



Kazakhstan — Va-PoReg Country Report

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10/21/1731 Start Part of Other Country [of Russia]: The founding of the Kazakh Khanate is regarded by the Kazakhs as the initiation of Kazakh statehood, commemorated with its 550th anniversary celebrated in 2015. However, the region's history is tumultuous and subject to debate. In much of modern Kazakhstan, the Uzbek Khanate was established. Under Abu'l-Khayr Khan, the country was weak, and corruption plagued the government. Janibek and Kerei Khan, the offspring of Barak Khan, rallied the Kazakh people to Jetysu, where they established the Independent Kazakh Khanate.¹ The Kazakh Khanate was a Kazakh state in Central Asia, successor of the Golden Horde existing from the 15th to the 19th century, centered on the eastern parts of the Desht-i Qipchaq.² During the reign of Kasym Khan (1511-1523), the khanate expanded considerably. Numerous victories in wars against neighboring countries made the Khanate's reputation and country well known even in Western Europe. The first Kazakh code of laws, Qasym Khannyn Qasqa Zholy (Bright Road of Kasym Khan), was also established in 1520. In the 18th century, the Russian Empire built the Irtysh line, consisting of forty-six forts and ninety-six redoubts, including Omsk, Semipalatinsk, Pavlodar, Orenburg, and Petropavlovsk, to prevent raids from Kazakh and Oirat into Russian territory. On 10/21/1731, as a result of the weakened state of the Kazakh Khanate caused by an exhausting war with Zunghars (Dzungar people), Khan Abul Khair and most of elders of the Little horde (Jüz) swore allegiance to the Russian Empire, thus the incorporation of Kazakhstan into Russia begun.³ During the 19th century, the Empire expanded its influence into Central Asia and controlled much of what is now the Republic of Kazakhstan. This period, known as the „Great Game,“ lasted from roughly 1813 to the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907.⁴

11/07/1917 Continuation as Part of Other Country [of Russia, Communist Ideocracy]: On this date the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) was proclaimed.⁵ On 04/10/1918 the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (initially, the Turkestan Socialist Federative Republic) was officially proclaimed. The Turkistan ASSR was an autonomous republic of the Russian Federative Socialist Republic, which included territories of present-day Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (Fedorenko 2015: 3).⁶ On 08/26/1920 the Kazakh ASSR was originally created as the Kirghiz Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic and was an autonomous republic within the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic.

12/28/1922 Continuation Part of Other Country [of Russia, Communist Ideocracy]: With the establishment of the USSR, Kazakhstan became a part of the Soviet Union.⁷ On 02/19/1925 Filipp Goloshchyokin was appointed First Secretary of the Communist Party in the newly created Kazakh Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic.⁸ From 1925 to 1933 he ran the Kazakh ASSR with virtually no outside interference. Between 06/15/1925 and 06/19/1925, the Fifth Kazakh Council of Soviets passed a resolution to change the name of the republic to the Kazak Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic.⁹ On 12/05/1936 the former Kazak ASSR was being elevated to the status of a Union-level republic and thus became the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic.¹⁰ Like other parts of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan underwent forced collectivization and industrialization. These policies had profound impacts, including widespread famine in the early 1930s. During World War II, many industries and people were relocated to Kazakhstan from the western parts of the USSR, further integrating the republic into the Soviet industrial framework. The Soviet era saw significant Russification in Kazakhstan, with Russian settlers moving into the region and Russian culture and language

being promoted. Namely during the 1950s and 1960s, the influx of immigrants, mostly Russians, skewed the ethnic mixture and enabled non-Kazakhs to outnumber natives. Neither LIED nor V-Dem treat Kazakhstan before 1990. In 1990, LIED identifies political liberties as absent and V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as ambiguous regarding the status of political liberties.

12/16/1991 End Part of Other Country [of USSR, Communist Ideocracy]/Start Electoral (Personalist) Autocracy: On this date, Kazakhstan became independent with Nursultan Nazarbayev as president and a legislature dominated by ex-communists. Nazarbayev maintained much of the structure and personnel of the communist system (Kadyrzhanov 1999: 147, Olcott 2010: 92-93, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 72). Universal suffrage was guaranteed since independence in 1991 (LIED). Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. V-Dem's EF&FI and CEI score elections as not really free, fair or clean. In May 2007, an unprecedented legislative change was approved by the parliament, which involved lifting the two-term restriction on the presidency exclusively for Nazarbayev. This change did not constitute an appointment for a lifelong term, but rather allowed Nazarbayev the possibility of indefinite re-election.¹¹ After stepping down from the presidency in 2019, Nazarbayev retained significant influence in Kazakhstan. He held the title of „Elbasy“ or „Leader of the Nation,“ a title that provided him with unique powers and privileges, including immunity from prosecution and a role in shaping domestic and foreign policies. This position and his continued influence in the political sphere made him a central figure in Kazakhstan's governance even after leaving the presidential office. Parliamentary and presidential elections are neither free nor fair, and major parties exhibit continued political loyalty to the government. The authorities have consistently marginalized or imprisoned genuine opposition figures. The dominant media outlets are either in state hands or owned by government-friendly businessmen. Freedoms of speech and assembly remain restricted, and corruption is endemic.¹² While Nazarbayev's regime exhibited elements of personalist autocracy, especially given his strong personal control over the state and its institutions, the regular occurrence of multiparty elections (albeit flawed) and the presence of some formal institutional structures align more closely with the definition of an electoral autocracy. Snap-elections in March 2023 were purported to be neither fair nor free and media coverage superficial with self-nominated candidates facing obstacles.¹³ According to FH's classification for the assessed regime period from 1994 onwards, a score between 11 and 14 makes the country not free, which we also place in the not free category. Additionally, political liberties have been absent since 1991 per LIED, while V-Dem's PCLI indicates that political liberties were in an ambiguous state from 1991 to 2004 and since 2022. The remaining years political liberties were not really present. Until 1994, according to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. From 1995 to 2004, based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive operated with unlimited authority, facing no institutional checks on power. Since 2005, as per Polity5's categorization, the executive has experienced minimal limitations on decision-making, placing it in the first intermediate category. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited from 1990-1994 and absent for the rest of the period. V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited between 1990-1999, 2005-2011 and 2022-present while absent between 2000-2004 and 2012-2021.

Electoral (Personalist) Autocracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional Sources (Gumpfenberg 2001, Schatz 2009, Sehring/Stefes 2010)

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Kazakhstan

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazakh_Khanate

³ <https://www.prilib.ru/en/history/619652>

- ⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazakhstan#Russian_Kazakhstan
- ⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Soviet_Federative_Socialist_Republic
- ⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkestan_Autonomous_Soviet_Socialist_Republic
- ⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union#Treaty_on_the_Creation_of_the_USSR
- ⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazakh_Soviet_Socialist_Republic
- ⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazakh_Autonomous_Socialist_Soviet_Republic
- ¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazakh_Soviet_Socialist_Republic
- ¹¹ Vgl. <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/KAZ> ; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_of_Kazakhstan
- ¹² <https://freedomhouse.org/country/kazakhstan/freedom-world/2022>
- ¹³ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/kazakhstan/freedom-world/2024>
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