

THE ROLE OF RELIGION AND VALUES OF YOUTH IN KAZAKHSTAN: EVIDENCE FROM A POST-COVID SURVEY AMONG ALMATY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The research seeks to understand how religious beliefs and spiritual orientations influence the formation of moral consciousness, social engagement, and personal development among young people. A total of 127 questionnaires were submitted through an online survey distributed via university-based WhatsApp groups in Almaty. After seven questionnaires that did not meet the age criterion of 18-35 years had been excluded, the final analytical sample consisted of 120 respondents. The questionnaire was structured to examine religious identification, religious practices, and the perceived importance of religion in civic and social life. The data were analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages automatically generated by Google Forms. Particular attention was paid to the relationship between religious beliefs, value orientations, and the civic identity of university students. The findings indicate that religion remains important in shaping the identity and worldview of many respondents, although its expression varies across the surveyed sample. The study highlights a complex coexistence between traditional religious affiliation and modern secular or humanistic perspectives, underscoring the enduring relevance of religion as a source of meaning, moral orientation, and resilience. Responses concerning post-pandemic changes reflect respondents' retrospective assessments and do not establish a causal effect of COVID-19 on religiosity.

Keywords: Identity Formation, Post-COVID, Psychological Motives, Religious Conversion, Religious Values, Social Motives, Youth.

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Қазақстан жастарындағы діннің рөлі мен құндылықтары: Алматы университеттері студенттері арасындағы постковидтік сауалнама нәтижелері

Аңдатпа. Зерттеу жұмысының мақсаты діни сенімдер мен рухани бағыттардың жастардың адамгершілік санасының қалыптасуына, әлеуметтік белсенділігіне және тұлғалық дамуына қалай әсер ететінін түсінуге бағытталған. Алматы қаласындағы университеттік WhatsApp топтары арқылы жүргізілген онлайн сауалнамаға 127 адам қатысты. Белгіленген 18-35 жас өлшеміне сәйкес келмеген 7 сауалнама таңдаудан шығарылып, қорытынды іріктемеге 120 респонденттің жауабы енгізілді. Сауалнама діни сәйкестікті, діни әдет-ғұрыптарды және діннің азаматтық және қоғамдық өмірдегі маңыздылығын зерттеуге арналған. Деректер Google Forms жүйесі автоматты түрде қалыптастырған жиіліктер мен пайыздар негізінде сипаттамалық әдіспен талданды. Діни наным-сенімдер, құндылық бағдарлары және университет студенттерінің азаматтық болмысы арасындағы қарым-қатынасқа ерекше назар аударылды. Нәтижелер діннің респонденттердің жеке басы мен дүниетанымын қалыптастыруда маңызды рөл атқаратынын, алайда оның көріністері зерттелген іріктеме шегінде әртүрлі екенін көрсетті. Зерттеу дәстүрлі діни көзқарас пен қазіргі зайырлы немесе гуманистік көзқарастар арасындағы күрделі қатар өмір сүруді көрсетеді, бұл діннің мағынаның, моральдық бағыттың және өміршеңдіктің қайнар көзі ретіндегі тұрақты өзектілігін көрсетеді. Пандемиядан кейінгі өзгерістер туралы жауаптар респонденттердің ретроперспективті бағаларын көрсетеді және COVID-19 пандемиясының діндарлыққа себептік ықпалын дәлелдемейді.

Түйін сөздер: сәйкестікті қалыптасуы, COVID-тен кейінгі кезең, психологиялық уәждер, діни конверсия, діни құндылықтар, әлеуметтік мотивтер, жастар.

Роль религии и ценностей молодёжи Казахстана: данные постковидного опроса среди студентов университетов Алматы

Аннотация. Цель работы – понять, каким образом религиозные убеждения и духовная ориентация влияют на развитие морального сознания, социальную активность и личностное становление молодых людей. В ходе онлайн-опроса, распространённого через университетские группы WhatsApp в Алматы, было получено 127 анкет. После исключения 7 анкет, не соответствовавших возрастному критерию 18-35 лет, итоговая выборка составила 120 респондентов. Анкета была разработана для изучения религиозной идентификации, религиозных практик и восприятия значимости религии в гражданской и социальной жизни. Данные анализировались описательным методом на основе частот и процентов, автоматически сформированных системой Google Forms. Особое внимание было уделено взаимосвязи между религиозными убеждениями, ценностными ориентациями и гражданской идентичностью студентов университетов. Результаты показывают, что религия продолжает играть значимую роль в формировании идентичности и мировоззрения респондентов, при этом формы ее проявления различаются в обследованной выборке. Исследование подчеркивает сложное сосуществование традиционной религиозной принадлежности и современных секулярных или гуманистических взглядов, подтверждая устойчивую значимость религии как источника смысла, моральных ориентиров и внутренней устойчивости. Ответы об изменениях после пандемии отражают ретроспективные оценки респондентов и не доказывают причиненного влияния COVID-19 на религиозность.

Ключевые слова: формирование идентичности, постковидный период, психологические мотивы, религиозное обращение, религиозные ценности, социальные мотивы, молодёжь.

Introduction

The twenty-first century is defined by an unparalleled level of globalization, digital advancement, and cultural change. These sweeping changes significantly influence how young people shape their identities, beliefs, and moral compass. The findings of this study, together with prior research, are intended to contribute to the advancement of social and religious studies in Kazakhstan and Central Asia more broadly. In the context of rapid globalization, digitalization, and cultural pluralism, religious engagement of young people is undergoing significant adaptation and transformation. Some individuals turn to spiritual traditions to fulfill needs for belonging, moral guidance, and community, while others increasingly adopt secular perspectives, reflecting broader cultural shifts [1, p. 119].

Researchers such as Inglehart and Norris contend that the progression toward modernization and post-industrialization results in a decrease in religious adherence, especially within younger age groups [2]. Nevertheless, other research indicates that religion persists in offering young people a sense of ethical direction [3]. Critics of the social reformism respective argue that this school of thought is reluctant to accept established and comfortable aspects of community life and culture [4, p. 172]. These considerations provide a strong additional rationale for investigating the criteria of identity and self-identity, while maintaining a focus on research that is as free as possible from political, ideological, or religious bias [5, p. 114].

Value is conceptualized as the fundamental basis that shapes the essence of human existence, serving as the guiding principle and driving force behind the orientation and motivation of human life [6]. Value orientations represent a distinct perspective through which individuals relate to both material and immaterial values, encompassing a comprehensive system of attitudes, convictions, and preferences. These orientations manifest in people's cognitive processes and behavioral patterns, serving as a framework through which individuals assign relative importance to various objects and phenomena within their environment [7, p. 287].

Spirituality functions as an essential framework for navigating life-threatening conditions, offering individuals a source of resilience and meaning during times of profound adversity. It also plays a pivotal role as a coping mechanism for mitigating occupational stress and addressing burnout syndrome, particularly among professionals in caregiving fields such as healthcare [8, p. 99]. This phenomenon can be attributed to the cultivation of inner tranquility and the enhancement of an individual's sense of purpose and life meaning, both of which are frequently associated with mitigating anxiety linked to illness. Personal belief systems play a pivotal role in shaping how people understand experiences of suffering, which are frequently conceptualized as multidimensional phenomena encompassing elements of spiritual engagement alongside physical and emotional challenges. The pursuit of a meaningful life, alongside a sense of connection to God and others, emerges as a crucial element

in coping with various health-related struggles [9, p. 1188].

Given the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, further research is essential to better understand how young people are experiencing this crisis as it unfolds, along with the distinct difficulties associated with navigating this pivotal phase of life [10, p. 44]. Discussions centered on the adverse effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health during 2020 have focused specifically on strategies to enhance the psychological well-being of young individuals. From these discussions and related studies, six overarching themes have been identified: (1) the uncertainty surrounding the long-term effects of the pandemic on younger populations; (2) The persistent pressure to maintain productivity despite challenging circumstances; (3) The overwhelming influence of social media on mental well-being; (4) The importance of improving mental health literacy; (5) The effects of social isolation compounded by limited access to mental health resources; (6) The significance of safeguarding the mental health of essential workers [11, p. 1899].

A crisis of unknown origin, regardless of its nature, holds the potential to pose significant threats to human civilization. Should such a crisis take the form of a virus, its impact can prove catastrophic, as demonstrated by the profound disruption caused by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic [12, p. 5]. The widespread impact of COVID-19 brought a sense of pervasive despair that seemed to envelop the entire globe [12, p.7]. In the early months of 2020, societies experienced significant upheaval as many customary behaviors were drastically altered in a collective effort to curb the spread of the virus [13, p. 55]. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, religious observances and rituals continued to be practiced in various forms, reflecting the enduring nature of divine commandments, rules and guidance even during times of hardship and uncertainty [14, p. 321].

The global COVID-19 pandemic dramatically reshaped religious and social customs across the world. The rise in religious activity and ritual observance worldwide during the pandemic is understandable, particularly as governments tightened restrictions to curb the spread of the virus [15, p. 361]. The role of religion in both personal and public spheres has garnered global interest, prompting numerous studies to explore the connections between

the post-COVID-19 era and religious dynamics. These investigations consider how religion may exert both beneficial and adverse influences during this ongoing pandemic [16, p. 8].

The impact of COVID-19 on religious practices has been profound and far-reaching. Traditional rituals involving in-person spiritual gatherings experienced significant limitations, with pilgrimages suspended and numerous religious schools temporarily closed. Communal interactions during festivals and celebrations were also restricted worldwide as preventive measures aimed at curbing the spread of the virus [17, p. 3]. The pandemic prompted a significant number of profound spiritual inquiries and generated moral dilemmas among health-care professionals confronted with insufficient medical resources, overwhelming numbers of patients, and the constant pressure to uphold ethical standards centered on non-maleficence. The turmoil induced by the pandemic also led some individuals to struggle in preserving their faith, maintaining care for others and safeguarding hope in divine providence amid the pervasive distress caused by the virus [18]. The pandemic has further been associated with a notable rise in the prevalence of prayer and intercessory practices [19, p. 99].

The impact of such experiences is heavily influenced by individuals' existing religious framework, their coping strategies, and the level of support they receive from their social network. Research indicates that people with a deeply rooted religious identity are more likely to perceive these events as affirming and reinforcing their faith, whereas those with a weaker or more uncertain belief system may experience a crisis of faith, leading to doubt or even a complete loss of belief. The notion of "spiritual intelligence" – the capacity to comprehend and apply spiritual insights to life's challenges – is gaining recognition as an essential element in the shaping and evolution of religious identity [1, p. 127].

These trends find further validation through social media metrics, which indicate a notable rise in engagement with religious and spiritual content among Asian youth demographics. This digital expression of spiritual curiosity aligns with the growing re-embrace of physical religious spaces, giving rise to what scholars describe as "hybrid spirituality" – a dynamic integration of traditional practices with modern forms of interaction and participation [20, p. 213].

Young people, who occupy a space between tradition and contemporary life, experienced accelerated shifts in their religious beliefs, digital interactions, and core values as a result of the pandemic. In Kazakhstan, a nation where Islam and a secular state coexist alongside remnants of Soviet influence, religion is taking on an increasingly intricate role in shaping the identities of its youth. This article explores the impact of religion on the formation of young people in Kazakhstan in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The core inquiry is: how are religious convictions and practices affecting the values and social behaviors of Kazakhstan youth today?

Discussions surrounding the religious beliefs and practices of young people have grown increasingly intricate in recent times. This study aims to delve into the significance of religion for contemporary youth in Kazakhstan. It explores the perspectives of young people on religion and the influence of religious values. Within the context of a modern, secularized society, religion functions as a moral guide, shaping both national identity and individual worldviews [21, p. 324].

In Kazakhstan, societal processes exhibit distinctive characteristics influenced by its Soviet secular heritage, the post-independence resurgence of religious practices, and its multicultural identity. Within this context, Islam, Christianity, and pre-Islamic traditions interact to shape the spiritual and moral outlook of the younger generations [22, p. 2]. Despite relatively low levels of religious observance, a significant proportion of Kazakhstani youth identify with religion, reflecting their nuanced and ambivalent relationship toward faith [23].

Spirituality constitutes a fundamental dimension in addressing mental health challenges, including fear, tension, anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, especially in the context of the widespread psychological impact associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional quantitative survey design to describe religious self-identification, religious practices, personal values, civic and social identity, and retrospectively perceived post-pandemic changes among university students in Almaty. The design supports descriptive conclusions

about the surveyed sample but does not permit causal or longitudinal conclusions.

Data were collected in 2025 through an anonymous online questionnaire created in Google Forms. The questionnaire was available in Kazakh and Russian and considered of 18 questions covering demographic characteristics, religious self-identification and affiliation, participation in religious practices, the importance of religion, value priorities, civic and social identity, perspective changes following the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey link was distributed through university-based WhatsApp groups.

The study included respondents affiliated with Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, the Egyptian University of Islamic Culture Nur-Mubarak and Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University. The verified distribution by age and educational level must be inserted the Google Forms responses before submission.

A total of 127 questionnaires were submitted. During eligibility screening, seven questionnaires were excluded because the reported ages did not meet the predefined criterion of 18-35 years. The final analytical sample consisted of 120 eligible and complete questionnaires. All mandatory questions were answered to the full sample were calculated using $n = 120$. For branching questions, the denominator was the number of respondents who answered the relevant follow-up question. For multiple-response questions, respondents could select more than one option; therefore, the sum of the frequencies and percentages could exceed the total sample size and 100%, respectively.

No specialized statistical software was used. Response frequencies were obtained from Google Forms, and percentages were calculated descriptively using the final analytical sample. The analysis was limited to frequencies and percentages for categorical variables. No inferential statistical tests were conducted. Accordingly, the findings describe only the surveyed sample and not estimate population parameters, tests differences between groups, or establish causal relationships.

Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The questionnaire did not collect names, university affiliation, or other directly identifying information. Respondents could decide independently whether to complete the questionnaire. Seven age-ineligible questionnaires were removed before analysis, and

the remaining 120 questionnaires were analyzed and reported in aggregated form. No formal ethics committee approval was obtained for this anonymous and voluntary survey.

Literature review

Recent analyses of research literature from recent years reveal that the pandemic has profoundly influenced the well-being and value systems of young people across the globe [24, p. 173]. The role of religion in shaping youth identity has undergone profound transformation in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in societies navigating rapid globalization and digital modernization such as Kazakhstan.

The intersection of religion, youth identity and social transformation has long been a focal point of sociological and psychological inquiry. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous scholars have explored how global crises reshape religious consciousness, community engagement and moral resilience. Many researchers – such as Thakur, Widigdo and Baker – have emphasized that global crises tend to function as both destabilizing and revitalizing forces for religion. Thakur and colleagues highlight that pandemics challenge existing systems of belief while simultaneously prompting individuals to seek deeper spiritual meaning. Similarly [25, p. 407], Widigdo asserts that the post-COVID era requires a renewed examination of the relevance of religion through classical theoretical perspectives such as those of Freud, James and Dewey. Baker and colleagues contend that the pandemic has opened new directions for sociological research, particularly regarding how social distancing reconfigured collective religious experiences [14, p. 330; 15, p. 360].

Inglehart and Norris further contend that global political instability and cultural backlash have revitalized religion as a powerful component of youth identity and civic life [2]. Their findings align with the Pew Research Centre's global survey, which revealed a growing generational divide in religiosity – young people tend to distance themselves from institutionalized religion while maintaining personal spirituality [3]. This shift from collective worship to individualized belief reflects a broader transformation in moral reasoning and the construction of self-identity among modern youth.

The spiritual dimension of human well-being has also been analyzed in psychological and occupational contexts. Chirico and Magnavita stress the importance of the spiritual dimension of health, emphasizing that faith can enhance workplace well-being and resilience [8, p. 99]. In African societies, Thandiwe, Zanele and Dumisani [12, p. 10], alongside Olonade [17, p. 5], found that the pandemic reshaped worship practices by strengthening community solidarity and reinforcing moral obligations within faith communities. Complementing these perspectives, Koenig and Doehring assert that faith-based coping mechanisms play a therapeutic role in mitigating moral distress and sustaining emotional balance during prolonged uncertainty [9, p. 1188; 18].

The psychological struggle associated with faith has also been documented. Upenieks highlights that religious engagement during the pandemic could either alleviate or intensify emotional distress, depending on the depth and authenticity of personal belief [13, p. 261]. Exline, Pargament, Grubbs and Yaki [26] contributed to this discourse through their *Religious and Spiritual Struggles Scale*, which provides a framework for measuring internal conflicts and the adaptive potential of spirituality [26, p. 210]. Analyzing scientific and other literature addressing the challenges faced by student youth post pandemic, several key issues among youth become evident. These include significant mental, psychological and spiritual struggles, alongside a noticeable shift in their value system, moving from a focus on material possessions to an appreciation of more intangible priorities [24, p. 177].

Studies conducted in Kazakhstan have examined several dimensions of youth religiosity. Kabidenova et al. analysed adolescents' attitudes towards religion and patterns of religious identification [22, p. 7], while Smagulov considered broader changes in the religious situation in Kazakhstan [23]. Drawing on a survey of the adult urban population of Almaty, Alimbekova, Shabdenova and Lifanova identified a discrepancy between declared religious affiliation and regular participation in religious practices [21, p. 326]. Zhaksybayeva, Zaton, and Zhaksybayev analysed the social, psychological and spiritual factors associated with religious conversion [27]. Rashimbetov and Mazhiev focused on Islamic motivation among young people in relation to secular and religious norms [28], while Zeinash et al. ex-

amined the revival of religious consciousness among Kazakhstani youth [29].

Cross-national research has also examined the relationship between religion and the COVID-19 pandemic. Lee and Oh analysed the response of South Korean Protestant communities to public health restrictions, focusing on the tension between compliance with state regulations and the preservation of religious autonomy [16, p. 12]. Coppen considered whether the pandemic might accelerate secularisation or contribute to renewed interest in religion [19]. These discussions show that the relationship between social crises and religious change remains complex and cannot be reduced to a single pattern.

Taken together, the reviewed studies provide an important basis for understanding contemporary religiosity. Nevertheless, religious identification, religious practice, personal values, civic identity and perceptions of post-pandemic change have usually been considered separately. Their coexistence within a single university-based sample in Kazakhstan has received less empirical attention.

The present study addresses this gap by examining these dimensions among 120 students and recent graduates affiliated with three universities in Almaty. It does not seek to establish a causal effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, it describes how respondents retrospectively assess changes in their religious attitudes and practices.

Results and Discussion

In order to improve the comprehensibility of the results, a series of graphs and visual representations were developed utilizing the statistical data obtained through the administered questionnaire. These visual tools encompass distributions of participants categorized by gender, academic standing, and religious affiliation, alongside trends in engagement with religious activities and stated reasons for conversion. The graphical elements aim to offer a detailed summary of the data while complementing the descriptive analysis presented within the core discussion.

Table 1 presents the gender distribution of the surveyed sample. Of the 120 respondents, 80 (66.7%) were female and 40 (33.3%) were male. Accordingly, female respondents constituted approximately two-thirds of the final analytical sample.

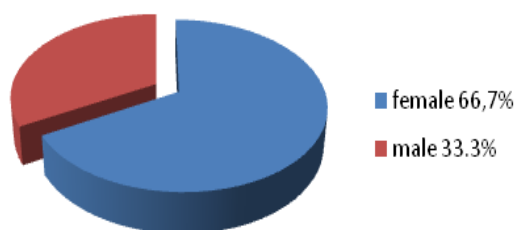


Table 1 - Gender distribution of respondents

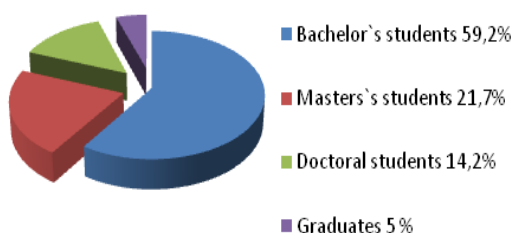


Table 2 – Education degree

Table 2 illustrates the educational composition of the sample, reflects a broad spectrum of academic stages within the higher education system of Kazakhstan. A significant proportion of respondents 71 (59.2%), were enrolled in bachelor's degree programs, which is consistent with the demographic predominance of undergraduate students in university populations. Master's students comprised 26 (21.7%) of the sample, while doctoral students accounted for 17 (14.2%), indicating the noteworthy participation of individuals engaged in advanced academic research and training. In addition, 6 (5%) of respondents were recent graduates who had recently completed their higher education but remained within the youth category as defined by national legislation (ages 18-35). Their inclusion was important for capturing perspectives that bridge the transition from student life to professional and social integration. This diverse distribution of respondents across various academic levels allows the study to consider the role of religion not only during undergraduate years, but also within the framework of advanced studies and early post-graduate experiences. This approach offers a deeper, more nuanced understanding of how religiosity and spiritual identity across different stages of youth development in the post-COVID context.

Table 3 shows that in the survey, respondents were asked whether they consider themselves affiliated with any religion. The majority 114 (95%) indicated that they do regard them-

selves as religiously affiliated, whereas only 6 (5%) reported that they do not identify with any religious tradition. These responses indicate the continued salience of religion within the surveyed sample, as reflected in the respondents' self-identification. However, this high proportion should be interpreted in light of the sample composition, which included respondents affiliated within an Islamic university.

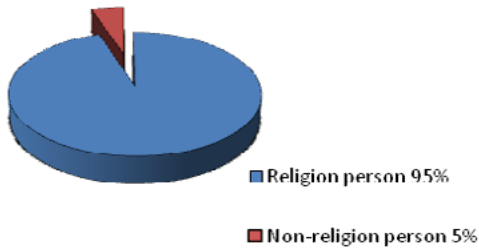


Table 3 – Self-identification with religion among respondents

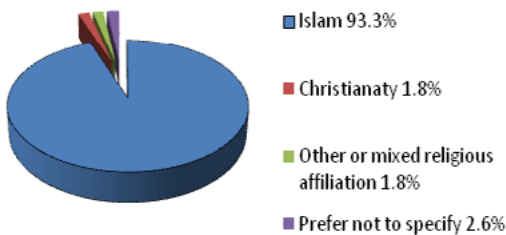


Table 4 – Religious affiliation of respondents who identified as religious (n = 114)

Table 4 presents the declared religious affiliation of respondents who identified themselves as religious (n = 114). The overwhelming majority, 107 respondents (93.9%), identified with Islam. 3 respondents (1.8) selected the category "Other or mixed religious affiliation". 4 respondents (2.6%) preferred not to specify their religious affiliation. Islam was the predominant religious affiliation within this subgroup, while other religious affiliations were represents to a considerably smaller extent. Six respondents who did not identify with any religious tradition were not included in this distribution. These results reflect the specific composition of the surveyed sample and should not be generalized to all young people in Kazakhstan.

Table 5 depicts the distribution of responses to the question "How important is religion in your life?" measured on a five-point Likert

scale, where 1 corresponded to "not important" and 5 to "very important" [30]. The data reveal that a significant majority of respondents ascribe substantial importance to religion in their lives. Specifically, 69 respondents (57.8%) selected the highest score of 5, signifying that religion plays a central and deeply significant role in shaping their personal identity, values and daily practices. A further 19 respondents (15.8%) assigned a rating of 4, indicating that while religion may not always be at the forefront of their lives, it nonetheless represents a strong guiding influence. 15 respondents (12.5%) reported a moderate stance by choosing a score of 3, reflecting ambivalence or a balanced position between religious and secular orientations. At the lower end of the scale, 8 respondents (6.7%) of participants indicated limited importance with score of 2, and 9 respondents (7.5%) considered religion to be entirely unimportant in their lives, selecting a score of 1. Taken together, these results illustrate that while the majority of Kazakhstan youth in the sample continue to view religion as highly significant, there also exists a minority whose responses reveal weaker levels of religious engagement. This distribution underscores the complex and differentiated nature of youth religiosity in the post-COVID era, pointing simultaneously to strong religious identification and the emergence of more secular or pluralistic perspectives.

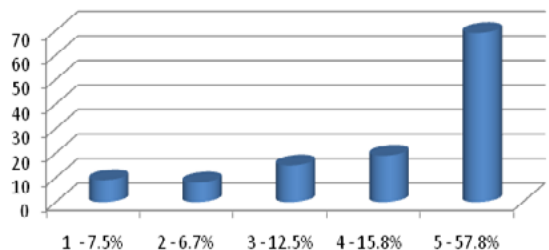


Table 5 – How important is religion in the lives of respondents

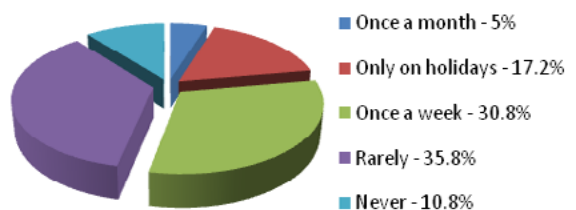


Table 6 – Frequency of attendance at religious ceremonies

Table 6 illustrates the frequency with which respondents reported attending organized religious services. The data reveal a diverse range of participation levels among the surveyed youth. The largest group, comprising 43 respondents (35.8%) of participants, stated that they rarely attend religious services. This finding suggests that for a significant proportion of young people, engagement with institutionalized religion is occasional rather than habitual, indicating a shift toward more individualized or selective religious practice.

At the same time, 37 respondents (30.8%) of respondents reported attending religious services on a weekly basis, underscoring that regular worship remains a meaningful component of life for a substantial minority of the student population. This demonstrates the persistence of traditional, structured religious observance even within an increasingly pluralistic and secularized social context.

Furthermore, 21 respondents (17.5%) of respondents indicated that they attend services only during major religious holidays. This pattern reflects a tendency toward cultural or symbolic forms of religiosity, where communal worship is linked primarily to festivals or significant occasions rather than to routine practice. The smaller proportion, 6 respondents (5%) reported attending services on a monthly basis, which may suggest a moderate level of religious involvement without the intensity of weekly participation. Finally, 13 respondents (10.8%) respondents stated that they never attend religious services, a result that reflects broader trends toward secularization and highlights the presence of non-practicing individuals even among those who may still identify with a religious tradition.

Taken together, 43 respondents (35.8%) These findings highlight a complex and layered pattern of religious participation among Kazakhstan youth in the post-COVID context, combining regular observance, symbolic holiday attendance and individualized or absent engagement with formal institutions of worship.

Table 7 presents the distribution of responses to the question "Which values are most important to you?" where participants were asked to select up to three values. The results demonstrate that family occupies an overwhelmingly dominant position among the surveyed youth. Family was the most frequently selected value, chosen 116 respondents (96.6%). This finding underscores the continuing importance of kin-

ship ties and familial support systems in shaping the moral and social framework of young people in Kazakhstan, even in a post-COVID environment characterized by rapid cultural and technological change.

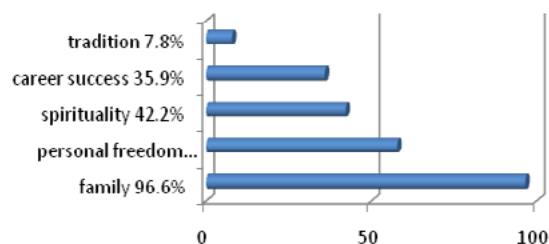


Table 7 – Distribution of selected value priorities among respondents

The second most highly ranked value was personal freedom, selected by 69 respondents (57.5%) of respondents. This highlights a strong generational emphasis on autonomy, independence, and self-determination, which coexist alongside the prioritization of family. Spirituality was also a notable choice, with 51 respondents (42.5%) of respondents ranking it among their top three values. This suggests that, while formal religious practice may vary, the pursuit of personal spiritual meaning remains a significant motivational factor in lives of students.

Career success and service to society were each selected by 43 respondents (35.8%) of respondents. This parallel weighting reflects a balanced perspective among youth: on one hand, recognizing the importance of contributing to collective welfare and social responsibility. Interestingly, tradition received relatively little emphasis, being chosen by only 9 respondents (7.5%) of participants. This result may indicate a generational shift, where traditional frameworks are increasingly subordinated to values of autonomy, spirituality and individual aspirations. Taken together, these findings show that family was the most frequently selected value, while personal freedom, spirituality, career success and service to society. Respondents could select up to three options; the frequencies 120 and the percentages do not sum to 100%.

Table 8 illustrates the degree to which respondents agreed with the statement: « Perceived influence of religion on civic and social identity », measured on five-point Likert scale enabled the study to capture nuanced varia-

tions in attitudes rather than a binary perception of agreement or disagreement, thus offering a more comprehensive understanding of the role religion in identity formation.

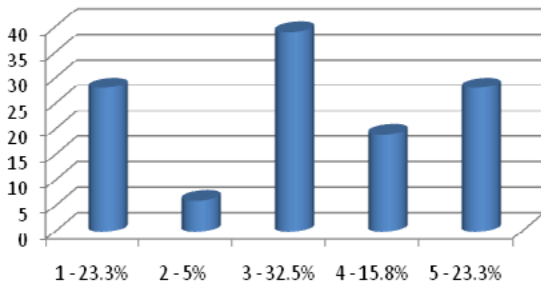


Table 8 – Perceived influence of religion on civic and social identity

The distribution of responses demonstrates a notable diversity of perspectives among the surveyed youth. Specifically, 28 respondents (23.3%) of participants strongly disagreed (scale point 1), and an additional 6 respondents (5%) selected point 2, suggesting that nearly one-third of the sample perceives religion as having little to no influence on their civic and social identity. By contrast, 39 respondents (28.3%) of respondents selected the midpoint (scale point 3), reflecting ambivalence or neutrality toward the statement. This result may indicate that while some recognize the cultural presence of religion, they do not necessarily view it as a decisive factor in shaping their civic roles.

On the other hand, 19 respondents (15.8%) of respondents agreed (scale point 4) and 28 respondents (23.3%) strongly agreed (scale point 5), representing almost 47 respondents (39.2 %) of the total sample. This group emphasizes the importance of religion as a significant element in shaping civic belonging, social participation, and collective identity. The contrast between these segments of respondents underscores the pluralistic landscape of post-COVID Kazakhstan youth, where secular tendencies coexist with deeply rooted religious commitments.

Overall, the application of the Likert scale highlights the spectrum of attitudes among youth, ranging from secular disengagement to strong religious identification, offering valuable insight into the negotiation of tradition, modernity and individual autonomy in the contemporary Kazakhstan context.

Table 9 presents the distribution of responses to the question: "Has the COVID-19 pan-

dem changed your personal attitude toward religion?" The findings reveal a predominantly stable orientation among respondents, with 90 respondents (75%) indicating that the pandemic did not alter their personal relationship to religion. This majority suggests that for most students, religious identity and personal faith are grounded in long-standing cultural and personal commitments that remained resilient in the face of global disruption. At the same time, 19 respondents (15.8%) of respondents reported becoming more religious following the pandemic. This subgroup underscores the role of crises in reinforcing spiritual needs, providing moral guidance, and strengthening connections to religious practices as coping mechanisms for uncertainty, fear, and stress. Such results align with broader sociological perspectives, which highlight the potential of pandemics and other global crises to revive religiosity as a source of meaning and resilience.

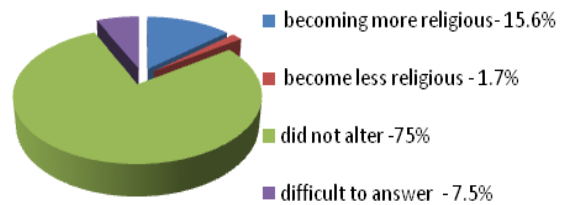


Table 9 – Perceived change in personal attitude toward religion during the COVID-19 pandemic (n = 120)

By contrast, only 2 respondents (1.7%) of participants indicated that they had become less religious. This minimal decline suggests that secularization trends within this population were not significantly accelerated by the pandemic. Instead, the broader pattern demonstrates continuity, with only marginal shifts in the intensity of religious commitment. Additionally, 9 respondents (7.5%) of respondents selected uncertainty "difficult to answer", reflecting ambivalence in interpreting the pandemic's impact on their spiritual life. This group may represent those who neither rejected nor intensified their religiosity, but experienced a complex reevaluation of their relationship with faith, without arriving at a clear conclusion. These findings highlight the limited yet meaningful influence of the pandemic on religious orientations among Kazakhstan youth. While the majority remained unchanged, a notable minority reported heightened religiosity, underscoring the enduring role of religion as a framework for coping and adaptation in times of crisis.

Ethical considerations

Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The questionnaire was distributed as an open link in university WhatsApp groups, and respondents decided indecently whether to participation. The stated eligibility criterion was 18-35 years of age. No manes or other identifying information were collected. Of the 127 submitted questionnaires, seven were excluded because the reported ages did not satisfy the inclusion criterion. The remaining 120 questionnaires were analysed and reported in aggregated form.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. Participations were recruited through university-based WhatsApp groups using non-probability convenience sampling. Consequently, the sample is self-selected and cannot be considered representative of all university students or all young people in Kazakhstan. The participation of respondents affiliated with an Islamic university may have influenced the distribution of religious self-identification. The number of people who received or viewed the survey and retrospective responses, which may be affected by social desirability and recall bias. Google Forms provided descriptive frequencies and percentage, and no inferential analysis was conducted. Finally, the cross-sectional design does not permit casual conclusion about the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic or conclusions about change in religiosity over time.

Conclusion

This study describes religious self-identification, religious practice, value priorities, civic and social identity, and retrospectively perceived post-pandemic change within a university-based sample in Almaty. The verified results should be summarized here after all raw counts and percentages have been entered consistently in Table 1-9.

The findings should be interested within the boundaries of the surveyed sample. Religious self-identification does not necessarily correspond to frequent participation in organized religious services. Respondents reported varied value priorities and perceptions of religion's relationship to civic and social identity. These patterns are descriptive and should not be generalized to all young people in Kazakhstan.

Responses concerning the period following COVID-19 represent participant's retrospective assessments. They do not demonstrate the pandemic casual changes in religiosity. Further research could use probability sampling, longitudinal data, and verified comparisons across educational settings to examine these relationships more rigorously.

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