



KAZAKHSTAN: Country Dossier

December 2018



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research Unit

December 2018

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World Watch List 2019

WWL 2019		1. Private life	2. Family life	3. Community life	4. National life	5. Church life	6. Violence score	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2019	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2018	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2017	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2016	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2015	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2014	
Rank	Country	(Max. score per block is 16.7)												
1	North Korea	16,7	16,7	16,7	16,7	16,7	10,9	94	94	92	92	92	90	
2	Afghanistan	16,7	16,7	16,7	16,7	16,7	10,6	94	93	89	88	81	78	
3	Somalia	16,3	16,7	16,6	16,5	16,4	8,9	91	91	91	87	90	80	
4	Libya	15,3	15,0	15,1	16,0	16,3	9,6	87	86	78	79	76	71	
5	Pakistan	14,3	14,1	13,9	15,0	13,2	16,7	87	86	88	87	79	77	
6	Sudan	14,7	15,0	14,6	15,6	16,1	10,6	87	87	87	84	80	73	
7	Eritrea	14,7	14,9	15,8	16,0	15,2	9,4	86	86	82	89	79	72	
8	Yemen	16,6	16,3	16,4	16,7	16,7	3,1	86	85	85	78	73	74	
9	Iran	14,0	14,3	14,3	15,8	16,5	10,4	85	85	85	83	80	77	
10	India	12,9	13,0	13,5	14,8	13,2	15,2	83	81	73	68	62	55	
11	Syria	13,6	14,0	13,1	13,8	14,2	13,0	82	76	86	87	83	79	
12	Nigeria	12,3	11,8	13,4	12,9	12,9	16,7	80	77	78	78	78	70	
13	Iraq	13,9	14,4	14,1	14,6	13,6	8,1	79	86	86	90	86	78	
14	Maldives	15,2	15,5	13,5	15,9	16,7	1,1	78	78	76	76	78	77	
15	Saudi Arabia	15,1	13,6	14,0	15,3	16,5	2,4	77	79	76	76	77	78	
16	Egypt	11,7	13,2	10,7	13,2	11,0	15,9	76	70	65	64	61	61	
17	Uzbekistan	15,4	12,9	13,9	12,3	15,9	3,1	74	73	71	70	69	68	
18	Myanmar	11,4	11,8	13,3	12,1	11,8	11,1	71	65	62	62	60	59	
19	Laos	13,0	9,1	14,2	14,7	14,9	4,6	71	67	64	58	58	62	
20	Vietnam	12,7	8,2	12,7	13,5	14,2	9,1	70	69	71	66	68	65	
21	Central Africa Republic	10,2	9,7	11,9	10,6	11,1	16,1	70	61	58	59	67	67	
22	Algeria	13,1	14,2	10,1	11,8	12,7	7,6	70	58	58	56	55	54	
23	Turkmenistan	14,6	10,8	13,8	13,3	15,1	1,3	69	68	67	66	63	62	
24	Mali	11,4	10,1	11,5	9,2	9,9	15,4	68	59	59	55	52	54	
25	Mauritania	13,9	14,0	12,2	13,0	13,3	0,6	67	57	55	(not in Top 50)	50	51	
26	Turkey	12,4	11,1	10,7	13,2	10,9	7,2	66	62	57	55	52	(not in Top 50)	
27	China	10,4	8,0	10,3	11,8	14,5	10,0	65	57	57	57	57	51	
28	Ethiopia	10,0	10,0	10,3	10,8	10,4	13,5	65	62	64	67	61	65	
29	Tajikistan	13,8	11,9	11,6	12,1	12,9	2,4	65	65	58	58	50	47	
30	Indonesia	10,6	11,1	11,3	10,2	9,3	12,0	65	59	55	55	50	46	
31	Jordan	13,0	13,1	11,8	11,5	12,2	3,0	65	66	63	59	56	56	
32	Nepal	12,4	11,4	10,6	10,9	11,9	7,0	64	64	(not in Top 50)	(not in Top 50)	(not in Top 50)	(not in Top 50)	
33	Bhutan	12,9	11,1	12,3	12,4	14,0	0,9	64	62	61	56	56	54	
34	Kazakhstan	13,2	10,8	10,3	12,2	13,5	3,1	63	63	56	55	51	49	
35	Morocco	12,2	13,3	9,6	12,0	14,4	1,5	63	(not in Top 50)	(not in Top 50)	(not in Top 50)	(not in Top 50)	47	
36	Brunei	13,4	14,3	10,5	10,3	13,4	0,7	63	64	64	61	58	57	
37	Tunisia	12,1	13,2	10,7	11,2	12,0	3,3	63	62	61	58	55	55	
38	Qatar	13,0	12,6	10,3	11,0	14,1	1,1	62	63	66	65	64	63	
39	Mexico	8,3	7,5	12,2	10,2	9,7	13,5	61	59	57	56	55	(not in Top 50)	
40	Kenya	11,7	10,6	10,1	8,3	11,5	8,3	61	62	68	68	63	48	
41	Russian Federation	12,5	8,4	10,7	10,4	12,0	5,7	60	(not in Top 50)	(not in Top 50)	(not in Top 50)	(not in Top 50)	(not in Top 50)	
42	Malaysia	11,8	14,2	12,1	11,7	8,6	1,5	60	65	60	58	55	49	
43	Kuwait	13,2	12,2	10,1	10,5	12,2	1,5	60	61	57	56	49	50	
44	Oman	12,9	12,5	9,8	9,6	12,8	1,7	59	57	53	53	55	56	
45	United Arab Emirates	12,8	12,0	9,1	10,5	12,2	1,9	58	58	55	55	49	51	
46	Sri Lanka	11,0	8,3	10,5	11,5	10,0	7,0	58	57	55	(not in Top 50)	51	55	
47	Colombia	7,9	7,6	11,8	9,4	8,5	12,6	58	56	53	55	55	56	
48	Bangladesh	11,0	9,1	11,6	10,5	7,8	7,8	58	58	63	57	51	46	
49	Palestinian Territories	11,4	12,3	9,0	10,6	11,8	2,4	57	60	64	62	58	53	
50	Azerbaijan	13,2	9,9	9,3	11,1	12,4	1,5	57	57	(not in Top 50)	57	50	(not in Top 50)	

World Watch List 2019: Persecution watch countries (PWC) - Countries scoring 41 points or more, but not reaching the Top 50

WWL 2019		1. Private life	2. Family life	3. Community life	4. National life	5. Church life	6. Violence score	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2019	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2018
Rank	Country	(Max. score per block is 16.7)							
51	Comoros	11,7	11,5	9,1	9,9	13,9	0,4	56	56
52	Kyrgyzstan	12,7	9,9	10,9	9,2	11,9	1,9	56	54
53	Djibouti	12,3	12,3	10,3	10,0	11,2	0,0	56	56
54	Congo DR (DRC)	5,6	6,7	9,3	7,4	10,3	16,1	55	(Below 41 points)
55	Bahrain	11,9	12,2	8,6	10,2	10,2	1,5	55	57
56	Cameroon	9,9	7,3	10,0	7,8	7,5	11,3	54	(Below 41 points)
57	Tanzania	9,3	10,8	10,3	8,6	8,8	4,8	52	53
58	Niger	11,5	9,7	8,1	8,1	10,0	4,8	52	45
59	Cuba	8,8	4,4	9,1	10,5	11,8	3,9	49	49
60	Chad	11,5	8,2	9,0	8,0	8,7	3,0	48	(Below 41 points)
61	Burkina Faso	9,0	8,0	8,8	6,6	7,9	7,2	48	(Below 41 points)
62	Uganda	11,4	8,0	7,7	6,9	9,6	3,7	47	46
63	Guinea	10,3	7,5	8,3	7,0	8,1	5,0	46	(Below 41 points)
64	South Sudan	5,7	1,5	7,5	5,8	8,0	15,0	44	(Below 41 points)
65	Mozambique	6,7	4,3	6,0	6,9	6,0	13,3	43	(Below 41 points)
66	Gambia	7,7	8,2	8,2	8,3	8,8	1,9	43	(Below 41 points)
67	Ivory Coast	9,8	8,7	8,2	5,5	6,4	4,3	43	(Below 41 points)
68	Burundi	5,1	5,8	9,7	9,2	9,6	3,3	43	(Below 41 points)
69	Angola	6,4	3,6	7,1	8,7	10,4	6,1	42	(Below 41 points)
70	Togo	8,8	6,7	8,5	7,1	8,4	2,0	42	(Below 41 points)
71	Venezuela	3,3	3,8	10,5	9,0	8,8	5,9	41	(Below 41 points)
72	Nicaragua	2,4	3,6	6,4	8,9	7,9	11,9	41	(Below 41 points)
73	Rwanda	5,3	4,4	6,7	7,8	10,1	6,7	41	(Below 41 points)

KAZAKHSTAN – Country Dossier (December 2018)

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Introduction

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

World Watch List Kazakhstan	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2019	63	34
WWL 2018	63	28
WWL 2017	56	43
WWL 2016	55	42
WWL 2015	51	42

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country was among the fifty highest scoring countries (Top 50) in the WWL 2015-2019 reporting periods.

Please note: The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”.

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

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

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

WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Kazakhstan

Link for general background information

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

Recent country history

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

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

The religious landscape

According to the World Christian Database (WCD 2018) 71.1% of the population is Muslim – predominantly Sunni. However, it would be wrong to call Kazakhstan a Muslim country. 70 years of atheism during the Soviet era have left a deep influence; the government (the heirs of the atheist Soviets) is staunchly secular and seeks to keep Islam under control, while the overwhelming majority of the population merely follows Islamic traditions rather than strict Muslim teachings. Nevertheless, “to be a Kazakh is to be a Muslim” is the belief of many Kazakhs. As a result, converts to Christianity experience much pressure from family, friends, and local community. This pressure is much stronger in the countryside than in the major cities. Relatives will oppress a Christian, sometimes using physical abuse, in attempts to make him\her turn back to Islam. Sometimes this is also done by local police. Only about 15,000 indigenous Kazakhs are Christians.

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

Another indication that some Muslims in Kazakhstan have radicalized is the number of Kazakhs fighting with radical groups like Islamic State, Hizb-ut-Tahrir or the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. In late [September 2014](#), the director of the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies, presented a report on Central Asians fighting for the Islamic State group (IS) entitled "Our People in an Alien War: Central Asian Fighters in the Syrian conflict." According to the report, there were 250 nationals from Kazakhstan in 2014 among the foreign jihadists within IS.

This poses the same problem for the regime in Kazakhstan as for the other countries in the region: What will happen when these radical Muslims return home?

The Christian share of the population of Kazakhstan is 24.9% (WCD 2018). This means that Kazakhstan has by far the biggest Christian presence in the region. The reason for this is not that Kazakhs have converted on a large scale to Christianity, but is due to the presence of a large Russian minority in the country's northern provinces. As a result, more than 90% of all Christians in Kazakhstan belong to the Russian Orthodox Church.

The political landscape

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

The question of who will succeed Nazarbayev has still not been answered - Nazarbayev turned 78 on 6 July 2018. A clear signal that Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev has no intentions of leaving the political scene was [his appointment](#) as head of the Central Asian country's Security Council for life on 12 July 2018.

In politics and economy Kazakhstan is increasingly linking up with Russia (and China). This is partly due to the huge number of ethnic Russian citizens in the northern part of Kazakhstan.

The socio-economic landscape

Kazakhstan is blessed with vast resources of oil, gas and other ores. The current regime has promoted market reforms and has transformed Kazakhstan into the second largest economy of the former Soviet empire (after Russia). Despite the fact that the country was hit hard by the financial crisis that started in 2008 (and later by the economic sanctions imposed by the West on Russia after that country had annexed the Ukrainian peninsula of the Crimea in early 2014) Kazakhstan remains the wealthiest country in the region. As a result, Kazakhstan is the only country in the region that has few labor migrants abroad, but many labor migrants from other Central Asia countries (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan). This offers opportunities for Christian outreach among these people.

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

The government is successfully stimulating the use of the Kazakh language and the renaissance of traditional Kazakh culture. On [12 April 2017](#), President Nazarbayev ordered authorities to

come up with a Latin-based alphabet for the Kazakh language by the end of 2017, marking a major shift after nearly 80 years with a Cyrillic-based alphabet. Despite this, 95% of the population of Kazakhstan is still capable of communicating in Russian. Due to the old Soviet educational system, practically all Kazakh citizens are literate. This offers great opportunities for the Church to spread the Gospel. Though the regime has imposed many restrictions in the production, importation and distribution of religious materials, the very long and open border with Russia means that getting much needed materials into Kazakhstan is less problematic than into other Central Asian countries.

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

Concluding remarks

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

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

External Links - WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Kazakhstan

- The religious landscape: September 2014
[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=43096&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=7&cHash=83c85544e0de4fafe4f1908e53ab03e0](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=43096&tx_ttnews[backPid]=7&cHash=83c85544e0de4fafe4f1908e53ab03e0)
- The political landscape: his appointment
<https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-nazarbaev-security-council-chairman-for-life/29358887.html>
- The socio-economic landscape: 12 April 2017
<http://www.rferl.org/a/kazakh-president-orders-shift-from-cyrillic/28425590.html>

WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2018	Christians	Chr%
18,404,000	4,576,000	24.9

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

How did Christians get there?

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

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

After the country gained independence in 1991, the new religious liberty allowed missionary and evangelistic efforts to reach thousands of ethnic Kazakhs who embraced Christianity. The indigenous Church (i.e. Christians with a Muslim background), which was practically non-existent in 1990, is now estimated to number 15,000.

What church networks exist today?

Church networks: Kazakhstan	Christians	%
Orthodox	4,176,000	91.3
Catholic	147,000	3.2
Protestant	57,900	1.3
Independent	151,000	3.3
Unaffiliated	62,600	1.4
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-18,600	-0.4
Total	4,575,900	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	44,700	1.0
Renewalist movement	129,000	2.8

Please note: Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. Roman Catholics: All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. Protestants: Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world’s 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. Independents: Believers who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman

Catholic, Protestant). Unaffiliated Christians: Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. Doubly-affiliated Christians: Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. Evangelical movement: Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. Renewalist movement: Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

The communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians in Kazakhstan do not form isolated groups and are not classed as a separate category for WWL analysis.

The historical Christian communities make up by far the largest group of Christians in Kazakhstan: Russian Orthodox Christians are about 22.7% of the total population. Other denominations in this group are the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Old Believers, and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Historical Protestant churches include the Lutheran church (mostly German), the Presbyterian Church and the Methodist Church. In all, these churches account for a little under 24% of the Kazakh population.

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

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

Religious context

Religious Context: Kazakhstan	Numbers	%
Christians	4,576,000	24.9
Muslim	13,078,000	71.1
Hindu	860	0.0
Buddhist	20,200	0.1
Ethnoreligionist	29,200	0.2
Jewish	5,600	0.0
Bahai	8,800	0.0
Atheist	94,000	0.5
Agnostic	578,000	3.1
Other	13,190	0.1

Please note: OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

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

According to [government statistics](#) from 2016, ethnic Kazakhs are 63.1% of the population and ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan are 23.7% (living mostly in the northern provinces). Other groups include Tatars (1.3%), Ukrainians (2.1%), Uzbeks (2.8%), Belarusians, Uyghurs (1.4%),

Azerbaijanis, Poles, and Lithuanians. Some minorities such as Germans (1.1%), Ukrainians, Koreans, Chechens, Meskhetian Turks, and Russian political opponents of the regime had been deported to Kazakhstan in the 1930s and 1940s by Stalin. Some of the largest Soviet labor camps (Gulags) existed here.

Most Christians belong to ethnic minorities - mainly Russian. Of the 4,576,000 Christians in the country only an estimated 15,000 are ethnic Kazakhs. In contrast to other countries in Central Asia, Kazakhstan has not experienced a mass emigration of ethnic Russians.

Notes on the current situation

- Christianity is looked upon as a Russian religion. After a wave of political and social unrest in 2011, some government-controlled media portray Protestant Christians as a threat to security and society. Local officials frequently encourage people to have a negative attitude towards Christians, especially in areas that border Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.
- Kazakhstan used to be one of the countries in Central Asia with the least problems for Christians. Since more restrictive legislation was implemented in September 2011, there has been an increase in the number of inspections of churches and Christian organizations all over the country. Some literature and equipment has been confiscated. Police and security officers occasionally disrupt worship services, film all the attendants and collect personal data.

External Links - WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

- Religious context: IRF 2015
<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2015/sca/256307.htm>
- Religious context: government statistics
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazakhstan>

WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

With a score of 63 points Kazakhstan ranked 34th in WWL 2019.

What type of persecution dominates?

- **Dictatorial paranoia:** No religious activities beyond state-run and state-controlled institutions are allowed. It is very common that members of Protestant churches are regarded as followers of an alien sect aiming to depose the government. Hence the need for them to be controlled and eradicated.
- **Islamic oppression:** Indigenous Muslims converting to Christianity experience pressure and occasionally physical violence from families, friends and local community to force them to return to their former faith.

Who is driving persecution?

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

What it results in

Religious freedom is already restricted by legislation (dating from September 2011) and the Kazakhstan government is constantly working at increasing its control over the entire society, which 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 mullahs also preach against them.

Violence

The following table is based on reported cases. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures.

Kazakhstan	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	0	10	11	3	1

WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	0	2	25	2	30
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Christians killed refers to the number of Christians killed for faith-related reasons (including state-sanctioned executions). Christians attacked refers to the number of Christians abducted, raped or otherwise sexually harassed, forced into marriage to non-Christians or otherwise physically or mentally abused (including beatings and death-threats) for faith-related reasons. Christians arrested refers to the number of Christians detained without trial or sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment or similar things for faith-related reasons. Churches attacked refers to the number of churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons. Christian-owned houses and shops attacked refers to the number of houses of Christians or other property (including shops and businesses of Christians) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons.

Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period

- On 25 February 2018 officers from the state secret service in Kazakhstan interrupted the Sunday service and arrested the pastor, his wife and leaders of the church. The leaders were kept in prison cells and questioned for 3 hours and then let go. The pastor was accused of "religious extremism" and more than 100 kg of Christian books and Bibles were confiscated from his home. (Source: Open Doors research)
- In early April 2018 the car of a convert (and pastor) was targeted. It was stolen late at night and wrecked. (Source: Open Doors research)

WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 63 points Kazakhstan ranked 34th in WWL 2019. The score remained the same as in WWL 2018. Although there was a drop in the violence score, pressure remained at high and very high levels in all *spheres of life*, particularly in the *Private* and *Church spheres of life*.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines: Kazakhstan	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Medium
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	EA	Not at all
Denominational protectionism	DPR	Very weak
Communist and post - Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Not at all

Please note: 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 (long version).

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 in the WWL 2019 reporting period. 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):

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

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of Persecution: Kazakhstan	IO	RN	EA	DPR	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	MEDIUM	-	-	VERY WEAK	-	-	STRONG	-
Government officials	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	Strong	-
Ethnic group leaders	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	Very weak	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Very weak	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	Medium	-
One's own (extended) family	Strong	-	-	Very weak	-	-	Medium	-
Political parties	-	-	-	-	-	-	Strong	-
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

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

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

- *Governments officials:* The government suppresses all religious activity independent of state control. Protestants have been fined, arrested and had their churches raided. Registration has been denied for years to several Christian groups. It is illegal for non-registered churches to gather, forcing them to go underground and leading to police raids during their worship services. Religious literature must be approved by the government. Unapproved religious meetings can result in fines and imprisonment, with members being interrogated.
- *Normal citizens* are Muslims. They will protest against conversions and report Christian activities to the local authorities.
- The ruling *political party* of President Nazarbayev functions as a driver since much of the persecution is government-sanctioned.

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

- Local *government officials* will have connections to the Muslim community, affecting their dealings with Christians.
- *Kazakh leaders*, with the support of the authorities, see conversion as an assault against Kazakh identity.
- *Muslim clerics* are open in their hostility towards non-Orthodox Christians and particularly towards converts from Islam.
- At the local level *normal citizens* are mostly from Muslim background. They will oppose conversion and have a negative attitude toward Christian activities.
- Pressure on converts exerted by *family, friends and community* to recant their Christian faith and return to Islam is high and can involve violence.

Context

President Nazarbayev is ageing (he was born on 6 July 1940). It is unclear who will succeed him but it will most probably be someone of the same school, providing little scope for change.

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

A small, but growing group of Islamic militants, which have carried out small-scale bomb attacks in the past, add to the country's worries. Officials say there were at least 300 Kazakh citizens fighting for the Islamic State group (IS) abroad. Non-official sources claim the number was much higher. The government makes use of this information and even exaggerates the danger so that they can clamp down on society and restrict more areas of freedom.

Christian communities and how they are affected

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

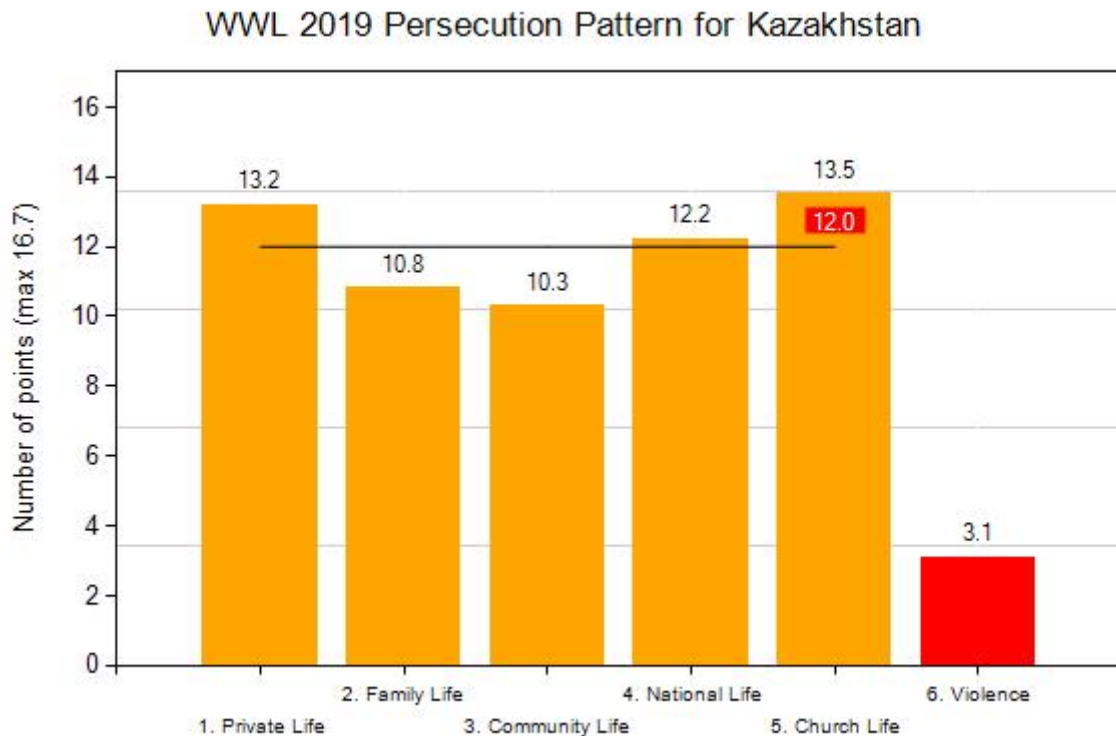
Historical Christian communities: These groups, of which the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is by far the largest, are not involved in evangelism among Kazakhs. They can function relatively freely since the Kazakh regime does not consider them a danger. Also, the Kazakh government has no interest in provoking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

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

Non-traditional Christian communities: Especially the unregistered groups of this category (which include Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations) experience increasing

persecution, especially since they are also active in evangelism. All Christians in this category suffer from raids, threats, arrests and fines by the authorities.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence



The WWL 2019 Persecution pattern for Kazakhstan shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (12.0), increasing slightly from 11.8 in WWL 2018. The increase in pressure was spread out over nearly all *spheres of life*.
- Pressure is at high and very high levels in all *spheres of life*, the highest levels to be found in the *Church and Private spheres of life*.
- The score for violence is still fairly high, although it decreased from 3.7 in WWL 2018 to 3.1 in WWL 2019. As in all other countries in Central Asia, reports of violent incidents tend to be low in number.

Private sphere:

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

give up their new faith. All non-ROC Christians are monitored by the Kazakh Intelligence Service (KNB).

Family sphere:

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

Community sphere:

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

National sphere:

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

Church sphere:

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

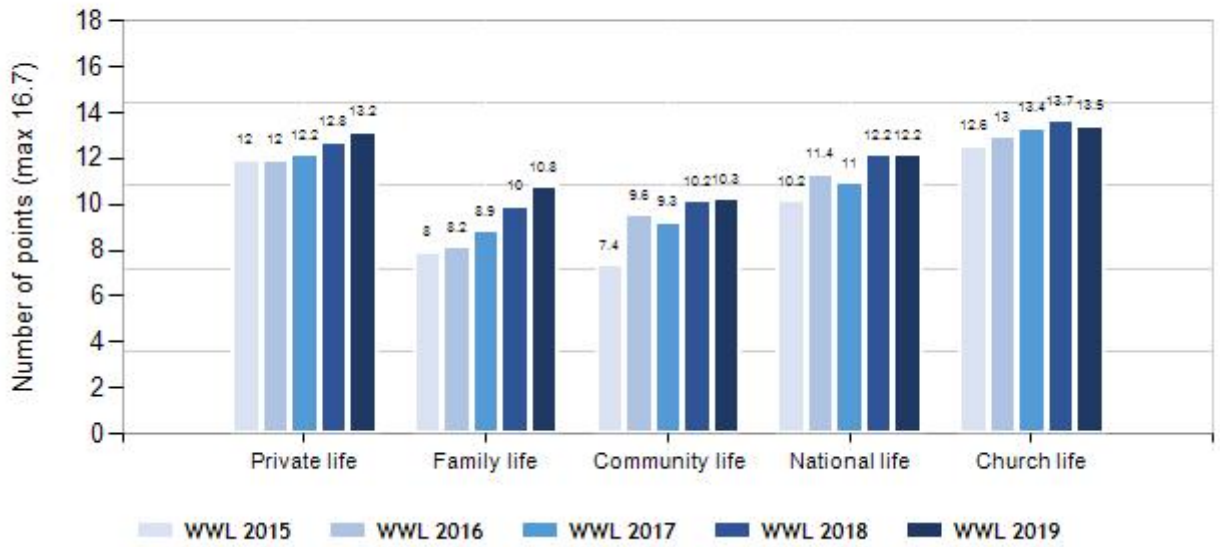
Violence:

In the WWL 2019 reporting period, three churches were damaged and more than 10 believers were harassed during raids on churches. More than 10 Christians were detained. For a summary of the statistics on violence and examples, please see the Short and Simple Persecution Profile section above.

5 Year trends

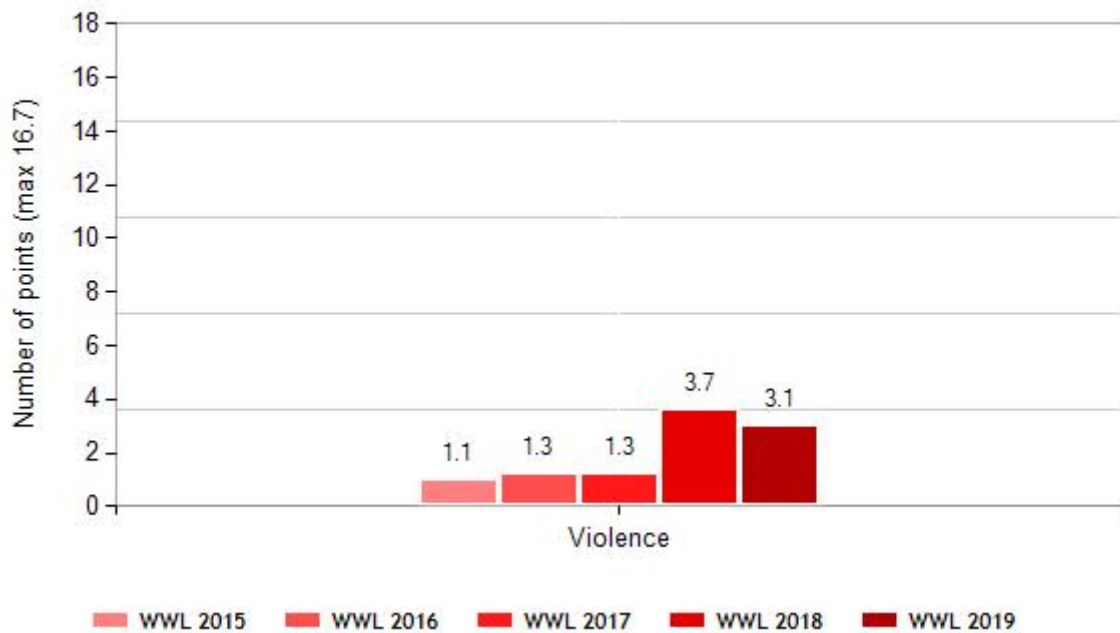
The three graphics below illustrate how the situation for Christians in Kazakhstan has deteriorated since WWL 2015, and that this trend slowed down somewhat in WWL 2019. Chart 1 shows that pressure seems to have levelled off in the *Community*, *National* and *Church life spheres* (the latter two at very high levels). However there have been rises in pressure in each reporting period in *Private* and *Family life* reflecting how especially converts have come under greater pressure. Chart 2 shows that the average pressure on Christians has been rising steadily over the past five years. Although the scores for violence (third chart) were stable at a very low level in the periods WWL 2015-2017, the score in the period WWL 2018-2019 has now possibly stabilized at a fairly high level (above the 3 point mark).

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for Kazakhstan (Spheres of life)



WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Pattern history: Kazakhstan	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2019	12.0
2018	11.8
2017	11.0
2016	10.8
2015	10.0

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for Kazakhstan (Violence)



Gender specific persecution

Female:

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

Male:

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

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to Forum 18 – a Norwegian human rights organization that promotes religious freedom – during 2017, the Kazakh authorities brought administrative charges against 279 individuals, religious communities, charities and companies for attending worship meetings, offering or importing religious literature and pictures, sharing or teaching faith, posting religious material online, praying in an unapproved manner in mosques, bringing a child to a religious meeting, maintaining inadequate security measures at places of worship, or failing to pay earlier fines. Of these, 259 received punishments that included fines, jail terms, bans on religious activity, deportations, and seizure of religious literature. During the year, the government convicted 23 individuals for practicing their religion. Of these, 20 were Sunni Muslims, two Jehovah’s Witnesses, and one Baptist. (Source: [US State Department, International Religious Freedom Report for 2017](#))

Examples of persecution of other religious groups:

- A 61-year-old Jehovah's Witness and cancer sufferer is serving a five-year prison term in the northern city of Pavlodar on charges related to "extremism". Two United Nations bodies have called for his release but Kazakhstan's authorities have ignored these calls. (Source: [Forum 18](#)).
- In March 2018, a court in Kazakhstan's southern Almaty Region sentenced a Muslim to one year's imprisonment charged with being a member of the banned Islamic missionary movement Tabligh Jamaat. (Source: [Forum 18](#)).
- On 20 February 2018, a court in Karkaraly District of Karaganda Region fined Muslim Dastan Abdrakhmanov for holding Islamic classes for teenage children in his home village of Borlybulak. Source: http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2368

Future outlook

The political outlook: There are no signs that current Kazakh president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, is planning to step down in the near future. There have been no signs that preparations are being made for a successor.

The outlook for Christians - through the lens of:

- *Dictatorial paranoia:* The current government exerts a high level of control over the country. Government officials at all levels are the strongest persecutors of Christians in Kazakhstan, imposing all kinds of legal restrictions, monitor all religious activities, raid meetings and block religious materials. This is not likely to change in the near future.
- *Islamic oppression:* Islam is not the state religion. It is the traditional religion of most of the population. Muslims are treated in the same manner as other religions. Muslim pressure on Christians in Kazakhstan does not come from radical Islamic movements but rather from the far-reaching influence of family, friends and community on converts. The chances that this will change soon are as good as non-existent.

Conclusion: Due to the very high level of stability of the two main Persecution engines in Kazakhstan, the Church in this country will have to brace itself for living under a continued and considerable level of surveillance and pressure.

External Links - WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution of other religious minorities: US State Department, International Religious Freedom Report for 2017
<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dliid=281024>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18
http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2359
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18
http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2359
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18
http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2407

Additional Reports and Articles

WWR in-depth reports

A selection of in-depth reports is available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/> (password: freedom).

Open Doors article(s) from the region

A selection of articles is available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/articles/> (password freedom).

World Watch Monitor news articles

Use the country search function at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/>

Recent country developments

Use the country search function at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/> (password: freedom).