

Ethno-confessional processes in East Kazakhstan (according to the results of sociological research)

P K Dashkovskiy^{1*} and E A Shershneva¹

¹ Altai State University, 61 Lenina prospekt, Barnaul 656049 Russia

E-mail: dashkovskiy@fpn.asu.ru

Abstract. The article presents the results of a sociological study of ethno-confessional processes in East Kazakhstan. The study was conducted jointly by the researchers at Altai State University (Russia) and the East Kazakhstan State University (Kazakhstan). As a result of sociological studies, the confessional preferences of the respondents, the ethnic composition of the population, and the degree of interethnic and interfaith tensions were revealed.

Keywords: ethno-confessional processes, religion, ethnic groups, population

1. Introduction

Over the past twenty-five years, significant socio-economic, political, and ideological changes have taken place in the post-Soviet space. The proclamation of the freedom of conscience at the twilight of the history of the USSR and then in the independent states formed on the basis of the Union republics, had serious consequences. On the one hand, virtually unlimited possibilities for confessing any religious system or not confessing any have opened, i.e. for the preservation of an atheistic worldview. On the other hand, the tendency to increase the number of religious communities of both traditional confessions and the active spread of the so-called new religious movements has been steadily outlined. In this case, we plan to dwell on the assessment of modern ethno-religious processes in the Republic of Kazakhstan, primarily in its eastern part.

This region is bordering with Russia, which additionally updates the study. An important aspect of the study of ethno-religious processes, including in East Kazakhstan, is sociological research. These studies significantly complement, and sometimes even make adjustments to, official statistics. Similar studies aimed at identifying the influence of ethnic and religious processes on the consciousness of the population of individual regions have already been conducted in Western Mongolia, as well as in the territory of the Altai Region of Russia [1; 2].

It is noteworthy that the territories of East Kazakhstan, Western Mongolia, and the Altai Region form a kind of historical and cultural cross-border zone. Such historical interrelation invariably affects the specificity of ethno-confessional processes, which is expressed in certain general trends in the designated area. The visiting card of Kazakhstan is the ethnic and religious palette, which includes more than 130 ethnic groups and significant religious diversity. In Kazakhstan, new trends are visible, indicating a changing social role of religion. This is reflected in the rapid growth of the number of religious people, the increase in the number of religious associations, the increasing complexity of interfaith relations, the susceptibility of the population to religious influence, and the importance of religious and ethnic identification [3].

2. Materials and Methods

This article is based on the results of a sociological research conducted in 2014-2015 in the East Kazakhstan region. A total of 464 respondents were interviewed. They answered questions reflecting the peculiarities of the perception of ethno-religious processes in the country and in the region. The authors chose an analytical type of sociological research, which allowed to identify the causes of the processes and phenomena associated with the religious situation in East Kazakhstan. Using the survey method, we have identified the main trends associated with the attitude of the population to religious processes occurring in the territory of the East Kazakhstan region. Special attention is paid to assessing the role of the state in building relations with religious associations. When processing the results of the survey, statistical analysis was used. It allowed to identify some patterns of development of religious processes. We also make generalizations and come to certain conclusions about the current ethno-religious situation in the country. Statistical survey results for clarity are presented in various diagrams.

3. Results

Among the 464 (100%) respondents surveyed in this field, 56% believe that a person needs to be religious, only 25% of respondents do not consider faith to be an essential component of each person's life. At the same time, 19% of respondents found it difficult to determine the role of religion in a person's life. Persons from 16 to 21 years old say that religion occupies the most important place in a person's life. In this age group, 62% of respondents believe that religion is an integral part of human life. Persons aged 36 to 45 years have the lowest percentage of religiosity, here only 26% of respondents note the important role of religion in society, and 43% of respondents in this age group found it difficult to answer the role of religion in their lives. In turn, this may indicate both their further positive and negative attitude towards religion in society. The distribution of the population by confessional affiliation in the region under consideration is reflected in Fig. 1.

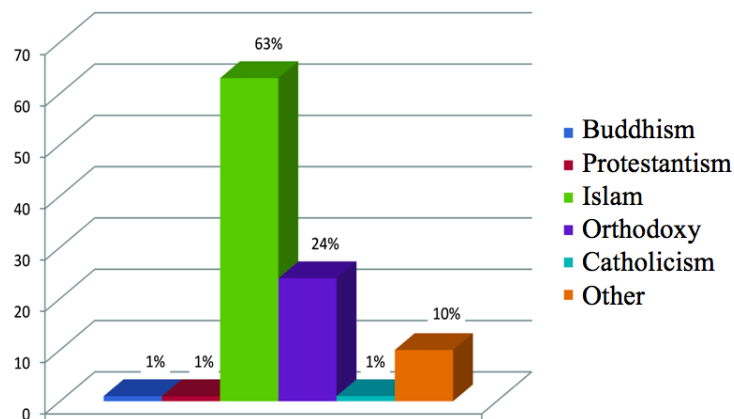


Fig. 1. Confessional affiliation of the population of the East Kazakhstan region.

The diagram shows that in the territory of East Kazakhstan, Islam is the predominant denomination. A rather large percentage of respondents indicated a different religion. It should be noted that the respondents in this category refused to specify their religion. It should also be emphasized that confessional affiliation is closely enough associated with the national identity of the area under consideration. Only 2% of the total number of respondents did not indicate their nationality. Thus, the population in the surveyed region is located on a national basis as follows:

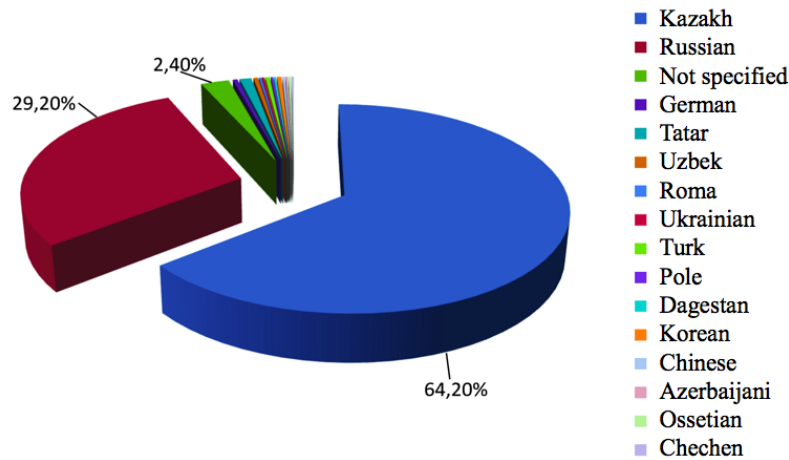


Fig. 2. National identity of the population of the East Kazakhstan region.

The Russians and Kazakhs are the largest ethnic groups, representatives of other nationalities make up less than 1% of the respondents. It is not difficult to notice that the percentage of Muslims in Kazakhstan almost completely coincides with the ethnic group of the Kazakhs. A similar situation is observed with representatives of the Orthodox faith, who in ethnic terms are predominantly Russian.

It should be noted that, despite the importance of religion in society, 77% of respondents indicate that the celebration of religious holidays, observance of rituals, as well as visiting religious places are not considered mandatory. Only 33% of them consider the ceremonies obligatory. In addition, 37% of the surveyed believe that these actions are not important in a person's life, and 30% of them find it difficult to answer this question. At the same time, representatives of all age groups adhere to this opinion. And the answer to the question of whether the respondents would be able to go to the temple of another religion testifies to religious conviction. At the same time, 43% of respondents indicated that they did not see any obstacles in it for themselves. 32% still considered it inadmissible to visit religious places of another religion, and 25% of respondents found it difficult to answer the question. It is noteworthy that in the age of 36 and over, in a much larger number of cases, people do not see any obstacles for themselves when visiting religious places of another religion. At the age of 36 to 45 years old, 66% of respondents, 50% at the age of 46-60 years, and, 67% of respondents at the age of 61 years and older do not consider it forbidden to visit temples of other religions. The most important factor in the regulation of inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations are family-marital relations. According to the survey, 36% of respondents would not agree to marry a representative of another faith. At the same time, 77% of respondents answered that there are no representatives of another faith in their families. In the case of marriage with representatives of another religion, preference is given to Islam (47% of respondents), in second place is Protestantism (28%), and the third place is occupied by Catholicism and Orthodoxy (25%).

It is interesting to note that Protestantism in Eastern Kazakhstan, as well as in many other regions of Central Asia [1], was chosen as the most preferred denomination for interfaith marriage. The question of how easily people find contact with representatives of another religion allows assessing the interfaith situation in Kazakhstan. At the same time, 57% of respondents answered that it was easy for them to find contact with representatives of other religions, and 27% of respondents noted that it was more easy than difficult to find contacts with representatives of another religion.

4. Discussion

It should be emphasized that representatives of other religions cause in 54% of respondents (36 to 45 years old) to be ready to accept new truths and implement them. A rather large percentage among the respondents takes interest in representatives of other religions. According to a sociological survey, on the territory of Kazakhstan, contradictions arise primarily with representatives of the prevailing denomination – Islam. Thus, contradictions with the Muslims arise in 30% of cases, in second place is

Orthodoxy (18% of conflict situations). It should also be noted that according to the survey, we can say that the residents of Eastern Kazakhstan are sufficiently aware of various religious areas, including the so-called new religious movements. The residents of Kazakhstan have an ambiguous relationship to the emergence of unfamiliar denominations. On this issue, 50% of respondents found it difficult to answer. 24% of respondents have a negative attitude towards the emergence of unfamiliar denominations. However, in general, it should still be noted that a fairly tolerant attitude towards representatives of other faiths was established in the territory of Kazakhstan. 80% of respondents did not have any contradictions with representatives of other faiths.

At the same time, it is impossible not to point out the facts of the spread of extremist ideas in Kazakhstan, as well as in the entire post-Soviet space, including Russia [4; 5]. This trend has been noted both in East Kazakhstan and in the south and west of the country [6]. At the same time, in the last decade, extremists are increasingly resorting to spreading their ideas and recruiting supporters via Internet resources. A similar situation is observed in Kazakhstan, although the authorities are trying to block extremist sites, but the problem remains rather acute.

5. Conclusion

Thus, we can conclude that the natural contradiction in the development of the current situation, characteristic of Kazakhstan, including the East Kazakhstan region, is observed. The contradiction lies in the fact that, on the one hand, the stability of the religious situation is observed, and on the other, the presence of a multitude of undercurrents connected with radical religious movements takes place. Ethno-confessional processes that occur in East Kazakhstan and in the whole country make you think not only about national, but also spiritual security. The domestic policy of Kazakhstan, as well as of neighboring countries, including Russia, in the sphere of freedom of conscience must take into account many aspects of the activities of foreign missionaries. Religious revival affects all aspects of public life, generates many problems that require the attention from public authorities, local government and law enforcement.

6. Acknowledgments

The research has been conducted as part of the implementation of the state assignment of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation on the topic “Development of the ethno-religious situation in the cross-border area of Altai, Kazakhstan and Mongolia in the context of state-confessional politics: historical experience and current trends” (project №33.2177.2017/4.6).

References

- [1] Dashkovskiy P K, Shershneva E A, and Tsedev N 2017 Ethnic and confessional studies in Mongolia in 2016 *Peoples and religions of Eurasia* **1-2**(10-11) pp 115-128
- [2] Dashkovskiy P 2015 Ethnic and religious processes in Western Mongolia (based on social research) *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* **185** pp 109-116
- [3] Telebaev G T 2003 Religious identification of the population and the religious situation in the Republic of Kazakhstan *Socis* **3** pp 101-105
- [4] Gradusova M M, Mazurov V A, Potapov D P, Snesar V A, and Trufanov A Yu 2010 *Nationalist and religious vectors in extremism and terrorism: criminal law and criminological analysis* (Barnaul, Russia: Altai State University)
- [5] Emanuilov R Ya 2016 *Religion and terrorism: problems of correlation* (Moscow, Russia: Nauka)
- [6] Zhanbosinova A C 2014 Kazakh jihad and Kazakh tolerance *World outlook of the population of South Siberia and Central Asia in a historical retrospective* **VII** pp 200-211