
World Watch Research

Kazakhstan: Persecution Dynamics

December 2024



Open Doors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

December 2024

© Open Doors International

Open Doors Sverige
sweden@od.org | 019-31 05 00 | www.open-doors.se

Contents

World Watch List 2025 – Top 50.....	2
World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78	4
Copyright, sources and definitions	5
Reporting period	5
Brief country details.....	5
Map of country	6
Dominant persecution engines and drivers.....	7
Brief description of the persecution situation.....	7
Summary of international obligations and rights violations.....	7
Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period	8
Christian communities and how they are affected.....	8
Areas where Christians face most difficulties.....	8
Position on the World Watch List	9
Persecution engines.....	9
Drivers of persecution.....	10
The Persecution pattern	11
Pressure in the 5 spheres of life.....	12
Violence	15
5 Year trends.....	18
Gender-specific religious persecution / Female	19
Gender-specific religious persecution / Male.....	21
Persecution of other religious minorities	22
Trends Summary	23
Further useful reports.....	23
External Links	23

World Watch List 2025 – Top 50

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	98	96	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.7	11.1	94	93	92	91	92
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	89	89	88	87
4	Libya	16.0	16.2	15.9	16.2	16.4	10.6	91	91	88	91	92
5	Sudan	14.1	14.2	15.5	14.9	15.3	16.1	90	87	83	79	79
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.9	12.2	89	89	89	88	88
7	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.6	14.9	14.5	16.7	88	88	88	87	85
8	Pakistan	13.6	13.9	15.0	15.0	12.9	16.7	87	87	86	87	88
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.9	16.5	10.9	86	86	86	85	86
10	Afghanistan	15.6	15.9	15.9	16.4	16.7	5.0	85	84	84	98	94
11	India	12.2	12.9	13.3	14.9	13.9	16.5	84	83	82	82	83
12	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.8	16.6	3.3	81	81	80	81	78
13	Myanmar	12.6	11.1	13.5	14.1	12.9	16.5	81	79	80	79	74
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	13.0	15.2	15.6	80	79	76	70	67
15	China	13.2	10.1	12.8	14.6	16.1	11.1	78	78	77	76	74
16	Maldives	15.6	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.7	78	78	77	77	77
17	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.3	14.8	13.9	6.1	78	79	76	78	82
18	Syria	13.5	14.4	13.9	14.4	14.3	7.0	78	81	80	78	81
19	Algeria	14.7	14.3	11.5	14.7	16.0	6.3	77	79	73	71	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	14.0	15.6	76	75	71	68	67
21	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.6	12.9	14.3	8.3	74	71	69	69	67
22	Laos	11.8	10.7	13.5	14.1	13.9	9.8	74	75	68	69	71
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	2.8	74	72	72	70	71
24	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.7	11.3	10.4	16.1	74	71	69	68	67
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.5	12.4	15.5	4.4	73	71	71	71	71
26	Cuba	13.2	8.5	13.9	13.3	15.1	9.1	73	73	70	66	62
27	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	14.0	15.6	72	70	70	68	66
28	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	14.6	15.7	72	70	70	68	62

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
29	Turkmenistan	14.3	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.3	1.5	71	70	70	69	70
30	Nicaragua	12.4	7.6	13.7	13.3	14.1	9.6	71	70	65	56	51
31	Mexico	11.7	9.0	12.5	11.8	11.0	14.6	71	68	67	65	64
32	Oman	14.5	14.1	10.9	13.8	14.1	3.0	70	69	65	66	63
33	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	15.6	70	69	66	66	65
34	Tunisia	12.4	13.2	10.1	12.6	13.8	8.1	70	69	67	66	67
35	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	10.8	14.5	16.1	70	67	67	66	64
36	Bhutan	13.2	13.2	12.3	14.1	14.2	2.2	69	68	66	67	64
37	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.9	68	68	68	65	63
38	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.6	12.2	12.8	14.2	4.3	68	65	65	64	64
39	Tajikistan	14.1	12.7	12.7	13.2	13.7	1.9	68	66	66	65	66
40	Egypt	12.7	13.7	12.1	12.4	10.9	6.3	68	68	68	71	75
41	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.7	67	67	68	74	67
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	2.6	67	66	66	63	62
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.4	13.1	16.1	67	66	65	65	64
44	Vietnam	10.8	9.5	12.2	14.1	14.1	5.9	67	68	70	71	72
45	Turkey	13.0	11.7	11.7	13.2	11.5	5.4	67	64	66	65	69
46	Colombia	11.0	7.9	12.7	11.5	10.5	12.6	66	68	71	68	67
47	Kyrgyzstan	13.5	10.3	11.7	11.4	12.4	6.9	66	59	59	58	58
48	Brunei	14.8	14.8	10.8	10.8	14.0	0.6	66	66	65	64	64
49	Chad	11.0	8.2	10.2	9.9	10.3	15.9	65	61	58	55	53
50	Jordan	12.9	14.3	10.4	12.2	12.8	2.4	65	65	65	66	64

World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
51	Malaysia	12.8	13.7	11.7	12.4	11.2	3.0	65	64	66	63	63
52	Azerbaijan	13.3	10.2	9.6	12.2	13.7	5.6	65	60	59	60	56
53	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.9	64	63	64	63	62
54	Nepal	12.2	10.6	9.5	12.6	12.3	5.9	63	62	61	64	66
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.4	63	62	63	61	58
56	Russian Federation	12.7	7.9	10.7	13.1	14.1	4.4	63	58	57	56	57
57	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.1	1.7	61	61	60	59	56
58	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	61	64	64	63
59	Indonesia	10.9	11.9	10.9	11.6	10.2	5.7	61	66	68	68	63
60	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.6	61	61	62	62	62
61	Sri Lanka	12.7	8.7	11.5	11.5	8.5	7.6	60	60	57	63	62
62	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	10.3	10.7	12.1	0.2	60	60	60	59	58
63	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	14.6	59	57	55	52	48
64	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	12.1	9.4	58	58	57	50	42
65	Honduras	7.9	4.7	11.7	7.3	9.9	13.1	55	55	53	48	46
66	Togo	9.2	6.7	10.4	7.1	11.5	9.3	54	52	49	44	43
67	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	0.6	54	55	55	57	56
68	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	8.9	54	52	48	43	47
69	Ukraine	6.8	5.0	7.8	12.5	13.5	7.2	53	44	37	37	34
70	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	8.3	53	52	52	51	46
71	Venezuela	6.3	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	9.6	52	53	56	51	39
72	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	16.1	52	52	51	48	47
73	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	9.6	51	44	44	42	42
74	Lebanon	11.5	10.1	7.0	6.2	6.7	7.2	49	48	40	35	34
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	4.4	48	47	44	44	43
76	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	8.1	15.6	47	46	46	43	43

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
77	Belarus	9.9	3.7	5.0	10.8	14.1	3.1	47	46	43	33	30
78	Philippines	9.2	6.6	6.6	6.1	5.7	8.5	43	40	32	34	26

Copyright, sources and definitions

World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- [Background country information](#) (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January).

These documents are the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. They include data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and 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 end of each document under the heading “External links”. These documents may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © Open Doors International.

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 can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website and on the Open Doors Analytical website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/> (password: freedom).

Reporting period

The WWL 2025 reporting period was 1 October 2023 - 30 September 2024.

Brief country details

Kazakhstan: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
19,828,000	5,031,000	25.4

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Kazakhstan: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	5,031,000	25.4
Muslim	13,935,000	70.3
Hindu	970	0.0
Buddhist	23,100	0.1
Ethnic religionist	31,900	0.2
Jewish	5,500	0.0
Bahai	9,900	0.0
Atheist	92,200	0.5
Agnostic	684,000	3.4
Other	14,970	0.1
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Map of country



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

- **March-May 2024:** A sharp rise in the number of police raids, arrests and fines traumatized Baptists in southern Kazakhstan, raising concerns about the future of religious liberty in the country. (Sources: [Forum 18, 3 May 2024](#) and [Christian Post, 17 May 2024](#))

Christian communities and how they are affected

The majority of Christians in Kazakhstan are ethnic Russians and Ukrainians, living mainly in the north of the country. It is therefore no surprise that the largest official church denominations in Kazakhstan are the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church.

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.

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.

Position on the World Watch List

Kazakhstan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	68	38
WWL 2024	65	47
WWL 2023	65	48
WWL 2022	64	47
WWL 2021	64	41

Kazakhstan scored 68 points in WWL 2025, 3 points higher than in WWL 2024. This was caused by a higher score for violence which rose by 3.2 points, while average pressure declined by 0.1 of a point. The highest pressure score was the extreme level of 14.2 points in the *Church sphere of life*, all other spheres of life scored very high. *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*. All three engines 'meet' each other in the *Community sphere of life*. Muslim families, friends and villagers exert pressure on converts, while the government imposes many restrictions on church activities. Religious freedom is restricted by legislation dating back to September 2011 and the Kazakhstan government has been working at increasing its control over the whole of society, which has led to increased surveillance, raids on meetings and arrests.

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	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 (Medium), 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	WEAK	-	-	STRONG	-
Government officials	Medium	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	Strong	-
Ethnic group leaders	Medium	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Medium	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	Weak	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Very weak	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Medium	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	Medium	-
One's own (extended) family	Strong	-	-	Strong	Very weak	-	-	-	-
Political parties	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Strong	-

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

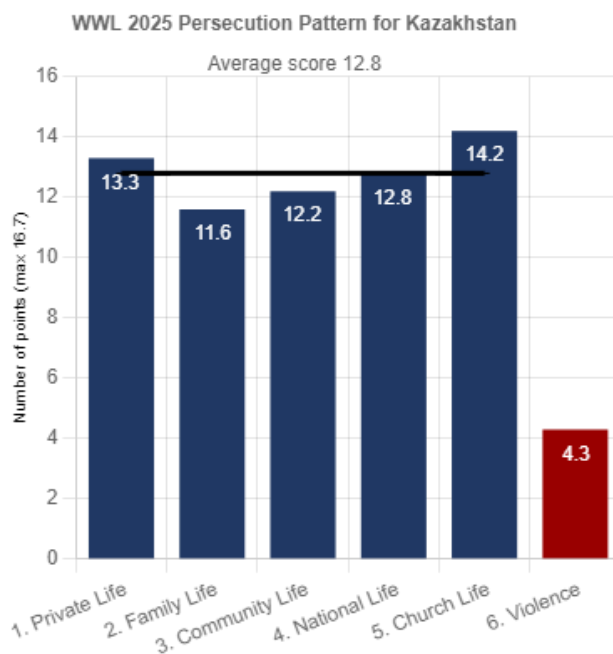
Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Strong):** The government suppresses all religious activity taking place independently of state control. Protestants have been fined, arrested and had their churches raided. Registration has been denied for years to several Christian groups. It is illegal for non-registered churches to gather, forcing them to go underground and making them vulnerable 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):** Just over 70% of the population are Muslims. They will protest against any conversions and report Christian activities to the local authorities.

Drivers of Islamic oppression (blended with Clan oppression)

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

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2025 Persecution pattern for Kazakhstan above shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (12.8 points), decreasing from 12.9 in WWL 2024.
- Pressure is very high in all spheres of life and is at an extreme level in the *Church sphere of life*. The second highest level of pressure is found in *Private sphere of life*. Pressure on Christians in Kazakhstan comes from *Islamic oppression* blended with *Clan oppression* (in the *Private sphere of life*) and *Dictatorial paranoia* (in the *National and Church spheres of life*).
- The score for violence has increased significantly from 1.1 points in WWL 2024 to 4.3 points in WWL 2025. As in all other countries in Central Asia, violent incidents tend to be underreported.

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 2025 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 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.25 points)

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

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

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

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

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

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.25 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 Christian children. 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 affected are converts and unregistered churches.

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

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

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

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

The amendment to the existing Constitution recognizes two religious organizations that are not required to re-register: i) the state-supported Muslim Board and associated religious communities, and ii) the Russian Orthodox Church. 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. (3.75 points)

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

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

There are no Christian political parties in Kazakhstan. There are no Christian civil organizations as they would be falling under the category 'religious' (Kazakhstan is a secular country). There are charity

organizations and rehabilitation centers run by Christians, but Muslims regard such activity as a form of outreach and will often oppose them.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For all imported materials approval is needed from the Religious Affairs Agency (RAA). Only registered churches can apply for this, and even then it may take considerable time for any permission to be granted. Muslims have no influence at this level.

Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following 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. 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 WWL chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

Kazakhstan: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	3	1
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	7	0
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
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?	10 *	0

(table continues below)

Kazakhstan: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	10 *	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	19	25
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	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?	0	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	19	0
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	0

In the WWL 2025 reporting period:

- **Churches attacked/closed:** Raids on three Baptist churches in the Shu province were reported.
- **Christians arrested:** Police in the Shu District of southern Kazakhstan made raids on three unregistered Protestant communities and issued six summary fines in March and April 2024. The leader of one church, 76-year-old Pastor Andrei Boiprav, awaits a court hearing despite his poor health. (Source: [Forum 18, 3 May 2024](#))
- **Christians sexually abused/raped:** At least 20 women were sexually abused. In-country sources expect that the actual number was higher because many women are afraid to report this type of violence.
- **Christians forced to marry:** At least 20 Christians from central Kazakhstan were forcibly married to Muslims husbands.
- **Christians harassed:** Sources reported that 19 converts (both men and women) faced harassment and abuse at the hands of their Muslim relatives and communities. Most were living in rural areas.
- **Christians forced to leave their homes:** At least 19 Christians (mostly women) were expelled from their homes.

5 Year trends

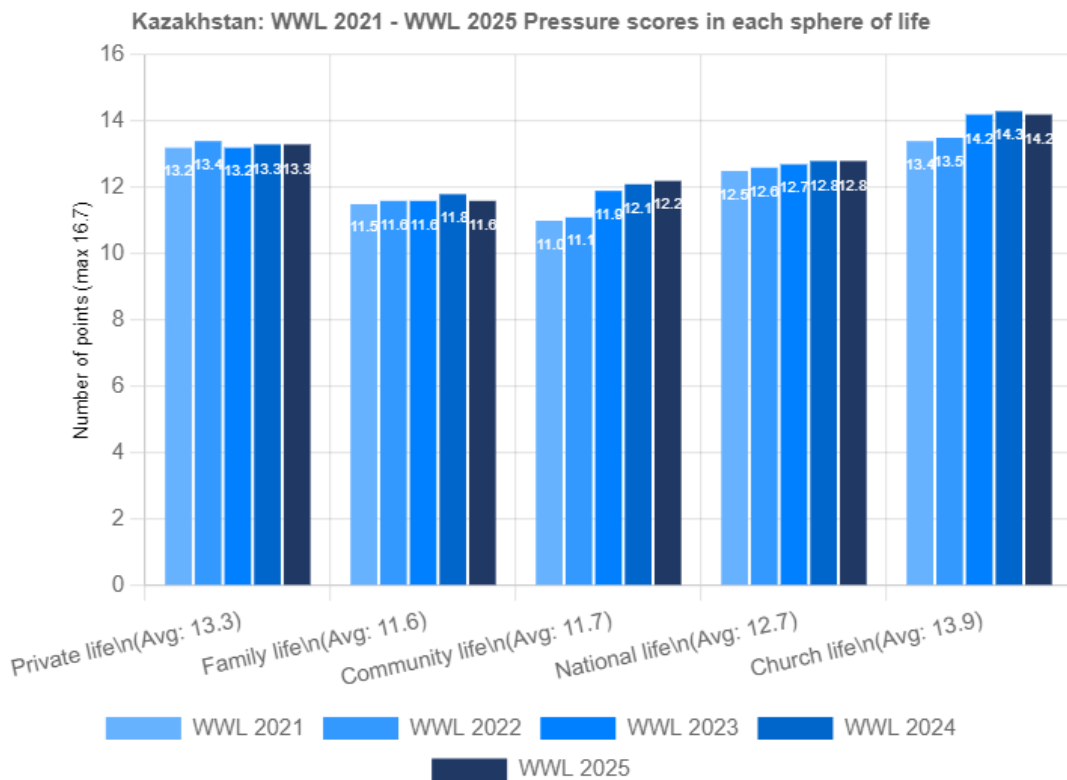
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Kazakhstan: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	12.8
2024	12.9
2023	12.7
2022	12.4
2021	12.3

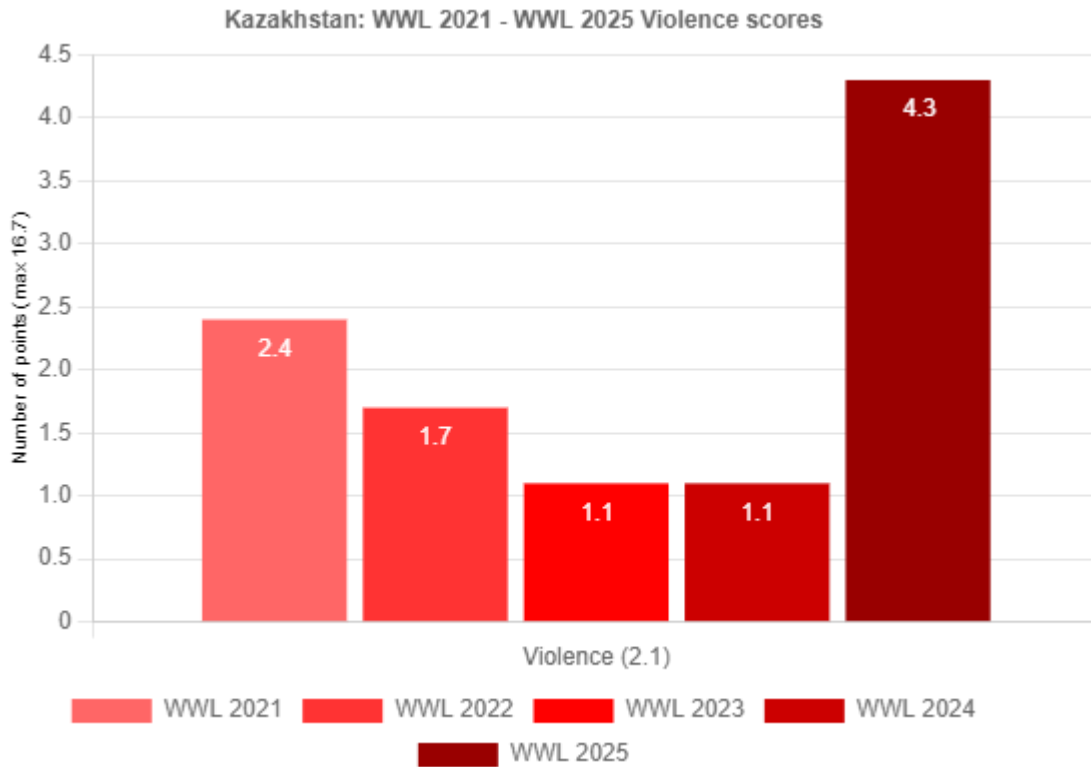
As can be seen from the table above, the average pressure over the 5 spheres of life in Kazakhstan has been constantly very high. Average pressure now appears to have stabilized within the range 12.7 - 12.9 points.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



Pressure is highest throughout the last five WWL reporting periods in the *Church* and *Private spheres of life*, reflecting the two dominant Persecution engines operating in Kazakhstan. In all spheres of life the scores for pressure are generally quite stable, but with a clearly increasing tendency in *Community life*.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



As in many other former Soviet republics, the number of violent incidents in Kazakhstan tends to be underreported. The score was 2.4 points in WWL 2021, but then went down in the following reporting periods. In WWL 2025 there was a jump to 4.3 points, which is by far the highest score in the past 5 years.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Kazakhstan	Female Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abduction Forced marriage Incarceration by family (house arrest) Violence – physical

In Kazakhstan the daily life of indigenous people is based on traditional Islamic culture, which puts women at a disadvantage and requires total submission. A country expert summarizes: “Traditional culture puts women lower than men and requires obedience to men in the family. For that reason, a

woman cannot choose her own religion and will be persecuted if she converts to Christianity.” This makes female converts from Islam more vulnerable to persecution, both as Christians and as women who challenge the existing order.

Converts risk suffering physical and verbal abuse, harassment, threats and being put under house arrest. One female convert reported that she had been regularly beaten by her husband a few years previously, and that he kicked her in her stomach while she was pregnant. Despite a strong relationship with her parents, she felt too ashamed to report the beatings to them for fear that she would be viewed as a bad wife. Her husband has since left her to provide for their children by herself, compounding her sense of shame. A country expert confirms that whilst both men and women experience physical abuse as a form of persecution, “females may face more physical violence when discovered”.

Facilitating such domestic violence, there has been a notable lack of effective measures to address gender-based violence against women, including a lack of police and support service resources, and policy-makers failing to review a draft domestic violence law that was suspended in 2021 ([HRW 2023](#) Kazakhstan country chapter). According to [HRW 2024](#) Kazakhstan country chapter:

- "In April 2023, Kazakhstan strengthened legal protections for women, including by eliminating the possibility of reconciliation after repeated acts of family abuse (a provision that had empowered abusers), enabling police to impose administrative penalties on aggressors without a survivor’s complaint, and increasing administrative arrest to up to 10 days for breaching a protection order. Kazakhstan still has not criminalized domestic violence, a widespread and underreported problem, as a stand-alone offense."

While there have been no reported cases, the risk of being forcibly married to a Muslim remains an ongoing risk for converts. This is sometimes linked to abduction, as part of “bride kidnapping” practices ([RFE/RL, 21 April 2021](#)). Women and girls living in rural areas are most at risk of falling victim to this tradition. Christian women are also vulnerable to sexual assault, an area which remains under-reported due to the associated stigma. A country expert explains that “it is also considered to be ... a woman’s fault if she is physically or sexually abused, so when it happens it is kept a secret.”

Spouses and children of converts in rural areas have also experienced pressure from their families who try to keep them within Islam. It is difficult for a woman to escape such pressure as she stands little chance of living on her own, due to high unemployment and a lack of financial independence. 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

Kazakhstan	Male Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic harassment via business/job/work access Economic harassment via fines Military/militia conscription/service against conscience Travel bans/restrictions on movement Violence – physical Violence – psychological Violence – Verbal

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

Pressure on Christian men comes from both state authorities, as well as from family and local community. State-based persecution has included restrictions on travel and fines. 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. One country expert explains that “Christian men have reportedly experienced pressure due to their faith within this predominantly Muslim context. The state is not offering alternative service, so refusal to take part in military service can invite fines and prison sentences.” Those Christians, who for religious reasons, do not want to take up arms are still forced to join the army. It is important to note that those who have converted to Christianity from a Muslim background experience even more pressure from their family, friends and community.

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. A country expert confirms that “it is difficult for Christians to earn a living – in rural areas in particular, authorities will demand bribes from Christians trying to run businesses.” Converts in the countryside are especially under this pressure at this point. Some business-owners keep their Christian beliefs a secret. Reports indicate that Protestants are persecuted in this way but not Orthodox Christians, and converts face pressure on their businesses from the local authorities and local community. Converts and church leaders particularly risk losing employment due to their faith.

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to [HRW 2024 Kazakhstan country chapter](#):

- “Religious groups face mandatory registration requirements and strict restrictions on the dissemination and sale of religious literature. ”
- “[A]t least 9 Muslims were serving prison sentences related to their social media posts on Islam.”

According to [Forum 18, 18 November 2022](#):

- “The Financial Monitoring Agency maintains a public list of individuals (1,536 on 14 November [2022]), organizations (26 on 14 November [2022]), and banned organizations (63 on 14 November) allegedly 'connected with the financing of terrorism or extremism'. This three-part list contains a wide range of individuals and groups, including genuinely terrorist organizations and individuals, a peaceful opposition political party, and individuals convicted of exercising their human rights. Some religious communities are on this public list, including:
 - the Russian Jehovah's Witness congregation in Taganrog (banned in Russia in 2009);
 - the alleged organization of Russian Muslims who meet to study the works of theologian Said Nursi, "Nurdzhular", banned in Russia in 2008 although Russian Muslims deny that it exists;
 - the Tabligh Jamaat Muslim missionary movement, 75 of whose adherents have been criminally convicted in Kazakhstan since 2015.”

According to the US State Department ([IRFR 2023 Kazakhstan](#)):

- “International religious freedom nongovernmental organization (NGO) Forum 18 reported eight Sunni Muslims were serving sentences connected to their religious activities or beliefs as of September. These included Dadash Mazhenov, serving an eight-year prison sentence for sharing religious talks on his social media page and denied transfer to a labor camp closer to his home as punishment for praying while standing after the lights were turned off for the evening. NGOs reported the actual number of Muslims serving prison sentences connected to peaceful religious activities or beliefs was likely higher.”
- “Jehovah's Witnesses stated that on three occasions, authorities interrupted religious meetings held in rented facilities.”
- “The government continued to ban import of 10 Jehovah's Witnesses religious publications, and the Church of Scientology reported cases of censorship.”
- “According to observers and members of minority religious groups, religious groups regarded as 'nontraditional', including Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists and other evangelical Protestants, and Muslims who chose to wear headscarves or other identifying attire, continued to face greater societal scrutiny and discrimination.”

Further information

- “While the constitution characterizes Kazakhstan as a secular state, it also recognizes certain religions - such as Hanafi Sunni Islam and Russian Orthodox Christianity - as traditional to Kazakhstan. The government considers other religious groups and those who subscribe to a different interpretation of "traditional" religions, particularly Islam, to be nontraditional. Author-

ities are more likely to target members of these groups related to their religious activity.” (Source: [USCIRF 2024 Kazakhstan Chapter](#))

- “Jehovah's Witnesses complain that the regime has taken "no action" to implement a 2020 United Nations Human Rights Committee decision finding that Kazakhstan had violated the rights of their leader in the country by banning the earlier import of ten of their publications.” (Source: [Forum 18, 13 January 2023](#))

Trends Summary

There have been no major changes in Kazakhstan since the publication of WWL 2024.

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, Christians have been facing very high levels of pressure. The situation has not improved since amendments came into force in January 2022.

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

These are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

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

External Links

- 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, 3 May 2024 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2907
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Christian Post, 17 May 2024 - <https://www.christianpost.com/news/police-raids-spark-concern-among-baptists-in-kazakhstan.html>

- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Forum 18, 3 May 2024 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2907
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: HRW 2023 - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/kazakhstan>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: HRW 2024 - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/kazakhstan>
- 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>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: HRW 2024 Kazakhstan country chapter - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/kazakhstan>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18, 18 November 2022 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2791
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2023 Kazakhstan - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/kazakhstan/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: USCIRF 2024 Kazakhstan Chapter - <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2024-05/Kazakhstan%202024.pdf>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18, 13 January 2023 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2802