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## **OVERWHELMINGLY RELIGIOUS YOUNG BEHIND ISLAMIZATION AND RADICALIZATION IN KAZAKHSTAN - OPED**

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Almost 90 percent of the leaders of Kazakhstan youth consider themselves believers, with 86 percent of them professing Islam, according to a survey conducted by sociologist Madina Nurgaliyeva and leading her to warn that religiosity among young Kazakhstanis is at a critically high level.

Moreover, she says, half of those who list themselves as believers are actively practicing believers, that is, people who visit the mosque or a church, regularly take part in Friday prayers and so on .

They say they are increasingly put off by the secular state and increasingly attracted by information on religion on the Internet. Moreover, in some oblasts, they are subject to active recruiting by various religious groups, including many that are radical and supportive of an Islamic social and political order.

For residents of the western [portions of Kazakhstan], she writes, it has become customary to see people on the streets whose visages clearly reflect their religious attachments, things like beards and hijabs. For the local population, this is customary; but for visitors from elsewhere, it is shocking.

One consequence of this, Nurgaliyeva says, is that inter-religious conflicts are now more common than inter-ethnic ones, something that many in that country are worried about and seek to have the government adopt a harder line against religion and especially the dissemination of religious literature coming in from abroad.

The youth leaders point to the significance of social networks and the role of the Internet in promoting various radical ideas of a destructive character, destructive they say not only of secularism but also of traditional Sunni Islam and its hitherto predominant role in Kazakhstan.

Media reports from the western portions of that country suggest that ever more young girls are wearing the hijab to school despite a government ban on such dress, that they are refusing to take part in some lessons, and even that they are refusing to stand in honor of the state flag or anthem.

This trend has prompted the Nur.kz portal to say that it is possible that if we allow girls to wear the hijab in schools, then we will soon remain without a state, without a language, without traditions, and without a culture.

The growth of Islamic and Islamist sentiment has even prompted one Muslim leader to write to President Nursultan Nazarbayev calling for the constitution to be revised so that Islam can be declared the state religion and so that religious parties can organize themselves legally .

Astana is clearly worried about all this, but its steps so far, including a call to require mosques to use Russian so that Russian speakers in the republic will get their religious instruction that way rather than via the Internet show that it is still moving very cautiously.

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Kaynak/Source: