan has not experienced a mass emigration of ethnic Russians.

## Notes on the current situation

- Christianity is looked upon as a Russian religion. After a wave of political and social unrest in 2011, some government-controlled media portray Protestant Christians as a threat to security and society. Local officials frequently encourage people to have a negative attitude towards Christians, especially in areas that border Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>6</sup> See: <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2015/sca/256307.htm>, last accessed November 2017.

<sup>7</sup> This category includes Atheists, Agnostics and New religionists.

<sup>8</sup> See:

[https://www.liportal.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/oeffentlich/Kasachstan/40\\_gesellschaft/Kaz2009\\_Analytical\\_report.pdf](https://www.liportal.de/fileadmin/user_upload/oeffentlich/Kasachstan/40_gesellschaft/Kaz2009_Analytical_report.pdf).



- Kazakhstan used to be one of the countries in Central Asia with the least problems for Christians. Since more restrictive legislation was implemented in September 2011, there has been an increase in the inspections of churches and Christian organizations all over the country. Some literature and equipment has been confiscated. Police and security officers occasionally disrupt worship services, film all the attendants and collect personal data.

## WWL 2018: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

**Reporting period:** 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

**WWL 2018 Points: 63 / Position: 28**

WWL 2017 Points: 56 / Position: 43

WWL 2016 Points: 55 / Position: 42

### Where persecution comes from

There are two main sources for the persecution of Christians in Kazakhstan: One is the State and the other the Muslim environment. State persecution comes in the form of police, secret services and local authorities who monitor religious activities and often attend church services. State authorities regularly raid non-registered churches. The general Islamic culture makes life for converts to Christianity particularly difficult.

### How Christians are suffering

All Christian communities are experiencing some form of persecution. 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.

Religious freedom is already restricted by legislation (dating from September 2011) and the Kazakhstan government is constantly working at increasing its control over the entire society, which will mean more surveillance, raids of meetings, and detention of believers. It is using the threat of militant Islam to restrict more and more areas of freedom. This all accounts for a worsening situation for the Christian minority and makes the future outlook for them look worrying. Pressure from the social environment (mostly on converts from Islam) is unlikely to change.

### Examples

- On 13 September 2016, two Baptists from Taldykorgan, Mikhail Lozovoi and Nadezhda Pikalina, were fined for offering uncensored religious literature to others in June 2016

on a visit to a village in East Kazakhstan Region. Their appeals against the fines were officially rejected in October and November 2016. (Source: [Forum 18](#))<sup>9</sup>

- Police who raided a Baptist Sunday morning meeting for worship on 28 May 2017 in the southern city of Taraz took 20 of the men and one of the women present to the local police station. There they took their fingerprints, photographed them and recorded their home addresses and other personal data. Police issued summary fines with no court hearing to eight of those present. (Source: [Forum 18](#))<sup>10</sup>
- Seventh-day Adventist Yklas Kabduakasov remained throughout the WWL 2018 reporting period in a labor camp after being sentenced to two years hard labor in December 2015. He was originally arrested for discussing his faith with students recruited by the secret police. (Source: [Forum 18](#))<sup>11</sup>

## WWL 2018: Persecution Dynamics

**Reporting period:** 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

**WWL 2018 Points: 63 / Position: 28**

WWL 2017 Points: 56 / Position: 43

WWL 2016 Points: 55 / Position: 42

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### Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 63 points, Kazakhstan rises 7 points compared to WWL 2017. The situation has become worse for Christians due mainly to the large number of violent incidents: Raids on

<sup>9</sup> See: [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2240](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2240), last accessed November 2017.

<sup>10</sup> See: [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2285](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2285), last accessed November 2017.

<sup>11</sup> See: [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2252](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2252), last accessed November 2017.

Christian homes, confiscation of religious materials, detentions, interrogations. Physical violence has increased markedly too. The country, which used to be one of the mildest in the region regarding persecution, is increasingly getting on par with the other Central Asian countries. The decision not to include (voluntarily) isolated communities of expatriate Christians as a separate category in the WWL analysis gives a better representation of the country situation, but also contributed to the rise in score.

## Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Kazakhstan <sup>12</sup>	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	Medium
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Not at all
Denominational protectionism	Very weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	Very weak

### 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 the number of raids on meetings and of Christians being detained and interrogated has increased in the WWL 2018 reporting period. It is very common that members of Protestant churches are regarded as followers of an alien sect that has only one goal, namely to spy on and destroy the current political system. From this perspective they need to be not only controlled, but if necessary, even eradicated.

### Islamic 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 mullahs 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

Drivers of persecution in Kazakhstan	Level of influence
Government officials at any level from local to national	Strong
Ethnic group leaders	Medium
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Very weak
Violent religious groups	Very weak

<sup>12</sup> The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Medium
Own (extended) family	Strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Strong
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Very weak
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN/OIC) and embassies	Not at all

*Government officials* and *Political parties* are the drivers that can be linked directly with the persecution engine *Dictatorial paranoia*. They form the oppression that comes from the authorities. The *Extended family*, *non-Christian religious leaders* and *Normal citizens* are the drivers that can be connected to the oppression of the Islamic environment especially on Christians with a Muslim background. These drivers are linked with the persecution engine *Islamic oppression*.

## Context

President Nazarbayev is ageing (he was born on 6 July 1940) and is reportedly not in good health. It is unclear who will succeed him but it will most probably be someone of the same school, providing little scope for change.

Another important issue is the significant size of the ethnic Russian minority in the north of the country. According to the 2009 census 23.7% of the total population of Kazakhstan is Russian. This causes some headaches for the government, bearing in mind the assertive policies of President Putin's Russian government. The events in Crimea and eastern Ukraine clearly show that the Kazakh worries are for real.

A small, but growing group of Islamic militants, which carried out small-scale bomb attacks in October 2011, add to the country's worries. There are also reports of Kazakh jihadists who are fighting with the Islamic State group (IS) in Syria and Iraq. Officials say there are 300 Kazakh citizens in the Middle East region fighting for IS. Non-official sources claim the number is much higher. The government makes use of this information and even exaggerates the danger so that they can clamp down on society and restrict more areas of freedom.

Christians are not the only religious group persecuted by the government. Since all religious activities are under surveillance, Muslims, Jews and Jehovah's Witnesses also experience similar pressure.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

### Communities of expatriate Christians:

Expatriate Christians in Kazakhstan form isolated groups and are not classed as a separate category for 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 danger. 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.

#### Communities of converts to Christianity:

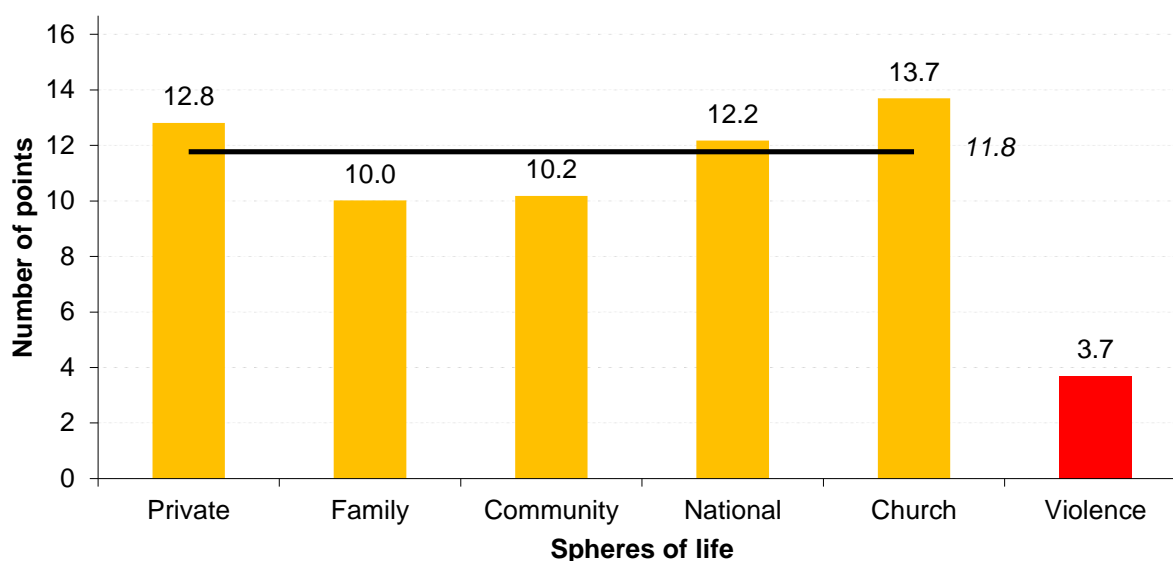
Christian converts with a Muslim background bear the brunt of the persecution in Kazakhstan. Apart from certain state restrictions, they are also under strong pressure from family, friends and community. And for them the latter is by far the more powerful.

#### Non-traditional Christian communities:

Especially the unregistered groups of this category (which include Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations) experience increasing persecution, especially since they are also active in evangelism. All Christians in this category suffer from raids, threats, arrests, and fines by the authorities.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

### WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Kazakhstan



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7.)

The WWL 2018 Persecution pattern for Kazakhstan shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Kazakhstan rose from 11.0 in WWL 2017 to 11.8.
- Pressure was highest in the in the *Church sphere* with 13.7 points, followed by the *Private sphere of life* (especially for converts from Islam) with 12.8 points. This can be linked directly with the two Persecution engines that are active in Kazakhstan: *Islamic oppression* and *Dictatorial paranoia*.

- The score for violence rose from 1.3 in WWL 2017 to 3.7 points. There were several reports of physical violence, raids on Christian homes and arrests, among others.

**Private sphere:**

Conversion is the issue that triggers a strong reaction in Kazakhstan. Converts with a Muslim background tend to avoid performing Christian rituals or openly displaying Christian symbols or materials in order to avoid drawing attention to themselves. The state is exceptionally sensitive to the spread of "untraditional" religions which are not recognized by law. Protestants are the main target of monitoring and scrutiny and raids against Protestant individuals and organizations, the confiscation of Christian materials and the issuing of fines for Christian activity are not uncommon. As soon as converts touch upon issues of faith in their circle of relatives (or a wider circle) conflicts almost always arise. Converts find it difficult to meet with other Christians as they are being monitored by their community closely and they run the risk of being placed under house-arrest by their family in an attempt to force them to give up their new faith. All non-ROC Christians are monitored by the Kazakh Intelligence Service (KNB).

**Family sphere:**

For Kazakh converts, baptism is a very important step and very often causes conflicts with their Muslim relatives. Islamic cemeteries permit Christians to be buried there, but only if Islamic rites are used. Freedom of religion is increasingly curtailed in Kazakhstan and cases of monitoring by security forces have been more commonplace. The situation for Protestants has become more difficult as the country's 2011 Law prohibits all activities of non-recognized religious groups. Children of Protestant Christians are quite frequently harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. Schools and other educational institutes use state funds to arrange meetings to combat sects, which include Evangelical churches. These (propaganda) meetings are supposedly voluntary, but everyone is strongly urged to attend. If converts refuse to give up their Christian faith, the family may try to force a divorce or take children out of their custody. There have also been court cases in which converts have lost their inheritance rights.

**Community sphere:**

The community in the countryside will monitor known converts. In rural areas only Muslims will be accepted in local institutions. Pressure, at times intense, is immediately put on converts to return to the faith of the fathers. Christian children and youth may be subjected to insults and propaganda at school, but none have yet been expelled simply because they are Christians. While lower levels of education are generally not problematic, higher education and professional training may not be as freely accessible to active Christians. Discrimination takes place mainly in state employment. This applies primarily to Kazakhs. A teacher may be made redundant, for instance, if he/she attends an Evangelical church. In law enforcement agencies, such discrimination is a common occurrence. The January 2015 criminal code introduced new fines and penalties that include up to six years imprisonment. There are also fines for groups that conduct activities that are not included in their charter.

**National sphere:**

In practice, the government has let it be known that Islam is for the Kazakhs, Orthodoxy is for the Slavs, and everything else is superfluous. Although freedom of religion is protected by the Constitution, in practice such protection is only offered to religions and religious groups that are recognized as "traditional" by the 2011 Administrative Code. Such groups include Sunni Hanafi Islam, Russian Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Judaism. Therefore, non-traditional Christian groups are left out and often risk prosecution for conducting faith-related activities. The same 2011 law made registration very difficult for smaller religious groups, therefore making them vulnerable to prosecution. The Kazakh media are in general negative towards Christianity. There have been quite a few programs targeting non-traditional Christian groups and converts. Non-traditional Christians have been accused of being non-Kazakh and anti-Islamic/anti-Christian, and have therefore by extension been accused of blasphemy by former co-religionists of their ethnic community.

**Church sphere:**

Fifty citizen-sponsors are required to register a religious association. Unregistered churches are strictly illegal. There are special requirements for church buildings and the land they are built on. Non-traditional Christians have often had their services and meetings disrupted. They often received fines because their places of worship were not officially recognized by the state. Courts frequently interpreted any religious activity that took place outside of a registered religious building as illegal missionary activity. The law requires that registered churches have the consent of both parents before children under 18 can attend church activities. Approval for all printing, importing, distribution and sale of religious materials is needed from the Religious Affairs Committee (RAC) and only registered churches can apply for this. According to the law no religion-based organizations, institutions or schools are allowed; nor is it possible to establish charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural institutions or associations by religious groups.

**Violence:**

No Christians were reported killed during the WWL 2018 reporting period. Two house churches were damaged. 40 Christians were detained, while 4 Christians were sentenced – 3 to short term imprisonment, while Pastor Bakhytzhan Kashkumbayev was sentenced to 4 year prison sentence on 18 February 2014. 2 cases of physical harassment of Christians were reported, while 22 properties of Christians were damaged. 8 businesses of Christians were attacked. 1 Christian had to go into hiding, while 1 Christian from India was deported. Further examples:

- Police who raided a Baptist Sunday morning meeting for worship on 28 May 2017 in the southern city of Taraz took 20 of the men and one of the women present to the local police station. There they took their fingerprints, photographed them and recorded their home addresses and other personal data. Police issued summary fines with no court hearing to eight of those present. (Source: [Forum 18](#))<sup>13</sup>
- Seventh-day Adventist Yklas Kabduakasov remained throughout the WWL 2018 reporting period in a labor camp after being sentenced to two years hard labor in December 2015.

<sup>13</sup> See: [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2285](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2285), last accessed November 2017.

He was originally arrested for discussing his faith with students recruited by the secret police. (Source: [Forum 18](#))<sup>14</sup>

## Gender profile of persecution

### Female:

In Kazakhstan the daily life of indigenous people is based on Islamic culture which puts women in an inferior position compared to men. Total submission is expected from women to their parents and if married - to their husbands. This makes them more vulnerable to persecution - both as Christians and as women who challenge the existing order. Female converts are at a bigger risk of suffering physical and verbal abuse, harassment, threats, house-arrest, discrimination and rejection by their family and the wider Muslim community, than other female Christians. For other Christians, persecution would be not different for men and women.

### Male:

Church leaders are normally men and men are also normally the head of their family and the main bread winner. When a Christian man becomes a target of persecution – e.g. is fined or imprisoned - his whole family will suffer. Losing jobs and income will affect the whole family. If a man is a church leader his persecution will affect his church and cause fear. Obligatory military service for young men provides an extra potential risk of persecution. In the case of converts from Islam, men and boys are at a bigger risk of physical and verbal abuse, harassment, threats, discrimination and rejection by family and Muslim community, than other male Christians.

## Future outlook

Religious freedom is already restricted by the 2015 legislation and the Kazakhstan government is constantly working at increasing its control over the entire society, which will continue to mean more surveillance, raids on meetings, and detention of believers. It is using the threat of militant Islam to restrict more and more areas of freedom. This all accounts for a worsening situation for the Christian minority and makes the future outlook for them look worrying. The pressure from the social environment (mostly on converts) is likely to remain unchanged.

## Policy considerations

Open Doors suggests the following recommendations be made:

- The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and international community should press the government of Kazakhstan to implement recommendations on Freedom of Religion or Belief by the OSCE within the framework for ‘Countering Extremism and Terrorism’.

<sup>14</sup> See: [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2252](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2252), last accessed November 2017.



- The OSCE and international community should press the Kazakhstan government to amend provisions in the Religion Law and Administrative Code which enact compulsory religious censorship and legal prohibition and sanctioning of unregistered activities. There should be no prior registration for individuals and communities wishing to express Freedom of Religion or Belief.
- The government and the OSCE should cooperate closely to ensure those drafting and applying policies concerning Freedom of Religion or Belief refer to the 2015 benchmark Guidelines on the Legal Personality of Religious or Belief Communities.
- The government should stop arbitrary arrests of Christians.

## WWR in-depth reports

All in-depth reports are available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/> (password: freedom).

- Central Asia – The State and Islam – 2016  
June 2016  
This report offers a broad regional and historic overview and a brief synopsis of the situation in each of the five nations in Central Asia. It concludes with a regional summary of the effect on Christians and threats for the future.
- Central Asia/Caucasus – Growing Islamic Extremism – Situation and Outlook – reissued 2015  
Re-issued 2015  
This report offers a study of Islamism in the Central Asian region through three-dimensional (macro, meso and micro) lenses on different levels – (1) history; (2) politics, security and socio-economic factors; and (3) culture and religion.

## Open Doors article(s) from the region

There are currently no Open Doors articles on Kazakhstan available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/articles/> (password freedom).

## World Watch Monitor news articles

Up-to-date articles are available at:

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/kazakhstan/>

- [Kazakhstan asks Christian organisations for info on youth members. Their answer: No.](#)  
13 April 2018  
Leaders of registered Christian religious organisations received a letter from the government demanding the personal data of people under 18 who attend Christian religious services.
- [Kazakhstan: Child in church triggers police raid](#)  
28 March 2018  
A senior police officer in the southern Kazakh city of Kyzylorda has defended sending anti-extremism officers to investigate the presence of a child in church.
- [Kazakh ‘sting operation’ to catch out Christian backfires](#)  
19 March 2018  
Police officers arrested Dilobarkhon Sultanova in January after she helped Elmira Inibekova download a Bible app to her mobile phone.
- [Kazakhstan: 24 faith-related criminal convictions in 2017](#)  
8 March 2018  
New figures show the number of known criminal convictions handed out for exercising freedom of religion or belief in Kazakhstan reached 24 in 2017. The individuals were mainly Sunni Muslims but included one Christian.
- [Kazakhstan: Hundreds punished for practising faith in 2017](#)  
31 January 2018  
Kazakhstan prosecuted 279 individuals, groups and organisations last year for conducting activities related to religion. In one case a woman was punished for attempting to sell online a 1910 Russian Orthodox Bible.
- [Kazakhstan’s new restrictions to ‘flagrantly’ violate religious rights](#)  
1 December 2017  
Proposed amendments to Kazakhstan’s religion law are currently with the Prime Minister and are expected to be signed into law within the next few months. Among the restrictions is the requirement for almost all religious communities to re-register, as well as stricter rules and punishments relating to religious education, proselytism and censorship.

- [Kazakhstan: more Baptists fined ‘for unregistered meeting’](#)  
28 November 2017  
Baptists in Ekibastuz, north-eastern Kazakhstan, have been fined for holding meetings not registered with the authorities.
- [Kazakhstan Baptist convicted for refusing to pay state ‘expert’ to analyse his Christian books](#)  
6 November 2017  
A court in northern Kazakhstan has given a Baptist man a one-year suspended prison sentence for refusing to pay fines for the state to give its “expert analysis” of Christian books he had with him at the time of his arrest.
- [Kazakhstan releases Christian imprisoned ‘as message to Muslims thinking about converting’](#)  
2 November 2017  
Kazakhstan has released a 56-year-old man imprisoned for more than two years. Local Christians say Kabduakasov was targeted by the police for converting from Islam and speaking about Christianity with Muslims.
- [Kazakhstan proposes further restrictions on religion](#)  
11 October 2017  
Kazakhstan has drafted amendments to its religion laws that will further tighten restrictions on religious freedoms.
- [Kazakhstan church banned for singing songs at summer camp](#)  
11 September 2017  
A three-month ban was imposed on the New Life Protestant Church in Oskemen, eastern Kazakhstan, because, according to the authorities, the church failed to obtain written permission to conduct a service at the camp.
- [Kazakhstan deports missionary for conducting baptisms](#)  
14 August 2017  
Kazakhstan has ordered the expulsion of Canadian citizen Hae Taik Kim for conducting “illegal missionary activity” by holding baptisms. A local pastor and two Korean and two US citizens also received fines.
- [Kazakhstan: closure of Jehovah’s Witnesses operation is sign of creeping religious intolerance](#)  
18 July 2017  
Kazakhstan’s decision to suspend operations at the headquarters of the Jehovah’s Witnesses is a symptom of the country’s growing intolerance towards religious rights. Jehovah’s Witnesses had operated in Kazakhstan for 25 years and has 18,000 followers.

- [Kazakh Baptists raided, fined on Easter Sunday as ‘illegal’](#)

4 May 2017

Kazakh police raided meetings of at least two Baptist Churches on Easter Sunday.

## Recent country developments

Up-to-date articles are available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Kazakhstan> (password: freedom).

- [Russia/Central Asia: Putin on flying visit to three Central Asian states](#)

5 March 2017

On 27 and 28 February 2017 Russian President Vladimir Putin paid a visit to Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. It would seem that Russia is working hard to re-establish its former domination in the region.

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