



Kazakhstan: An Overview

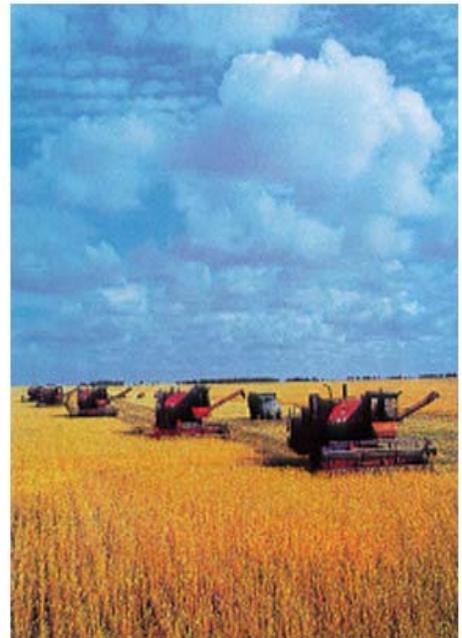
by

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General Background

The origin of the Kazakhs as a people continues to be debated. What is certain is that the Mongol Hordes, moving westward, swept the Turkic peoples of Central Asia into the Kipchak Plain and beyond to what is today Eastern Europe. Two and a half centuries later, after the division of the Golden Horde, the Uzbeks and Kazakhs left Crimea and Kazan and settled in the region between the lower Volga and the Aral Sea. Soon after that, the Uzbeks invaded the cities of Samarqand and Bukhara, established themselves as masters of Central Asia, and went their own way. The Kazakhs, who commanded a large territory between Lake Balkhash and the Volga, remained in the area. Divided into three *zhuzes*, each occupied a portion of the Kazakh territory. Kazakhstan's topography is varied, made up of dry steppe, semi-deserts, and mountain forests. The Ust Urt Caspian Depression and the Ural Plateau form the western and northwestern parts of the republic. The Tien Shan peaks rest in the east and southeast, leading to the central uplands formed by dried-up salt lakes.



Harvesting wheat

In the 18th century, the land of the Kazakhs was conquered by Russia; it underwent a period of profound Russification. The tribulation of the Kazakhs, as a people determined to remain independent but experience the benefits of modern living, is documented in *Abai's Path*. In 1916, led by Amangeldi Imanov, the Kazakhs rebelled against Imperial Russia, but were defeated. They rebelled again, in 1918-1921 (Alash Orda), against the Communists; they were defeated again in the early 1920's, this time by the Red Army.

Kazakhstan became a Soviet Republic, after a major purge, in 1936. Encouraged by the Soviet government, during the 1950's and 1960's, Kazakhstan became the center of an agricultural experiment usually referred to as the "Virgin Lands" program. Soviet citizens from all around the nation helped transform Kazakhstan's northern pastures into wheat fields.

In 1991, Kazakhstan became independent and joined the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In 1992, Kazakhstan joined the United Nations.

Geography

With an area of 1,070,000 square miles (2,717,300 sq km), the largest in Central Asia, the Republic of Kazakhstan is located to the north of the other Central Asian republics. It is bound by the Russian Federation to the north, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to the south, the Caspian Sea to the west and China to the east. Kazakhstan is essentially landlocked but has access to the Aral Lake and the Caspian Sea.

Regarding the territorial holdings of Kazakhstan, it should be noted that, in 1995, the Governments of Kazakhstan and Russia entered into an agreement according to which Russia would lease an area of 6,000 sq km enclosing the Baikonur space launch facilities, as well as the city of Baikonur, from Kazakhstan for a period of 20 years.

Climate

Kazakhstan has hot summers and extremely cold winters. The average January temperature in the northern and central regions is between 3 F and -2 F (or -16 to -19 C). In the south, at the same time, the temperature is between 23 F and 29 F (or -5 C or -1.4 C). Summer is long, dry, hot, and cloudless. In the south, the temperature can reach as high as 104 F. The mean temperature for July, however, is 90 F (or 32 C). Winter is usually short. The mean temperature for the north in winter is 10 F (or -12 C) but some days can be as cold as -36 F (or -38 C). The average July temperature ranges from 68 F (or 20 C) to 84 F (or 29 C). Average annual rainfall is about 12 inches in the north as opposed to 20 inches in the south.

Tourism

Kazakhstan has a genuinely great potential for tourism. It commands some of the major sites of antiquity, as well as health resorts, natural preserves, as well as scenic mountain and forest oases. The museums of the republic exhibit some of the rare archaeological and ethnographic relics related to the tribal life and culture of the nomads of Central Asia. Additionally, the republic is the birthplace of [Abai Kunanbaev](#), [Mukhtar Auevov](#), and Jambul Jabaev, each a national treasure with a museum to his name.

History

According to the Greek sources, between 300 BC and 200 BC, the region that is occupied by the present-day Kazakhs was populated by the Scythians, who themselves were overtaken by the Usans. The actual movement of the Turkic people into the region does not begin until the reign of later Sassanian kings of Iran, i.e., AD 500. The cause for their appearance at this juncture in history is explained as a population explosion on the Mongolian plain and a lack of pasture for the more westerly Turks.

The movement of the Turks in the direction of Central Asia happens at the same time as the rise of Arabian tribes in what is present-day Saudi Arabia. The two cultures clash in what is present-day southern Kazakhstan. The interaction bodes well for the people of the region as it facilitates communication between the distant lands of China and Europe. Running like a silk thread

through the cities of China, Central Asia, Iran, and Iraq, all the way to Europe, the Silk Road created an unprecedented network of artistic, religious, and commercial centers into which melting pot Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Manichaeism made immense contributions.

In the thirteenth century, the Mongols pushed their way into this global metropolis and reshaped it to their own image. Sweeping people from east to west, they uprooted all the communities and civilizations that lay before them. By the time they lost their initial zeal to conquer the world, the world had already conquered them. The Mongol tribes settled down in the northern regions of the Caspian and ruled a menagerie of unruly chieftains and a bevy of power-hungry Eastern European power hungry lords.

When the Mongol rule succumbed to Russian might in the fifteenth century and the Golden Horde was dissolved, the Kazakhs and the Uzbeks joined forces and moved to the region east of the Ural River. The Kazakh-Uzbek Confederation lasted until the latter part of the fifteenth century. The alliance, however, was an uneasy union. While the Uzbeks, the more adventurous wing of the confederation, proposed to invade Bukhara and to capture Ma Wara' al-Nahr (ancient Transoxiana), the Kazakhs preferred to establish themselves in the upper Syr Dariya region.



The capital city of Astana

The split occurred around AD 1500 when, Khan Kasym moved his tribe southeast and established the grazing land in southeastern Kazakhstan as Kazakh tribal grounds. The Uzbeks, on the other hand, moved directly south, captured Samarqand and Bukhara and established themselves in the Khiva, Bukhara, and Kokand regions.

A similar tripartite division obtained among the Kazakhs as well. Called the Kazakh Clan Confederation, the Kazakhs are usually divided into three subgroups or *zhuzes*. The greater body, known as the Elder Horde, moved to the southeastern regions where it prospered for a while. The Middle Horde occupied the grazing lands around the present-day capital of [Astana](#) (former Aqmola), and the Lesser Horde stayed more or less in the region previously occupied by the Uzbek-Kazakh Confederation.

Once the migration was over and the Hordes "settled" in their respective homes, they began to experience pressure from their new neighbors. The Elder Horde was too close to the Kalmyks, a people of Mongol origin, and the Lesser Horde was virtually a neighbor of the mighty Russian Empire.

The years between AD 1600 and 1700 proved to be very trying for the Kazakhs. Many brave and wise leaders appeared and led the Hordes, but none was able to put an end to internal clan fights and external pressures from the south and the north. By 1700, which coincided with the rule of Taukekhan (d. AD 1718), the Kazakh Clan Confederation broke down and the Hordes became free agents to choose their own destiny.

The Lesser Horde was made up of three tribal confederations: the Zheti Ru, Alim Uly, and Bai Uly. Being the closest of the *zhuzes* to the Russian Empire--they lived in northwestern Kazakhstan--they were the first, under Abul Khayr Khan, to seek Russian protection in 1731. They needed Russian protection because the Elder Horde had already fallen into the hands of the Kalmyks. The Middle Horde was made up of the Kipchak, Argun, Naiman, Kerei, Kongrat, and other tribes. They lived in northern and eastern Kazakhstan. Following the example of the Lesser Horde they, too, sought Russian protection in 1742.

The Elder Horde was made up of the Sary Uisin, Kangali, Dulat, Alban, Jalair, and other tribes. They lived in southeastern Kazakhstan. The Kalmyks defeated the Elder Horde in 1723. Between 1840 and 1860, pressed by the Oriots to their east, they, too, sought Russian protection and became part of the Russian Empire.

When the reduction of the Hordes was completed, Russian pioneers began to scout the new territory and make suggestions for alternative uses of the land and the other resources of the region. This did not sit well with the Kazakh chiefs who like Khan Kene of the Middle Horde, led rebellions against them.



Burial mounds called Kurgan accommodate the remains of ancient Kazakh warriors

In the long run, however, all the Kazakhs' efforts at preserving their grazing grounds failed, especially when, in 1850, Russia began to build fortifications in the region. The fortifications greatly alarmed the Kazakhs because they formed a core for the attraction of city dwellers and farmers, and because they reduced the amount of grazing land necessary for a large number of livestock.

The conclusion of the Crimean War (1854-56), and the capture of Imam Shamil of Daghistan, opened the way for the victorious Russians to complete a process that they had started in the 1840s, i.e., the reduction of Central Asia and the transformation of its grazing pastures into wheat farms. The Kazakhs were the first of the peoples of the region to feel the impact of what came to be known as Russification, whereby the Kazakhs were systematically divested of their land and livestock holdings; they were pushed up into the hills or into the harsh desert regions where many of them died.

Between the 1860's, when Russia officially annexed Kazakhstan (1863) as its Steppe District, and 1916, when the Russian tsar, Nicholas II, planned the conscription of Central Asian youths into the Russian army, a state of *modus vivendi* held the two peoples together. Large numbers of Russian serfs moved into northern and eastern Kazakhstan, preparing the way for even more settlers. By 1910, under the auspices of the Minister of the Interior, Peter Stolypin, almost half a

million farms had been carved out of Kazakh grazing lands for the cultivation of corn, wheat, and other grains. Nicholas II's decree that the Kazakhs should work behind the lines, however, destroyed that mutual understanding. As a result, the Kazakhs rebelled in large numbers to protect the work force that maintained their fields and livestock and to prevent the destruction of Muslim lives for Russian gains. It took the Russian army four months to end the rebellion and restore law and order in the region. The process cost the Kazakhs thousands of lives; about a million of them left their homeland for China. A similar rebellion, the Alash Orda (1918-1920), against the Communists was defeated by the Red Army. After the dust settled, the Bolsheviks ignored the ethnic differences of the people and created the Kirghiz Autonomous Socialist Republic in present-day Kyrgyzstan. Five years later, in 1925, the Kazakh appellation was reinstated; the Kazakh Autonomous SSR was given its own capital--Alma-Ata (present-day [Almaty](#)).

In the 1950's, Nikita Khrushchev decided to use Kazakhstan to showcase Soviet ingenuity in land management and agriculture. As a result, he appointed Leonid Brezhnev, then the First Secretary of the republic, and commissioned him to carry out what was later known as the "Virgin Lands" project. Helped by the Kazakh Dinmukhammad Kunayev, and a large number of Kazakh youths, Brezhnev turned the ancestral Kazakh grazing lands into wheat and cotton fields. While this was a major plan for the Soviet Union--it met the grain needs of the European republics--the project played havoc with the lives of the Kazakhs. Distanced from their major sources of self-sufficiency, bread and meat, they became entirely dependent on imports from the rest of the Soviet Union.

The 1960's and 1970's saw the arrival of a different group of Soviets, the technicians who worked the coal and gas deposits and who took charge of the oil industry. This new community, added to the old communities of farmers and miners, tipped the balance against the Kazakhs who became a minority in their own country.

After Brezhnev, Kunayev became First Secretary. Using ancient Kazakh institutions such as the tribal hierarchy and *bata*, Kunayev forged a new system of exploitation within the already exploitative Soviet system. As the chief of the "tribe" he made all the decisions on hiring and firing of managers of major firms and plants. Then, using *bata*, or sealed lip, he prevented any information that could damage his operation from reaching the Center in Moscow. The Kunayev "empire," built around a core of his kinsmen, grew very strong. It would have grown even stronger were it not for Mikhail Gorbachev who displaced Kunayev as First Secretary and installed a Russian, Gennadii Kolbin, in his place. As for Kunayev, he refused to disappear quietly. Rather, he set his own forces into motion and created the so-called "Alma-Ata" riots of the late 1980's, the first to shake the foundation of the Soviet Union.

Today, Kazakhstan is an independent republic ruled by President [Nursultan Nazarbayev](#).

Culture

As far as lifestyle and culture are concerned, the Kazakhs have traditionally been pastoral nomads. Even today, after forced settlement, large numbers of Kazakh youth live up in the mountains and tend their herds of horses and flocks of sheep. This mix of quasi-urbanites,

farmers, and nomadic shepherds, prevalent in areas distant from the major cities, lives a comparatively good life.



Kazakh woman baking bread in a pan covered with hot ashes

The culture of the Kazakhs includes a wealth of oral epics, legends, and ritual songs. Jambul Jabaev, Abai Kunanbaev, and Mukhtar Auezov are names closely tied to this tradition. Abai, who can easily be called the founder of Kazakh literature, supplemented the traditional education that he received at a traditional Kazakh *maktep* (elementary school) with a solid understanding of Russian culture and literature. At times, he took his love for the Russian culture to such an extreme that Soviet commentators regarded him as the epitome of progress in dismantling the Islamic *Shari'a* law among the Kazakhs.

The life of Abai Kunanbaev is the subject of two major works by the Kazakh author and academician Mukhtar Auezov. These works entitled *Abai* and *The Path of Abai* (1952-56) examine the life of the poet, the history that shaped that life, and the lives of Abai's contemporaries. They make fascinating reading especially for those interested in the process of the forced settlement of the Kazakhs.

Natural resources

Kazakhstan commands major deposits of petroleum, natural gas, coal, iron ore, manganese, chrome ore, nickel, cobalt, copper, molybdenum, lead, zinc, bauxite, gold, and uranium.

Environment

The factories and plants that were built during the Soviet period release a great deal of hazardous materials into the air, the rivers, and the lakes of the region. Kazakhstan's real sources of pollution, however, are agricultural and atomic waste, as well as waste generated at the Baikonur space center. The diversion of the waters of the Amu and Syr, especially the creation of the Kara Kum Canal, and other minor irrigation canals off the rivers, has affected the level of the Aral Sea, transforming it into two relatively small pools. Chemical pesticides, originally used in the fields, appear as a crust on the exposed dry seabed. These substances are picked up by the wind and blown about, creating diverse health problems. Storage of radioactive or toxic chemical waste from the former defense industries and test ranges create a different set of environmental and health hazards. To this, pollution in the Caspian Sea, soil pollution from overuse of agricultural chemicals and salination from poor infrastructure and wasteful irrigation practices, and industrial pollution, severe in some cities, must be added.

Natural hazards

Frequent earthquakes in the south and mudslides around Almaty create a great deal of damage to life and property of the Kazakhs.

People

As of July 2003, Kazakhstan has an estimated population of 16,763,795. Its ethnic mix includes Kazakh, Russian, Ukrainian, German, Uzbek, Tatar, and others. A considerable number of Uighurs, Koreans, and Dungans also live in the republic. Ideologically, the population breaks down as follows: Muslim (Sunni of the Hanafi sect), Russian Orthodox, Protestant, and other.

Health Care

Before the influx of the Russians into Central Asia in the 19th century, the nomadic Kazakh tribes roamed the steppes of Central Asia in search of grass for their animals. The move kept them fit and healthy. The infirm and the sick were placed under the care of the elderly and the experienced. Shamans and *hakims* played a major role in warding off sickness. The shaman consulted the world of the spirits and diagnosed sickness; the *hakim* followed the knowledge of the ancients, especially Galen and Avicenna and made a recommendation in keeping with the rules of the *unani tibb* (Greek medicine).

The Russians introduced their newly gained Western medicine and medical technology into the areas that were under their jurisdiction. The Soviets enhanced the contributions of the Russians by introducing a new system of subsidized health care. During the Soviet period, the Kazakhs developed a good system of health care of their own with many hospitals, clinics, and medical institutions.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan's healthcare system was decentralized and privatized. As a result, various types of independent models of health care with different

approaches and attitudes emerged. The government encouraged the development of the new healthcare systems, especially when it had less and less state health care organizations to support.

Today, well-trained doctors staff Kazakhstan's hospitals. What is lacking is access to modern technology and diverse types of medicine. Shortage of funds has also narrowed the Kazakhs' choice to Japan for medical equipment and to Japan, Austria, and Portugal for medical training. The most widespread diseases in Kazakhstan are Respiratory infections, tuberculosis and cardiovascular. HIV infections are on the rise as are cancers and birth deformities caused by pollution and nuclear contamination. The Average life span in Kazakhstan is 64 years for men and 73 years for women.

Education

Before the Soviet era, the majority of the Kazakhs did not receive any formal education. Some of the chiefs of tribes who resided in cities benefited from Russian schools. Their sons, and sometimes their daughters, were educated. Even that, in some cases, was restricted to the study of the *Qur'an* and the *ahadith*. Little attention was paid to what we know now as an ordinary elementary education.

Early in the 20th century, Russians introduced the new-methods system of education into Central Asia. This method consisted of revising the old *mektep* textbooks and enhancing them with aspects of European education. In various regions of Central Asia, especially in Samarqand and Bukhara, this system came under heavy criticism and censorship.

The Soviets continued the Russian tradition but made education compulsory and free. Compulsory, free education brought up the level of the literacy of the Kazakhs dramatically. Today, seventeen years of compulsory education are provided free of charge. 98% of the Kazakhstanis above the age of fifteen are literate. Kazakhs are bilingual. They speak Kazakh (their official language) and Russian. The Kazakh language (also Qazaq), a Turkic language of the Ural-Altai branch, is spoken by over 40% of the population. It has three dialects corresponding to the three hordes or *zhuzes* to which they belong.

A Kazakh literary language was established at the end of the 19th century but many Kazakhs continue to use Tatar as their spoken language. Russian, also an official language is spoken by more than two-thirds of the population.

The Kazakh script has gone through the same changes that the scripts of the other republics have undergone. From the end of the 19th century to 1929, the Kazakhs employed an Arabic-based script to write Kazakh. Samples of this writing are preserved at the library of the Academy of Sciences of Kazakhstan in Almaty. Between 1929 and 1939 the Latin script was introduced to facilitate the Kazakhs' access to Latin-based information. Since 1939, the Cyrillic script has been modified and used.

In 1992, there was talk of a return to the Latin script, but that talk has since subsided. The institutes of higher education in Kazakhstan include the Kazakhstan Academy of Sciences, the

Al-Farabi State National University, and the Qaraghandy State University. There are also numerous institutes providing instruction in economics, civil engineering, and medicine.

Welfare

Before Central Asia was overtaken by Russia, the Kazakh tribes followed the dictates of Islam in taking care of their families as well as the poor and infirmed in the community. Funds gathered through *zakat* and *ushr* paid by the wealthy were distributed among the needy according to the rules established by the religion.



Old mendicant at the entrance of the main Almaty bazaar

The Soviets introduced the concept of welfare in order to distribute the wealth in the region more equitably, as well as in order to enhance the opportunities of the poor.

Today, the Kazakh welfare system is under great financial stress because, more than a quarter of the population of the republic lives below the poverty line. When social welfare was subsidized, the Soviets carried the burden. Today, it is up to the independent Kazakh worker to provide pension for the elderly Social insurance, unemployment benefits, as well as assistance for minimum wage, pensions for the disabled, social benefits for orphans, the elderly and the infirm are also partially his burden to carry.

Housing

Before the Revolution, Kazakhs lived in portable, nomadic tents or *yurts* that could be put up and dismantled within an hour. During the Soviet era, those families that were engaged in herding were allowed to keep their *yurts*. Others, due to the promotion of *kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz* farms, and industrialization, were forced to live in apartment blocks. These high-rise buildings, built on the same blue print, shared the same lines for water, electricity, and garbage disposal. The apartments on the wings were spacious, in the center small but efficient. Rather than the size of the family, the social and official status of the individual determined the type of housing assigned. And there was always a long waiting list.

Today, with privatized housing, there are more choices. Heating and other utilities, previously heavily subsidized by the government, are no longer subsidized. Neither are the enterprises responsible for managing housing services or maintaining related utilities for their employees the way they used to. The government provides the appropriate institutional and regulatory framework for the transfer of services.

Nationality

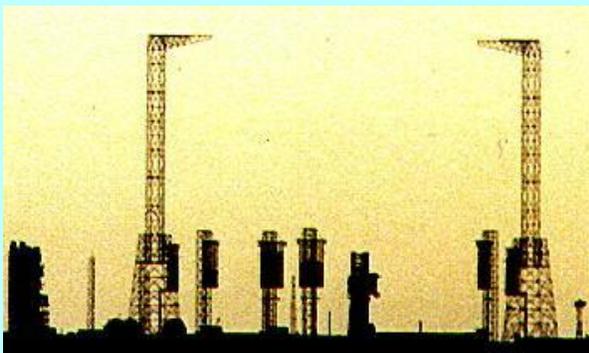


Kazakh man in traditional clothing



Kazakh woman in traditional headdress and silk clothing

Among the republics of the former Soviet Union, Kazakhstan is relatively calm and collected. It has signed the Caspian Pipeline Consortium agreement (December 1996) to build a new pipeline from western Kazakhstan's Tengiz oil field to the Black Sea and it is trying to resolve residual disputes with Russia and China. This security, however, lasts only as long as Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan can prevent the Islamic militants in the Ferghana Valley from spilling into southern Kazakhstan.



Like the populations of the other Central Asian Republics, the Kazakhs wish to remain independent. But ethnic strife remains a potential problem, especially if the Kazakhs, on their way to gaining a majority, decide to influence the laws of the republic in favor of the Muslim Kazakhs. That would not sit well with the 34% percent of Russian Kazakhstanis who claim "ownership" of the northern regions. The Baikonur cosmodrome, which sits on the fringe of this disputed territory, has the potential of creating its own host of problems for both Russia

and Kazakhstan. Resolution of these problems requires Kazakhstan to offer its nationals equal share in its government.

Kazakhstan's way to independence has not been easy. Tied to the economy of the former Soviet Union, the need for Kazakhstan's traditional heavy industry products declined between 1991 and 1994, resulting in hardship for a large segment of the population, especially the Russians. After 1995, however, the pace of privatization has quickened, resulting in the availability of a larger amount of assets in the private sector and allowance of small industries to grow. This process has also boosted the opportunity for getting and retaining jobs.

Although like the populations of the other Central Asian Republics, the Kazakhs wish to remain unified and independent; they are not ready to sacrifice the economic and cultural well being for Kazakh unity. They realize that 34% percent of the population of the republic is Russian and that many other nationalities other than Kazakh and Russian live in Kazakhstan. Rather than identifying themselves as "Kazakhs," therefore, they have opted to refer to themselves as "Kazakhstanis." According to the 1999 census, the major ethnic groups in Kazakhstan are: Kazakh (also Qazaq) 53.4%, Russian 30%, Ukrainian 3.7%, Uzbek 2.5%, German 2.4%, Uighur 1.4%, other 6.6%.

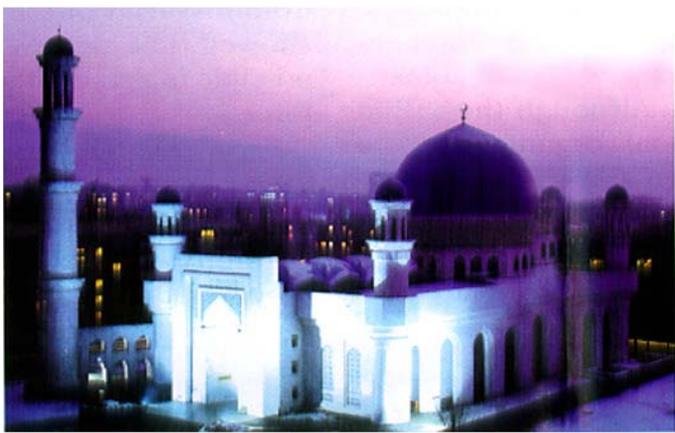


Hotel Kazakhstan in Almaty

Religion

47 percent of the population of Kazakhstan is Muslim, 44 percent is Russian Orthodox, and 2 percent Protestant. The other 7 percent belong to other religions.

The Kazakhs were the last of the Turkic peoples of Central Asia to be Islamized. Influenced by the Tatars, they chose the Sunni faith and within that the Hanafi school of law. The Tatars themselves had become Muslims only in the 14th century under the Khans of the Golden Horde, especially Berke and Uzbek. After gaining dominance in the region, the Russians could easily have stopped the Tartars from carrying the process to an end. But they did not. The reverse would have promoted Central Asian conservatism and Shamanism, neither one of which the Russians liked.



The new Almaty mosque

The Islam practiced by the Kazakhs is quite different from the Islam practiced in either Saudi Arabia or Iran. Prevented from reading the *Qur'an* for over seventy years, Kazakhs have lost touch with the fundamentals of the faith. Instead, they have developed an affinity to what can be termed folk Islam, i.e., a combination of superstition and the dictates of the *ishans*. Many believe in *jinns*, in the spirit of their ancestors, and in the intermediacy of Muslim saints.

For instance, children are adorned with *tumars* to protect them against evil eye. Adults tie votives to trees by running water so that their wishes may be granted, and some visit the graves of Muslim saints to pave their way to heaven.

Language

Kazakh (Qazaq, state language) 64.4%, Russian (official, used in everyday business, designated the "language of interethnic communication") 95% (2001 est.)

Government

Kazakhstan is a republic. Its capital is Astana. Until recently, the capital of Kazakhstan was the city of [Almaty](#) (Alma-Ata, during the Soviet period) with a population of about 1,210,000. By the order of Kazakh President, [Nursultan Nazarbaev](#), in December 1998, the capital was moved to Astana (former Aqmola), which is farther north, closer to the Russian border and to the concentration of the Russian population of the republic. The official reasons for the move were the location of Almaty, which is prone to mud slides and earthquakes, and Astana's proximity to the Russian population of the state. Other major cities of Kazakhstan are Karaganda, Chimkent, Jambul, and Semipalatinsk. Administratively, the republic is divided into 14 provinces, and 3 cities. A post-independence constitution was adopted on 28 January 1993. On 30 August 1995, the Kazakhstanis adopted a constitution through a national referendum.

Kazakhstan's legal system is based on civil law with suffrage at 18 years of age. The Executive branch consists of a chief of state or [President](#), a head of government, and a cabinet or Council of Ministers appointed by the President. The President can initiate constitutional amendments, appoint and dismiss the government, dissolve Parliament, call referenda at his discretion, and appoint administrative heads of regions and cities.

The president of Kazakhstan is elected by popular vote for a seven-year term. The president appoints the prime minister and the first deputy prime minister.

The Legislative branch consists of a bicameral Parliament, including the Senate with 39 seats. The President appoints 7 of those seats. The other members are popularly elected, two from each of the 14 oblasts, as well as from the capital of Astana and the city of Almaty. The Senate's term of service is six years.

The Majilis, or Lower House, has 77 seats. Of those members, 10 are elected from the winning party's lists. All members are popularly elected to five-year terms.

The judicial branch consists of a Supreme Court with 44 members and Constitutional Council with 7 members.

Political parties and leaders

The Major political parties of Kazakhstan, accepted by the political party law passed in July 2002, are the Agrarian Party, the Ak Zhol Party, the Civic Party, the Communist Party or (KPK), and the Patriots' Party. There are also a number of pressure groups.

Flag



Adopted June 4, 1992
sky blue field golden sun
with 32 gold rays below the sun a golden
eagle in flight;
symbol of freedom and aspirations on the
hoist side is a "national ornamentation" in
gold.

Democratization

General Introduction

In order to understand the economy of the republics of the former Soviet Union, it is necessary to understand how centrally controlled economies work and how a centrally controlled economy is changed into a market economy.

In simple terms, the Communist Manifesto gave birth to a number of economies in Central Asia all of which were controlled by the state. The articles of the Manifesto asked for a total, central control of all aspects of life. In other words, all the peoples' assets were taken from them and placed under the supervision of the State. This included the factories, plants, and natural resources, as well as human resources.

Privatization is the reverse of centralization. It requires a centrally controlled state that wishes to become a modern independent state to decentralize its agriculture, industry, businesses, and housing. It requires that the individual be given the right to buy and sell property. Means of

transportation, production, and communication should be placed in the hands of the people. Similarly, the state should decentralize its banks, allow foreign investment to help develop its resources, and become a party to local and international efforts in running a meaningful and profitable market economy.

A truly independent republic cannot ignore freedom. It must allow its population the right to free speech by placing the media (newspapers, radios, and televisions) in the private domain and by removing censorship. Additionally, people should be given political freedom so that they can form political parties, stand for election, and vote.

What was outlined above serves as the basis for creating a democratic state with a stable government. A republic with a parliament that respects international law and which legislates laws that are sensitive to ethnic, racial, ideological, national, and gender concerns of the people, a government that recognizes equal opportunity and equal rights of its people.

Finally, an independent state must create access to education and health care through state and private welfare programs, it should form committees to oversee its conduct of human rights, as well as a committee to handle abuse of natural resources.

Since receiving their independence, the republics in Central Asia have responded differently to the demands of independence, especially with respect to privatization, political freedom, and human rights issues. The difficulty does not rest with the republics as with the nature of changes that are required of them. Obviously these changes cannot be meaningfully implemented unless those receiving the changes are cognizant of the rules of democracy. As every one knows, the road to democracy is long. It requires sacrifice as well as a large amount of funds for educating the people and making them understand the working of the law vis-à-vis the rights of the individual and the community.

Economy

Kazakhstan's economy is comprised of agriculture and industry. Agriculture subsumes a number of sectors most important among which are farming, animal husbandry, and fisheries. Similarly, industry comprises light industry (foods, textiles), chemical and steel plants, and non-ferrous metals. Other areas of the republic's life, i.e., banking, tourism, and exports and imports, as well as communication and transportation are also related to economy, although not directly. It should be added that Kazakhstan has a labor force of 8.4 million (1999), divided as follows: 30 percent industry, 20 percent agriculture, and 50 percent services. The unemployment rate in the republic is 8.8 percent. Kazakhstan's total revenue is estimated at \$4.2 billion and total expenditure at \$5.1 billion.

Agriculture

Kazakhstan is the largest of the Muslim republics of the former Soviet Union. But most of the republic's territory is comprised of semi-deserts, mountain forests, steppe land, and desert. Only about eleven percent of Kazakhstan's topography in the north is suitable for cultivation. In pre-Soviet times, herding was the major contributor to Kazakhstan's agriculture. That is why, perhaps, the region's leading agricultural commodities were wool, meat, milk, and other livestock products.



Sidestreet irrigation channel

The Russians, who conquered Kazakhstan in the 19th century, had a penchant for farming, especially for the cultivation of rice, cotton, and wheat. They transformed most of the pastures into fields, at times forcing the Kazakhs to move to the desert or to nearby China. The Soviets, who followed the Russians, shared the latter's emphasis on farming. Soon after they took over, Kazakhstan's agriculture underwent a period of collectivization. As a result, the private farms that the Russians had established now emerged as newly organized *kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz* collective farms.

While in the south, in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, for instance, the Soviets emphasized the cultivation of cotton; in Kazakhstan they emphasized the production of wheat. In 1953, Khrushchev used the Hungry Desert area of northern Kazakhstan for the implementation of his "Virgin Lands Program." Making extensive use of machines and large-scale irrigation technology, Khrushchev intended to increase the wheat yield of the region around present-day Astana manifold. The experiment failed but, nevertheless, the cultivation of wheat continued. In fact, grain, mostly spring wheat, as well as cotton, and livestock remain the mainstay of Kazakhstan's agriculture.

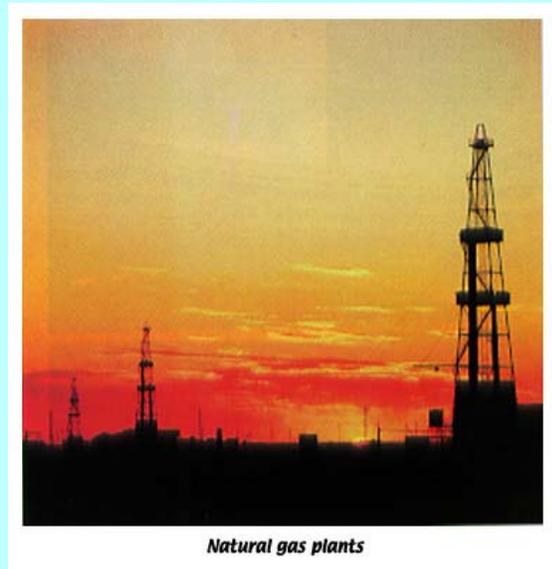
In 1990, 36 percent of the republic's labor force worked in the agricultural sector. By 1999, as a result of a number of progressive reforms introduced into Kazakh agriculture, the first signs of growth appeared in farming. Stockbreeding (sheep, cattle, camel, horses) and fishing, however, lag behind farming. Fishing is adversely affected by the Aral Lake disaster.

Industry

At the beginning of the 20th century, Kazakhstan did not have an industry. The nomadic Kazakhs hated settling down and building towns and villages, or to farm or manufacture goods. What utensils they needed, they bought from the Russians and the Chinese. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan was well known for its wool fabrics, cotton textiles, bags, leather boots, and colorful garments. Kazakhstan's food industry was known for butter, yogurt, and cheese.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, cottage industries continued to grow, and Kazakhstan diversified most of its domestic industry.

The influx of the Russians, and later on the Soviets, into the Kipchak Plain changed the educational dynamics of Kazakhstan and, consequently, the mindset of most of the Kazakh population. The fact that Kazakhstan was an untapped source for raw materials was also a major factor in the transformation of the region from a pastoral and agrarian land into an industrial region. Increasingly Kazakhs, alongside other Soviets, were employed in mines, plants and factories, and as plant managers in the industrial centers.



Kazakhstan supplied 60 percent of the mineral resources of the Soviet Union. The republic has an enormous amount of untapped reserves of oil, natural gas, and metals. Coal, gold, silver, lead, copper, zinc, cadmium, iron ore, beryllium, manganese, chrome, nickel, cobalt, bauxite, titanium, sulfur, and industrial diamonds are among some ninety minerals found in the republic. Kazakhstan also has large uranium mines. But its most important asset in the future might lie in the large reserves of oil in the Caspian Sea. China, India, Russia, Europe, and the United States are all waiting for a decision on the division of the Caspian Seabed so that the oil reserves beneath it can be exploited.

Kazakhstan is an industrialized nation. Many of its cities in the north accommodate large chemical and steel plants, textile factories, and centers for processing nonferrous metals, especially copper. A good number of these plants and factories were moved east during World War II, when the Soviets did not wish their technology to fall into German hands. These plants and factories, which were housed in Akmolinsk, Karaganda, and Alma-Ata, form a relatively large machine building sector specializing in mining, construction equipment, tractors, and agricultural machinery. There were also foundries that produced copper, aluminum, and ore bars for use elsewhere in the Union.

Finally, Kazakhstan is the home of the Baikonur cosmodrome, the heart of Russia's space program. Of the three launching sites in the former Soviet Union, Baikonur is the most well known. It has served as the foundation of the Soviet space program as well as the primary launching point for the Soviet manned space missions. It was from Baikonur, for instance, that on October 4, 1957, the Russians launched Sputnik. Yuri Gagarin, the first human being to orbit the earth also was launched from Baikonur. For some time, Russian space launches from Baikonur were halted due to two rocket explosions. Eventually, Russia, accepted to pay \$115 million a year for 20 years to rent Baikonur. Kazakhs remain unconvinced that Russian rockets can be launched safely and that they will not contaminate central Kazakhstan.

Privatization

The difficult task that Kazakhstan faced was how to integrate its major resource, its people, into their economy. For seventy years the Kazakhs were subjects of a totalitarian regime. The *Communist Manifesto*, Soviet bureaucrats, and a weak ruble controlled by Moscow dictated the development of their government and economy. By 1990, the Soviet Union became decrepit. Its giant plants created more pollution than products. There was no demand, either domestically or internationally, for its products. On December 16, 1991, Kazakhstan became independent.

As an independent nation, as outlined above, they had to develop a new legal system, new commercial ties, and sufficient administrative skills to attract the good will of their neighbors along which the foreign funds they needed to update their economy and make it profitable for the state. Consequently, they decentralized their economy, a process that required the existence of amenable democratic institutions achieved through the establishment of democratic institutions and severance of ties with the past. Cognizant of the fact that a decentralized Kazakhstan economy would mean future unemployment, long lines in front of empty stores, and the inability to attract foreign capital, they forged ahead.



The flower section of the main bazaar in Almaty

Between 1991 and 1995, to reform its government: Kazakhstan divided the Supreme Soviet into legislative, executive, and judiciary branches. Armed with these powers, a constitution was written to restore peoples' rights to property and freedom. Following that, from 1995 to 1998, elections were held for a bicameral parliament that satisfied the needs of Kazakhstan's diverse national, tribal, religious, and ethnic groups. At the end, the reforms created a fairly democratic system of government--a multi-party system, led by a democratically elected president.

As a first step for restoring peoples' purchasing power, as well as to generate jobs, open the factories, and end unemployment, the Kazakhs dismantled the defunct Soviet centralized economic system, restructured their surviving institutions, and implemented social and political reforms. The first step in this direction was taken when the Kazakhs ended their dependence on Moscow by introducing their own monetary unit, the *tenge* (see below for details). Additionally, they built a legal system to accommodate the basic institutions of the state. Then, within this framework, they established a program for liberalizing their new economy. A large-scale reduction in production and an imposition of quotas on distribution of goods were the results of this initial bold step by the state. Once the results of these endeavors materialized, the Kazakhs found themselves masters of a viable private sector in which a market economy operated. Only then did Kazakhstan adopt a fast-paced, viable program of privatization.

Between 1991 and 1995, Kazakhstan broached denationalization and privatization. The programs covered the sale of retail trade and service facilities, as well as the transfer of state property to

employees, mass privatization, case-by-case privatization, and privatization of agricultural enterprises. During the subsequent three years, the republic's pharmaceutical companies and drugstores were privatized. This was followed by the privatization of medicare, education, tourism, and sports. In 1998, a part of the state holdings in the Caspian Seashelf Oil Exploration Consortium was privatized.

Preparation for entering the world market took the Kazakhs four years (1996 — 2000). During this period, the Kazakhs explored, and eventually penetrated, foreign markets for the sale of their petroleum, natural gas, and other commodities. Unlike the Uzbeks who tried to entice investors to invest in their economy, the Kazakhs facilitated trade by introducing genuine liberalization measures such as abolishing limits on exports and decreasing demands on acquisition of licenses. They also regulated customs duties and excluded banks that were not viable. Extraction, transportation and processing of oil, railroad and air transportation, power distribution, uranium, and raw materials production were not privatized until 1999-2000. Even then, they were placed under the custodianship of the state, pending appropriate legislation.

A major task yet to be fully implemented in Kazakhstan is diversification. A good portion of the local diversification is complete, but the diversification of the international side of the economy has proved to be challenging. That is due to the shifts in world demands for commodities, the unpredictability of stocks, and global competition. With the new reserves of oil entering Kazakhstan's future, the Kazakhs have no alternative but to divert some of their gas exports from the European to the Asian markets.

The measures that Kazakhstan took were both wise and practical. The liberalization of their economy gave direction to their national and international economic relations. Consequently, they privatized most of their Soviet holdings successfully and reformed their tax laws, allocated budgets, and created appropriate banking procedures. Most importantly, they created those needed democratic institutions that assure international investors of their republic's stability and credibility.

Banking

When Kazakhstan became independent on 16 December 1991, it had one hundred banks. Earlier, it had had two hundred. Of the one hundred banks, 84 were registered, 6 were state owned, and 20 were foreign banks. In 2000, Kazakhstan had 51 banks of which 22 were foreign. Turkish banks established 4, and others established 4.

Kazakhstan's currency, the Kazakhstani *tenge*, is equivalent to 100 *tiyn*. In 2002, the rate of exchange for the *tenge* was 153.279 *tenge* per one US dollar.

Exports and Imports

Nearly one half of the population of Kazakhstan is Russian. They are the descendants of the émigrés who moved into the region soon after serfdom was abolished in Russia. The establishment of trade relations between Kazakhstan and Russia, therefore, is easier than with most other states. No new funds are required for construction of pipelines, rails, or roads.

Additionally, as a legacy of the Soviet economy, the Kazakh and Russian economies complement each other. Neither are language and culture barriers able to keep the two populations separate. Besides, Russia can assist Kazakhstan, a member of the CIS, in security matters, drug traffic, and acquisition of international prestige.

Exports

Kazakhstan's major exports include: fuel, oil products; ferrous metals; copper and copper products; inorganic chemicals; cotton; precious and semiprecious stones and other non-precious metals; zinc and zinc products; ores, slag and cinders; and reactors and machinery. In 2000, there was a rise in the export of minerals, food and engineering products; but a decline in the export of metallurgic, chemical and textile products. Kazakhstan's major export in 2000 is estimated at \$8.8 billion, 10.5 billion in 2002. Kazakhstan's export partners are Russia, Bermuda, Italy, China, and Germany.

Imports

Kazakhstan's major imports include: machinery and parts, industrial materials, oil and gas, and vehicles. Kazakhstan's import partners are mostly from among its export partners with the addition of Turkey. Kazakhstan's total import for 2000 is estimated at \$6.9 billion, 8.2 billion for 2001. Russia, Bermuda Islands, Virgin Islands, Italy, China, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Ukraine, U.S.A., Uzbekistan, and Great Britain are among the major importers of Kazakh products.

Balance of Payment

Kazakhstan's deficit for 2000 was estimated at \$12.5 billion, 11.6 billion for 2001. Between 1992 and 2000, Kazakhstan received \$610 million from the United States and \$409.6 million in economic aid.

Internet

The Internet country code for Kazakhstan is kz. There are 10 Internet Service Providers (with their own international channels) and 100,000 Internet users.

Transportation

Kazakh transportation uses railway and paved and unpaved roads. Unpaved roads, made of unstable earth, are difficult to negotiate in wet weather. The Syr and Irtysh rivers are used as waterways. Gigantic pipelines and tankers (some foreign owned) carry Kazakh crude to Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union and the EU. Kazakhstan has 28 airports with paved and 421 airports with unpaved runways.

Communication

The Kazakh communication system is outdated. Nearly two million main telephone lines use antiquated equipment and are serviced poorly. Connection to the republics of the former Soviet Union and China are carried by landline and microwave radio relay. Connection with other countries is by satellite and by the Trans-Asia-Europe fiber-optic cable.

Military

Unlike in the other republics where regionalism plays a major role in politics, the population of the republic of Kazakhstan are Kazakhstanis first, Kazakhs second. For its defense, Kazakhstan continues to depend on Russia, its political partner. But to ensure stability, Kazakhstan has signed treaties with Iran, Turkey, and China as well. Kazakhstan's military consists of ground forces, air and air defense forces, naval force, border service, and the republican guard. The recruitment age for the military is 18. Kazakhstan's available military manpower is 4,580,754 of which 3,658,815 is fit for military service. Kazakhstan's annual military expenditure is \$221.8 million

Border Issues

The long-standing boundary dispute between Kazakhstan and China has been resolved. That means now both countries can control their borders better against the movement of illegal drugs, as well as population control and trade. Similarly, the delimitation with Kyrgyzstan is largely complete. The situation with regard to Russia and Turkmenistan is somewhat more complex. No resolution is reached on the division of the Caspian Seabed and the reserves beneath it.

Kazakhstan is located on the transit point for narcotics produced in Southwest Asia and bound for the Russian and the European markets. There is a significant illicit cultivation of cannabis for the CIS markets. A limited amount of opium poppy and ephedra (for the production of the drug ephedrine) are also cultivated. There is little attempt by the government to eradicate the cultivation of illicit crops.

See also:

[Central Asia: An Overview](#)

[Azerbaijan: An Overview](#)

[Iran: A Concise Overview](#)

[Kazakhstan: An Overview](#)

[Kyrgyzstan: An Overview](#)

[Tajikistan: An Overview](#)

[Turkmenistan: An Overview](#)

[Uzbekistan: An Overview](#)

[Afghanistan: An Overview](#)