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Қазақстан Республикасы,
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ҚР Президенті жанындағы ҚСЗИ

Телефон (7172) 75-20-20
Факс (7172) 75-20-21
E-mail: office@kisi.kz
www.kisi.kz
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Aigul Zabirowa¹, Natalya Seitakhmetova²

¹ Senior research analyst, Kazakhstani Institute for Strategic research
under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan,
doctor of sociological sciences, professor
(Astana, Kazakhstan)
e-mail: Zabirowa_a@kisi.kz

² Senior research scientist, Institute of Philosophy, Political sciences and
Religious studies, National Academy of sciences of the Republic of Kazakhstan,
doctor of philosophical sciences, professor
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)
e-mail: natalieseyt@gmail.com

AFTER ATHEISM: A SOCIOLOGICAL EXAMINATION

Abstract. The fall of communism and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the processes of nation building in five Central Asian states have changed the status of religion in these post-soviet countries. The religious freedom is recognized as one of the fundamental humans right in the Republic of Kazakhstan. This essay aims to highlight a unique form of secularism in Kazakhstan, one that is based on the low level of everyday religiosity and evidence that the eventual expansion of Islam in the physical and spiritual spaces does not negate the influence of established secular cultural attitudes.

This study examines Kazakh religiosity through a comparative examination of World Values Survey data from 2011 and 2018. The examination of the features of religiosity and the proposition of the distinction between a believer and a religious person define this paper's subject. The empirical data indicates that Islam has the capacity to transcend moral norms, despite the fact that the majority of Kazakhs' national attitude does not align with Islamic religion in the twenty-first century.

Finally, the study draws the conclusion that since most people in post-atheistic Kazakhstan continue to keep secular attitudes, state policy must preserve the secular character of the state while adjusting state-confessional relations to changing Kazakhstan's religious landscape.

Keywords: religiosity, Islam, believers, Kazakhstan, Kazakhs, post-atheistic society.

Айгуль Забиrowa, Наталья Сейтахметова ПОСТАТЕИЗМ: ӘЛЕУМЕТТАНУЛЫҚ ТАЛДАУ

Аңдатпа. Коммунизмнің құлдырауы мен Кеңес Одағының ыдырауы, бес дамушы мемлекеттегі ұлттық құрылыс процестері Орталық Азияның дамушы елдеріндегі діннің мәртебесін өзгертті. Зандық тұрғыда Қазақстан

Республикасында діни бостандық адамның негізгі құқығы ретінде танылады. Мақалада күнделікті діндарлықтың төмен деңгейіне негізделген Қазақстандағы зайырлылықтың ерекше түрін, сонымен қатар исламның әлеуметтік және физикалық кеңістікті иеленуі қалыптасқан зайырлы мәдени көзқарастарға қарсы тұрмайтынын көрсетуге тырысады.

Жұмыс Дүниежүзілік құндылықтарды шолудың эмпирикалық деректерін талдауға негізделген, қазақтардың діндарлығы туралы түсінігі салыстырмалы түрде берілген (2011 және 2018 жж. сауалнамалар). Жұмыстың пәндік ауқымы діншілдік контурын талдаумен сипатталады, діндар мен діни адамның аражігін ажырату ұсынылады. ХХІ ғасырда қазақтардың көпшілігінің ұлттық менталитетін дін қалыптастырмайтыны көрінеді, бірақ эмпирикалық мәліметтерге сүйенсек, исламның адамгершілік нұсқауларды бағдарлау мүмкіндігі бар. Исламның түсіндірме функциясы қазақтардың бүгінгі дүниетанымында басымдығы байқалады.

Жұмыс қорытындысында постатеистік Қазақстанда халықтың көпшілігі зайырлы мәдениет шеңберінде қалып отыр, сондықтан мемлекеттік саясат мемлекеттік-конфессиялық қатынастарды Қазақстанның діни ландшафтына бейімдей отырып, мемлекеттің зайырлы сипатын одан әрі сақтау қажет деген шешім жасалды.

***Түйін сөздер:** діндарлық, ислам, дінишілдер, Қазақстан, қазақтар, постатеистік қоғам.*

Айгуль Забирова, Наталья Сейтахметова **ПОСТАТЕИЗМ: СОЦИОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ**

Аннотация. Падение коммунизма и распад Советского Союза, процессы строительства наций в пяти развивающихся государствах изменили статус религии в развивающихся странах Центральной Азии. С правовой позиции религиозная свобода признается как основополагающее право человека в Республике Казахстан. В этой статье предпринята попытка продемонстрировать особый вид секуляризма в Казахстане как основанного на низком уровне повседневной религиозности и показать, насколько присвоение исламом социального и физического пространства не отменяет противовеса встроженных светских культурных установок.

Работа основана на анализе эмпирических данных Всемирного обзора ценностей, понимание религиозности казахов дано в сравнительной перспективе (опросы 2011 и 2018 годов). Предметное поле работы очерчено анализом контуров религиозности, предложено различение верующего человека от религиозного. Показано, что в 21 веке национальный менталитет большинства казахов не формируется религией, но, судя по эмпирическим данным, ислам имеет потенциал в навигации нравственных ориентиров. Представлена объяснительная функция ислама как доминирующая в сегодняшнем мировоззрении казахов.

В заключении работы сделан вывод, что в постатеистическом Казахстане большинство населения остается в рамках светской культуры, поэтому государственной политике необходимо и дальше удерживать светский

характер государства, адаптируя государственно-конфессиональные отношения к религиозному ландшафту Казахстана.

Ключевые слова: религиозность, ислам, верующие, Казахстан, казахи, постатеистическое общество.

Introduction

If in Eastern Europe, namely Poland, prior to democratic transition in 1989 the Catholic Church used to hold a significant role in the dualistic societal framework that pitted «good» Poles against «bad» communists, the Islamic authorities in Central Asia did not make significant voice in public discourse [1]. Soviets pursued a policy of state atheism, seeking to gradually eradicate religious beliefs within its borders. Although the state had never officially declared religion illegal, it nonetheless made great efforts to reduce the prevalence of religious beliefs in society. The complete elimination of organized religious life and the official ban on never occurred in the USSR, and in certain periods of its history, the leadership of the USSR even provided support to some of the religious confessions, pursuing its own political interests [2,3].

The fall of communism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, nation-building processes in five emerging states altered the status of religion in the emerging Central Asian nations. The Mosque' legal stance shifted to one that acknowledged religious freedom as a fundamental human right. Kazakh society, as the rest of Central Asia, where Islam was the most common faith, gravitated toward it as a result of national and cultural revivals.

Kazakhstan is a new, emerging state, located on two continents, in Europe and Asia. The population of Kazakhstan is 20 million people, Kazakhs make up 70.65% of the population or 14 million people. The gross domestic product in Kazakhstan in 2023 was \$ 259.7 billion. According to the International Monetary Fund classification, Kazakhstan belongs to the group of countries with a transition economy and above-average income. 61.8% of the urban population lives in the cities of Kazakhstan, 38.2% in rural areas. The secondary education is compulsory and lasts 11 years. According to the Constitution, Kazakhstan is a unitary, legal and secular state in the form of presidential governance.

In this paper, we argue how a particular kind of secularism in Kazakhstan is based on a low level of daily religiosity and a modest public image of Muftiat for public managing the public affairs of Muslims (DUMK), how the remarkable appropriation of social and physical space by Islamic religion, even up to the imaginative space of the national culture as a whole, does not cancel the counterweight of embedded secular cultural arrangements.

Understanding the rise of religion in Kazakhstan as a post-soviet country involves looking at number of factors in specific context, as the dynamics can vary widely between different regions and communities. First of all, people in Kazakhstan, as people anywhere else, are looking for meaning and purpose in their life. In the twenty-first century, when things are uncertain, people frequently turn to religion in pursuit of these things. Religion has the potential to give direction and stability as well as answers to existential dilemmas. In times of significant

social change, Islamic communities as any other giving a sense of solidarity and belonging as well as social networks and at the top a sense of identity. People's tendency to look to religion for direction on how to lead moral lives, make moral decisions, and resolve difficult moral dilemmas is another common characteristic.

So the significance of religion as a social institution is changing in Kazakhstan, reflecting a shift in societal foundations as well as shift in ideological perspectives. Multiple factors that influence Kazakhstan's religious landscape are addressed in this paper in order to understand this turn. I start with explanation through the lens of the concept of “Radical Islamism”, which is considered by both the local population and experts in the sociology of religion as an entirely international influence. The term «Radical Islamism” in the 21st Century» refers to a global concept that originated in the United States and emphasizes the challenges posed by a global redistribution of religion as well as the detrimental effects of Islam on global stability. Exposure to global religious movements through media and migration can lead to localized revivals, where traditional practices are blended with global religious trends. Moreover, religious groups often establish transnational networks that provide resources and support for local communities.

Academic interpretation of the religious renaissance in Kazakhstan stands that Islam interpreted as an object of cultural identification that Kazakhs have acquired as a result of national independence, reflecting the socio-cultural role of religion [4, 5]. As in many regions, before USSR religion was ingrained in cultural and historical traditions of Central Asian people.

Cultural significance still attached to the process of Islamic revival, which is closely linked to the events leading to the resurgence of Kazakh ethnic identity. Islam underwent a kind of renaissance during the early phases of nation-building, in 1990th, the revival of national and cultural traditions. However, the majority of Kazakh population are still not showing any significant attraction towards it.

The influence of Islam varies in different parts of country. The point is about stronger roots and «denser» functioning of Islam in the southern and western parts of Kazakhstan, where in addition to the concentration of the Kazakh population, such ethnic groups of Central Asia Uzbeks, Uyghurs, Dungans are localized, they are comparatively more Islamized cultures.

«Failed» modernization as a cause of a new religiosity considered as crucial in explanation of growing religiosity. Rapid social changes lead to existential crises at the individual level, a crisis of ideology, a loss of values, and consequently insoluble social problems for social groups. Islam for many individuals, who are facing poverty and uncertainty, offers a coping mechanism during difficult times. Religious narratives can provide individuals with a sense of purpose and hope, which is essential in challenging circumstances [4].

In this scenario, the growth of Islam in its radicalized form occurs within the nations themselves, but it does so within the context of a globally process wherein global ideologies encourage the return of historical uncertainty or demand the application of authoritarian solutions to challenges [6].

Another reason people are moving to Islam is also rooted in the breakdown of the old cultural values and social norms, anomie. As E. Durkheim noted the religion covers precisely potential protests. When person experiences social

insecurity, tiredness, and degrading feelings, that makes him feel useless and subservient, believing that nothing can be done [5].

Increases in religious practice and affiliation might result from revivals or resurgences of interest in Islam. Mosques are increasingly being built around the nation, both at the expense of domestic tax revenue and foreign funding. So, if the number of mosques throughout Kazakhstan in 1989 was 59, then in 2024 there were 2800. The number of mosques is growing all over the world, only in the USA their number increased from 2106 in 2010 to 2769 in 2020. Moreover, the construction of mosques in the original Christian regions is moving from American and European megacities to medium-sized cities and rural areas, since it is easier to get or cheaper to buy land for the construction of a mosque, which is also happening in Kazakhstan.

The widely accepted notion that Islam is an indication of urban culture is starting to take shape in Kazakhstan. According to our observations, the urban population of the country is getting more and more involved in religiosity. The growth in the number of mosques confirms the importance of religious identity not only in the traditional sense for the region, but apparently also acts as an indicator of a new communal identity. It has become important for part of the population to attend the mosque «like everyone else», to come to Friday prayer as a collective prayer. In other words, mosques acquire or reproduce the function of public and possibly socio-political unification, which was lost under the Soviets.

Lastly, the rise of Islam as an emerging form of spirituality in the era of current value vacuum, where Islam is perceived as the creation of recognized Muslim spiritual leaders and is understood to be a confessional and spiritual phenomena unrelated to politics. All of this displays Islam's complexity and integrity in all of its diversity, including geographical, theological, intellectual, and ethnocultural dimensions.

So, the dynamic landscape of the 21st century, the role and characteristics of religion have undergone significant transformations, reflecting the evolving social, cultural, and technological landscape. The shift in economy, politics, demographics, communication modes, and global exchanges has generated substantial shifts in religious life and the ways in which Kazakhs practicing religion.

The aforementioned phenomena are all transforming society's religious environment, revealing the features of religiosity and suggesting potential models, and signaling the emergence of Islamic religiosity.

In the Soviet and especially in the late Soviet years, the population of Kazakhstan, the Kazakhs, were religiously loyal both as a result of the state-confessional policy relations. Also thanks to the social policy that guaranteed free education, health care, work and housing to every citizen of the country. Nevertheless, atheism or religiosity in the USSR had a very conditional nature in a sense that many near-religious traditions were still observed in all the regions of the country.

The Kazakhs' religious loyalty can also be understood in terms of their historical self-identification. In the Kazakh steppe, unlike other sedentary Muslim peoples, Islam was not so thoroughly integrated into the fabric of the nomadic

way of life, unlike the urban way of life in Middle Eastern societies. Today, as is evident from direct observations of everyday life, that religion has begun to play a significant role in social development [7].

The sociological examination of religious revival in post-atheist nation reveals a multifaceted interplay of cultural, economic, political, and psychological factors. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for comprehensively assessing the implications of religious movements on community resilience, social change, and individual well-being in impoverished contexts. Such research and especially field studies are essential to deepen insight into specific case studies and the impact of these revivals on local societies. This paper conducts empirical testing of the hypothesis using empirical data from the World Values Survey and provides a comparative analysis of the findings.

Through a comparison of empirical data, this research aims to investigate the dynamics of religiosity among Kazakhs in the twenty-first century. The following issues are still essential in understanding of Kazakhstan as a post-atheistic society: who should be considered a believer? and who as a religious? How to measure and understand a person's religiosity? To what extent a person immersed in religiosity? Finally, what are the characteristics of religiosity and what kind of models are there?

The work's inquiries are defined by the examination of religion as a value and its meanings, as well as the dynamics of religiosity in the context of religious actions. Religiosity as a dependent variable in this study is measured by using specific questions from the World Values Survey from 2011 and 2018 waves. We do define religiosity as a characteristic of mentality, indicating the immersion of an individual, group, or society in religion as a social institution, which is designed to regulate the individual life or a group. Religiosity defines both through religious actions, metaphorical meanings and traditions, as well as the degree of adherence to religious norms in everyday life.

Methods of data collection and analysis

We do use actual data from the World Values Survey, gathered in the years 2011 and 2018, in order to illustrate the changes in Kazakh religiosity in a temporal perspective and develop conclusions about the key trends in religiosity [8]. The data from 2011 were collected in Kazakhstan in the spring of 2011 and from 2018 were collected in the spring of 2018. Both data bases are publicly available through WVS website. Both samples include 1,500 respondents. Data for both countries are declared by the World Values Survey as representative and valid. Databases are available in SPSS, the advantage of which is the ability to comparatively analyze data.

While some researchers' data may appear antiquated, we firmly agree that national religious landscapes and cultural values do not shift dramatically in a single generation; rather, change is a gradual process that takes time. At least these data as available data allow us to record trends, so WVS data seems as appropriate in this analysis.

In order to conduct analysis, two subsamples consisting only from Kazakhs (793 respondents in 2011 and 851 people in 2018) were created from databases.

The use of quantitative methods in the study of religiosity as a constellation of various factors has some limitations; the diversity of individual experiences and beliefs remains behind the “curtain”; as a result special importance is paid not only to beliefs, meanings and values, but also to practices.

The data were analyzed using the SPSS program using such methods as measuring central tendency (mean, mode and median), initial distributions and cross-tabulations.

Sample characteristics in the study

The study population in both samples - the urban and rural population aged 18 years and older.

Urban respondents in 2011: - 49.7%, rural residents – 50.3%. In 2018 study - 56.2% urban residents and 43.8% of rural respondents.

Age of respondents. The 2011 study involved 34.9% aged 16 to 29, 44.7% aged 30 to 49, and 20.4% aged 50 and older. The 2018 study involved 25% aged 16 to 29, 49.4% aged 30 to 49, and 25.9% aged 50 and older.

Gender of respondents. The 2011 sample included 50.9% men and 49.1% women. In 2018 study 48.3% men and 51.7% women.

Education of respondents. In 2011 study: pre-school education - 0.2% of respondents, primary education - 1.4%, 7 grades of secondary school - 2.6%, 9 grades of high school - 10. % of respondents, high school - 6.2%, vocational education - 3.9%, college - 15.9%, bachelor's degree / higher education - 36.4%, master's degree, doctorate and equivalent academic degrees - 23.4% of respondents.

2018 study: pre-school education - 2.1% of respondents, primary education - 0.4%, 7 grades of secondary school - 1.8%, 9 grades of high school - 24.3% of respondents, high school - 20.7%, vocational education - 12.5%, college - 15.1%, bachelor's degree / higher education - 24%, master's degree, doctorate and equivalent academic degrees - 23.4% of respondents in Kazakhstan.

Marital status. In 2011 study: 63.3% of respondents are married, 23.8% are single, 5.8% are divorced, 4.6% are widowed, 1.8% are living together but not registered in marriage. In 2018 study: 63.7% of respondents are married, 17.6% are single, 8.6% are divorced, 5.8% are widowed, 0.6% are living together but not registered in marriage, 0.6% are registered in marriage but living separately.

Employment status. In 2011 study: 47.4% were fully employed, 14.5% were underemployed, 6.3% were self-employed and 8.7% were pensioners, 11.2% were housewives or househusbands, 5.9% were students, and 5.8% were unemployed.

In 2018: full-time employment - 57.4%, part-time employment - 7.2%, self-employed - 7.8% and pensioners - 10.1%, housewives or housewives - 10.2%, students 3.2% of respondents, unemployed - 3.6%.

The Shape of Religion

Since conventional definitions of religion have not yet been defined by the sociology of religion, the subject of who qualifies as a believer and who is religious has remained up for debate in social sciences. In this paper, believers are defined as those for whom religious orientation is important but not decisive,

and religious are those for whom religious orientation is subordinate to other, non-religious ones.

In both surveys - 2011 and 2018 - 63.2% and 81.0 % respondents respectively said they were believers. Assuming in a post-atheistic society, commitment to a religious worldview and perception is historically and contextually dependent. World values survey in measuring religiosity employs a number of questions—two of which we will analyze here. The first is “Regardless of whether you attend religious services or not, can you say that you are“: 1. Believer; 2. Non-believer; 3. Atheist» . The second question is «Do you believe in anything I am about to tell you?» The question is accompanied by a nominal rating scale: «In God, in life after death, in the existence of hell, in the existence of heaven» in 2018, the scale of 2011 is shorter - «In God, in the existence of hell» .

Table 1. Religious believes

	Are you believer		Believe in God		Believe in the existence of hell	
	2011	2018	2011	2018	2011	2018
Yes	63,2%	81,0%	93,3%	89,5%	62.3%	52.5%
No	33,0%	9,4%	6,7%	5,2%	37.7%	28.9%
Atheist	3,8%	1,2%				
St.dev.	0,476	0,371	0.211	0,227	0.240	0,479

Religious beliefs are one of the fundamental markers of religiosity. First of all, the majority of Kazakhs in both waves identified themselves as believers, as shown by the empirical data (Table 1). Furthermore, it is clear that the number of believers has increased. In both panels, the vast majority of respondents said they believed in God.

There is a degree of consensus in the division of Muslims into nominal (or non-practicing) and practicing (or devout) groups in daily life. Due to family history, ethnicity, and (inadvertent) cultural conditioning, the majority of Kazakhs identified as nominal Muslims up until recently, which meant that they had a secular worldview. Despite this, they continued to identify as Muslims. When Kazakhs encountered Muslims from other parts. say the Arabian Peninsula, they are not recognized as Muslims since they had not observed all five pillars of Islam: a month-long fast, a five-time-daily prayer schedule, alms equal to ten percent of one's yearly income, and the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca. In other words, if we adopt the criteria of religious puritanism, then the only individuals who can be considered «truly Muslim» are the Arabs residing in the Middle East, and even then, only very reluctantly.

In the religious domain, nation-building and cultural revival processes have also brought about a significant trail of changes; therefore, it is crucial to know if Kazakhs are becoming more religious as Muslims. The measurement of religious activities is one pertinent tool for analyzing this problem. Here, we take two questions from the World Values Survey: «How often do you currently attend religious services, excluding weddings and funerals?» «How often do you pray

to God, excluding weddings and funerals?» is the next question.

Table 2. Service actions

	«How often do you currently attend religious services, excluding weddings and funerals?»		«How often do you pray to God, excluding weddings and funerals?»	
	2011	2018	2011	2018
Sample' year	2011	2018	2011	2018
Several times per day	-	-	7.7	13.0
Once a week	3.0	3.1	9.7	13.1
Several times a week	9.1	12.2	8.4	12.9
Once attending services	11.9	19.2	15.4	22.7
Only at the important religious celebrations	25.7	39.8	16.6	19.9
Once a year	8.3	7.9	3.3	3.5
Less than once a year	7.8	8.4	6.0	2.8
Never	34.3	8.7	32.9	12.1

Table 2 shows the dynamics of mosque attendance across the seven years of the study. If a third of Kazakhs had never attended to a mosque in 2011, then in 2018 that number dropped to 8.7%/ In other words, more Kazakhs currently attend mosques. It is clear from the data that the percentage of people who perform five times prayer a day has doubled, from 7.7% in 2011 to 13.0% in 2018. Between 2011 and 2018, the percentage of people who never performed five time prayer fell by three times, from 32.9% to 12.1%. One of the essential pillar of Islam is the prayer, which must be performed on time and five times a day. It is believed that the best deed a Muslim can do is to do a prayer. The observance of required prayer was questioned throughout the Soviet era due to waves of anti-Islamic propaganda, the loss of Islamic education, the prohibition on written Islamic legacy, and the lack of mosques, leaving it legally possible only for the elderly and retirees. Following independence, religious identity started to take shape as part of the national and cultural revival, primarily within the context of the ethnic Kazakh revival. The number of people attending mosques increasing along with the number of mosques. This is a novel and significant trend: after seven decades of rejecting Islam and Sharia law, despite modernization of country and secularization process, population is starting religiously resurface. We suppose that religiosity is starting to be embedded in daily life rather than existing primarily as a cultural phenomenon.

The importance of religion

The principles of aiding others, loyalty, duty to the tribe, and willingness to give up personal interests for the good of the tribe have been upheld by Kazakhs for generations. All of these ideals obviously satisfy the ecological needs of a nomadic community as well as, for instance, the sociocultural narratives around the extended family in feudal culture. From a sociological standpoint, the Kazakh

steppe can be characterized as a *Gemeinschaft* (F. Tönnies) or a rural community where mechanical solidarities predominate (E. Durkheim).

Kazakhstan experienced several fundamental changes throughout the 70 years of Soviet administration, including urbanization, the first demographic shift, the industrialization of particular regions, the growth of education, and the state's commitment to provide homes and jobs for all inhabitants. To put it another way, as Kazakhstan modernized, its culture, values and norms also changed. A part of the population continued to adhere to the «*Gemeinschaft*» (Tönnies), while others, who were confined to urban areas and possessed the traits of the «*Gesellschaft*» (being urbanized and educated), began to adopt individualistic values instead of collectivist ones, despite the totalitarianism of the Soviet state.

In the latter part of the Soviet era, values such as material and financial achievement began to emerge in society, but the majority of individuals who identified as collectivists in one way or another held the most significant value, which was to be a soviet citizen.

From the standpoint of sociopolitical perspective, it is very heuristic to imagine the dynamics of dominant values. After all, in the more than 30 years since gaining independence, Kazakhstan has experienced a transition to a market economy, which has had a substantial societal impact. Significant waves of rural-urban migration have occurred in Kazakhstan, leading to the emergence of new socioeconomic groups and social strata. Officially, there are now rich and impoverished people, private owners, unemployed individuals, and independent contractors. In the end, most people behave largely for their own financial gain. Therefore, it is essential to comprehend how people and society react to these extreme challenges, what happens to moral principles and conventional collectivist norms (value replacement is obvious), and how religion fits into these new frameworks.

It has been agreed that significant economic changes in society eventually result in changes to the values of society. At least, this is usually the case for wealthy, educated, and city-dwelling individuals. How does religion function now as a part of society and means of expressing spirituality? To what extent religion is valued on a personal level? We do define religious values as a firm belief that the ultimate purpose of human existence is the only ones that are desirable from both a societal and personal standpoint. To what extent does religion serve as an eternal value for Kazakhs in the twenty-first century?

To measure religion as a value, the following question is used in the World Values Survey: «Please tell me how important in your life?» . Scale consisted from next indicators: «Family, friends, free time, politics, work, religion» . The scale is a Likert scale, measuring from “very important” to “not important at all”.

In Kazakhstan, since Soviet times, the relationship between religion and science has had an established character in a sense of science as a dominant value in comparison with religion. Today, society is in a transition to a market economy, which has led to a change in socio-economic structures and behavior. In this regard, it is important to understand what changes are occurring at the level of consciousness? Faith is the basis of religion, that is, if religion arose from a person's need for hope, then the grain of science is doubt, and the fundamental

difference between the two worldviews is that scientific discoveries require empirical evidence, while religious ones are taken on faith.

Table 3. Religion as a value

	Religion as a value		Religiosity as an essential child's quality	
	2011	2018	2011	2018
Mean	2.29	2.12	1.89	1.86
Median	2.00	2.0	2.00	2.00
Mode	2	2	2	2
St.dev.	0.948	0.914	0.316	0.452

In measuring value preferences along the religion-science axis, the World values Survey uses the following question: «If a conflict arises between science and religion, then religion is always right». 6.3% of respondents fully agree with this statement, 18.5% agree, 41.6% disagree, and 21.5% completely disagree. The majority, or more precisely two-thirds, of respondents in the case of a conflict between science and religion do not consider religion to be right, that is. This suggests that the majority of Kazakhs are holding secular cultural attitudes.

Religion meanings

According to Jerom Diamond, American evolutionary biologist and historian, there are six main utilitarian purposes for religion in human history:

- Religion's ability to explain.
- Religion serves the early purpose of easing fear of threats that are beyond human control.
- The third purpose of consolation—particularly in the face of grief, suffering, and death—was also present, but it has grown more important as humans have progressed.
- Religion's organization and subordination.
- Religion's rules of behavior toward strangers.
- Religion's justification for going to war; and its indications of commitment [9].

The background and meanings of religion change throughout time. However, one thing about it never changes: its system of sacred meanings is an essential tool for understanding human behavior since it offers standard interpretations and observations for particular actions.

Diamond asserts that while some religious purposes are disappearing, others are still important despite changing. Therefore, religions continue to carry out the ideological role in many communities. They also contribute to the formation of alternative worldviews, existential problems, and ideological underpinnings.

To what extent does religion currently provide Kazakhs a sense of the worldview? We will analyze this using two questions from each of the two waves of the World Values Survey. An alternate question was presented to the respondents as a dyad. «The primary purpose of religion is to explain life beyond death,»

says the first question. «The primary purpose of religion is to comprehend the meaning of life in this earthly world,» continues the second part of this question. The second question starts with statement «The main meaning of religion is to do good to other people,» and the subsequent part is «The main meaning of religion is to follow religious norms and rituals» .

Table 4. Religion’s meanings

	The primary purpose of religion is to explain life beyond death		The primary purpose of religion is to comprehend the meaning of life in this earthly world		The main meaning of religion is to do good to other people		The main meaning of religion is to follow religious norms and rituals	
	2011	2018	2011	2018	2011	2018	2011	2018
Yes	16.6	18.2	83.4	70	79.1	64.2	20.9	28.8
No	83.4	70	16.6	18.2	20.9	28.8	79.1	64.2

Let's first examine what religion implies when it comes to understanding the meaning of life on Earth or, conversely, how it explains life beyond death. Evidently, the negative dynamics are noteworthy, over a seven-year period, the percentage of individuals believing that religion's main goal is to explain life after death has increased by 2.2%, while the percentage of individuals believing that religion's main goal is to comprehend the meaning of life on Earth has decreased by 13.4% (Table 4). However, as the statistics demonstrate, the majority of respondents still view religion as a means of figuring out why they are here on Earth.

The next point is about the meaning of religion as “following religious norms and rituals”, or “doing good to other people”. The majority of respondents (79.1%) saw the primary purpose of religion as doing good deeds for others; only 20.9% saw the primary purpose of religion as adhering to religious rituals and conventions (Table 4).

More than just Islam's excommunication or ignorance in Soviet Kazakhstan, where many customs and rituals were banned, making it hard to conduct prayers, fast, or complete the Hajj, explains why Islam is relevant to Kazakhs as a method of doing good deeds. The rise in educational attainment among Kazakhs mostly explains such unique interpretation of Islam among the people. According to the data of the last Soviet census of 1989, for every thousand people under the age of 15 in the USSR there were 812 people, and in Kazakhstan this figure was 838 people. In 1985, the number of students in high education institutions among Kazakhs per ten thousand people was 232 people among Kazakhs, while among Uzbeks it was 137 people. The increase in educational attainment was evident in Kazakhs' increased interest in jobs in scientific careers and the creative industries, as well as in their involvement in the modern labor market. However, structural factors restricted their claims to contemporary jobs.

The sense of physical and economic security that state provides for citizens offers another explanation why religion is so important to them when it comes to completing good deeds. Socially supportive state policy reflected in steady trends towards a decline in mortality and a rise in life expectancy (63.5 years in 1995 to

75,09 years in 2023),

Concurrently, since 2001, the nation has witnessed a rise in the birth rate in both rural and urban areas. This trend is intensifying and doesn't appear to be slowing down. The causes of the growth in the birth rate could include religiously motivated values that promote greater birth rates along with of governmental support.

Religiosity and demography

The social status of believers are generally similar to those of non-believers in any religion for both the samples (2011 and 2018). However, there are some clear patterns in Islamic religion. Islam is, as is widely known, a way of life and philosophy, with the Quran offering the solutions to all significant questions. It is not merely a system of theology and doctrines. The five-time prayer is one way that religion can be incorporated into everyday life.

Firstly, as empirical data show, differences between generations in religiosity are obvious. Both in 2011 and in 2018, such act as five-time prayer dominates in the middle-aged cohort (Table 5). If in the young cohort the number of those performing five-time prayers increased by 1.6%, in the older cohort by 1.2%, then in the middle group by 2.4%.

Table 5. How often do you pray?

	Age in three generations						Total	
	15-29 years		30-49 years		50 and older			
	2011	2018	2011	2018	2011	2018	2011	2018
Several times per day	2,4%	4,0%	3,1%	5,5%	2,3%	3,5%	7,8%	13,0%
Once a week	3,8%	3,4%	4,4%	6,1%	1,5%	3,6%	9,7%	13,1%
Several times a week	3,1%	3,8%	3,1%	5,9%	2,1%	3,3%	8,4%	12,9%
Once attending services	5,5%	5,6%	6,3%	11,4%	3,6%	5,6%	15,5%	22,7%
Only at the important religious celebrations	4,8%	3,4%	8,4%	11,0%	3,4%	5,5%	16,6%	19,9%
Once a year	0,9%	0,5%	2,3%	2,4%	0,1%	0,6%	3,3%	3,5%
Less than once a year	1,9%	0,6%	3,3%	1,5%	0,8%	0,6%	5,9%	2,8%
Never	12,6%	3,3%	13,7%	5,5%	6,5%	3,4%	32,8%	12,1%

The generation «X» (born 1964–1980) is undoubtedly the most significant age cohort in Kazakhstan. They are educated and as a kids of the late Soviet generation in Kazakhstan, «preaching» professionalism as one of the most contemporary ideals. On the other hand, the substantial social and cultural shifts of the 1990s also fall on this generation. Following Inglehart's theories [10] we suggest that the values of this generation are hybrid, combining elements of materialism and post-materialism values, which helps to explain why this generation is quite religious. As the most prevalent demographic generation, the generation «X» continue to shape the fundamental values of Kazakhstani society.

The second observation is that younger people engage in practices like five-time prayer, which are equally typical of older and younger generations and shouldn't be observed in modern societies. In the younger cohort, the proportion of those who never visit a mosque has dropped by about four times, whereas in the older cohort, it has declined by less than two times. We need to pay particular attention to this empirical fact. In terms of demographics, millennials—particularly those born in the latter part of the 1990s—represent a sizable and crucial generation in Kazakhstan. They are the first generation of Kazakh independence and made up of those who have only ever known Kazakhstan as a nationhood. Furthermore, according to statistics, millennials are the most educated generation in Kazakhstan in any other historical contexts. The millennial generation is the one that will eventually support the state and forward own agenda—the paradigm of values. Undoubtedly, changes in an area like religiosity take time, but it is clear that generational trends shape the religious landscape in country.

Concluding remarks and policy recommendations

- The majority of people in Kazakhstan as a post-atheistic nation, yet follow secular cultural standards, according to empirical evidence. Even though only a small fraction of Kazakh citizens identify as religious, state policy needs to maintain the state's secular character while adopting state-confessional links to the nation's religious landscape.

- Apparently, Kazakhstan is following the secularization trend, which makes sense given the country's growing level of social security and economic prosperity [9]. Certainly, some people in society still find peace in religion, especially in hard times like economic and financial ones. The form of religiosity in society, however, seems to depend on how well state institutions are able to reclaim their role in ensuring citizen security in the wake of the 1990s crises. Social institutions, including schooling and retirement funds, as well as social support networks, will determine how much religion is needed and when.

- Changes in birth rates in some regions of the country since the start of the twenty-first century point to a possible return to traditionalism and even archaism. One can only agree with R. Inglehart that the secularization of society is a non-linear trend. Stated differently, someone who encounters protracted social instability will start to lose hope and security for the future, which will lead to a greater and faster reliance on religion.

- The interplay between Public policy, economic and physical security, and an individual's participation in Islamic religiosity shapes the contours of religiosity in society. In order to facilitate extensive modern job possibilities that are consistent with modern beliefs, viewpoints, and lifestyles, this interplay requires the state to continue modernizing its economy. The state and society should not allow to believe that the only way out of the current socioeconomic situation is to address it in a way that advances Islamic justice to spread.

- The significant variations in religiosity across the national regions emphasize the importance of regional authorities, who need to debunk the myth that handling religiosity will be easy for them. Realizing how important it is to address the socioeconomic problems facing the populace is essential; otherwise,

societal problems would provide a platform for the spread of extreme religious ideas. It's crucial to understand that maintaining bazaar economy and primitive trading will only make society more backward, leading to pre-revolutionary patterns and attitudes.

- Finally, it is obvious that both society and religion as a social institution are changing. Consequently, one should anticipate changes in social hierarchies, cultural practices, and political dynamics as a result of gradual changes in societal norms and behavior.

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