

## Spiritual Values and Personality Formation of Youth in the Context of Contemporary Social Transformation in Kazakhstan

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### Abstract

The rapid transformations occurring in modern society influence all dimensions of social life, including the sphere of spirituality. This study examines the role of spiritual values in shaping personality amid processes of urbanisation, globalisation, and digitalisation, with particular attention to the declared and actual spiritual priorities of young people in Kazakhstan. Although the spiritual foundations of Kazakh society appeared to weaken between 2000 and 2025—a period marked by both a post-independence revival of traditional values and the emergence of new spiritual orientations—the findings suggest that what is occurring is less a decline than a transformation in the forms through which spiritual values are expressed. The data reveal a potential gap between the values young people claim to hold and the ways these values manifest behaviourally in certain empirical indicators; however, this discrepancy cannot be generalised to all youth in Kazakhstan.

Cultivating a system of spiritual values among young people, therefore, requires a balanced approach that integrates both traditional and emerging values, while also discouraging the mere declaration of socially approved ideals that are not reflected in practice, as such dissonance undermines the very essence of spirituality. The findings of this study can inform the development of targeted social and educational programmes and provide a foundation for future research.

**Keywords:** Contemporary Culture; Digitalisation; Globalisation; Personality Formation; Self-Determination; Kazakhstan

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## Introduction

The purpose of this research is to examine the correlation between traditional spiritual heritage and modern social influences in the process of youth personality formation within the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The contemporary world is rapidly changing, causing society to undergo dramatic transformation. The primary factors driving things in this are urbanisation, globalisation and digitalisation. Each of these processes has its own impact on an individual's spiritual journey, but when considered together, they create a new context for the formation of core values (Burlacu et al., 2021). Globally, 58 per cent of the population resides in urban areas; however, within the urban-rural typology, population distribution varies significantly across regions, ranging from 83 per cent in North America to 53 per cent in Asia (Statista, 2025a).

Cities offer unique opportunities for organising social life (Mouratidis, 2021). While urbanisation has both positive (e.g., increased welfare, relatively low inequality, better education and health care) and negative (e.g., high crime rates and social isolation) consequences, it changes the general structure of society (United Nations, 2025), causing a shift in conditions under which individuals develop their personalities (Galster & Üblacker, 2024).

Globalisation manifests itself as an intercontinental network of social relations, blurring borders between people and leading to the creation of complex interdependent transnational systems in different arenas (economic, technological and cultural) of social activity (Statista, 2024). One of the indices of globalisation is the Globalisation Index, which ranks countries in accordance with the economic, political and social dimensions of globalisation (Statista, 2024). According to the 2023 report, the most globalised countries are located in Western Europe; these include Switzerland (90.75), Belgium (90.38), and the Netherlands (90.32). Overall, countries in Europe and Central Asia are among the top 50 countries

with the highest rates of globalisation worldwide (Statista, 2024). Besides new economic ties, expanded opportunities, and intensifying cultural exchange, globalisation creates a deficit of national self-sufficiency, which manifests itself in different spheres of social life (World Economic Forum, 2024).

Digitalisation encompasses all spheres of human life (Ayhan, 2017), but a problem remains: a digital divide exists both between and within countries (Liu, 2024). In Central Asia, for instance, 84 per cent of the population has access to the Internet, whereas in East Africa, the figure is only 29 per cent. At the same time, the trend of digitalisation continues to pose new challenges for humanity, particularly in the area of artificial intelligence (World Bank, 2023). The difference in Internet penetration rate between urban and rural areas is not always significant. In the United States, for example, 95 per cent of urban residents, 97 per cent of suburban residents, and 93 per cent of rural residents are Internet users (Statista, 2025b). Most Internet users are teenagers and young adults aged 16 to 24, whereas people aged 65 and older account for the smallest portion of Internet users (Statista, 2025c). Thus, young people whose personalities are yet to mature are exposed to the influence of digital networks. Digitalisation is an effective tool for shaping the perception and formation of cultural and spiritual values (UNESCO, 2025), making it an important factor in personality development. It also changes the conditions in which society exists, creating a parallel virtual reality. For core values, virtual reality is a new medium where they can be constructed, negotiated, and displayed in social and digital practices (Hussain & Wang, 2024).

All three processes influence Kazakhstan's situation. The urban share of the population in Kazakhstan significantly exceeds the rural share, with estimates of approximately 12.7 million and 7.5 million, respectively (Hussain & Wang, 2024). The country's globalisation index increased from 62.07 in 2015 to 64.36 in 2022, whereas the current average is 61.23 (The Global Economy, 2022). In addition, Kazakhstan ranks first among

the CIS countries in digitalisation and 24th in the world (Global CIO, 2024). These changes affect both the social structure and organisation of society.

The new social conditions have created the need for updating the tapestry of traditional values and guidelines for spiritual living, which may compromise both or lead to the loss of spiritual knowledge. The very foundations of spiritual thinking are changing. The transformations affect all layers of society, from individuals to large social groups (Youvan, 2024). In a modern world, an individual is faced with a choice: one can pursue success and be productive at the expense of spiritual values, but this may result in the weakening of family ties and departure from national traditions (Dittmar & Isham, 2022).<sup>1</sup> In such circumstances, a harmonious personality takes on a new meaning and requires new ways of understanding the role of spiritual values in its formation (Akmataliev et al., 2021). Harmony presupposes the ability to exist in a modern world where new trends rise to overshadow family values and undermine respect for national traditions and culture (Faster Capital, 2025).

Spiritual values constitute a core quality of each individual, guiding one's moral decisions and ultimately the moral health of society as a whole (Ysmailova et al., 2020). "Spiritual values" can be seen as stable points of reference for a person. These points of reference determine, first and foremost, moral choices, self-identification, and understanding of one's purpose in life. They should be distinguished from socially approved norms, as spiritual values derive their significance from the individual's internal beliefs rather than from external social expectations.

The changes that impact the world today are not only comprehensive in nature but also occur rapidly, creating a gap between generations that manifests as a diminished understanding of moral and ethical dogma. Therefore, the harmonious coexistence of traditional values

and new social reality is a necessary condition for the development of the individual and society.

The revival of traditional values in Kazakhstan coincided with global social transformations (Abdulina & Abisheva, 2018). While new spiritual values emerge under the same factors that shape them in most countries worldwide, Kazakhstan also invests in restoring and preserving traditional values. The resulting dilemma requires that Kazakhstan's government find new approaches to influencing the formation of traditional values in the face of modernisation. This concerns the growing role of opinion leaders and independent bloggers who present an alternative to traditional methods of educational influence (e.g., family, religious institutions, and educational establishments). An objective assessment of their activity will allow us to develop new approaches to the education and socialisation of young people.

The study proposes a three-factor model of interrelated determinants that shape the transformation of spiritual values in Kazakhstan: urbanisation, globalisation, and digitalisation. The study also combines analysis of large-scale data at the state-statistics level with the author's empirical material, enabling an assessment of discrepancies between declared values and actual practices. The role of digital networks as a new reality shaping global cultural trends and influencing the formation of spiritual attitudes is also being assessed.

## Literature Review

### The Concept of Values and Personal Values

The concept of values is a multidimensional phenomenon that integrates individual, societal and cultural dimensions. Each ethnic group has a unique set of values shaped by various factors, including geographical conditions and historical circumstances (Long et al., 2020). The personal values of the individual define their aspirations and underlie their choices in life (Sagiv et al., 2017). These values, or sense-making systems, are inherently desirable by the individual and

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<sup>1</sup> National traditions refer to the shared customs, practices, and cultural norms that are historically rooted in a particular nation or society. These can include traditional

holidays, family roles, language use, moral values, religious practices, and social expectations passed down through generations.

society, occupy a certain place in the hierarchy of values based on assigned importance, are applicable across situations and relatively stable across time, and allow the individual to consciously choose to pursue or ignore them (Saginaw & Schwartz, 2022). Personal values contrast with related concepts, such as needs and motives, which can be assessed both positively and negatively by society (Saginaw & Schwartz, 2022), and are the building blocks for the hierarchy of priorities, the construction of which requires that a person understands moral concepts (Vanello, 2025) as well as the social situation (Kirkman, 2024). The system of personal values, as a main driver behind one's decisions in behaviour and social perception, largely determines a person's activity within society (Gamage et al., 2021). At the same time, personal values should be considered not only in an individual context, but also as a result of changes in the context of socialisation. This is linked to changes in the intracultural space, the development of intercultural ties, and the emergence of competing value orientations within a single society. This refers to the so-called cultural dynamics in which modernisation and global contacts lead to changes in outlook on life and a simultaneous strengthening of traditional values (Yeganeh, 2024).

### **Disciplinary Approaches to Spiritual Values**

Different disciplines offer different approaches to understanding spiritual values. Philosophy, for example, attempts to generalise the concept of spirituality. The inclusive definition of spirituality refers to a system of meanings ingrained in a society's heritage upon which a person's individual fate rests; these meanings ensure that an individual achieves sustainable development while adapting to changing conditions (Helminiak, 2011; Reisinger, 2025). In religion, spiritual values are inextricably linked with supernatural manifestations (Pérez & Ronde, 2022). Sociology focuses on the relationship between spiritual values and the behaviour of both individuals and groups within society (Can & Tran, 2025). Sociologists have paid particular attention to the relationship between spirituality and business ethics (Huang

et al., 2024). Modern approaches to the concept of values suggest that personal and corporate values influence productivity and sustainability (Athota et al., 2019), thereby shifting the focus from the spiritual dimension of family life to the business sphere. Given the existence of various disciplinary approaches, the term "spiritual values" does not have a single interpretation. Thus, their interpretation must be carried out in the context of specific disciplines. They can also be considered from the perspective of macro-factors influencing their development: urbanisation, globalisation, and digitalisation. What these factors have in common is their ability to influence the structure of everyday contacts and socialisation institutions, expand the range of available symbols and norms, and accelerate the diffusion of value models. As a result, spiritual values are transformed not "directly" but through changes in the conditions for the formation of identity, norms and practices. This approach is consistent with empirical models of "globalisation-based acculturation," in which global changes necessitate navigating cultural pluralism and are associated with a reassessment of meaning and identity (Ozer & Kamran, 2023).

### **Cultural and Religious Aspects of Spiritual Values**

The understanding of spiritual values varies not only across disciplines but also across regions. In Islamic culture, spirituality is almost exclusively tied to religion. At the same time, these practices are used not only in their traditional form, but also through modern digital tools. An example of this approach is the creation of an app designed to support students' morale during the pandemic through spiritual and religious practices (Dwidiyanti et al., 2021).

Eastern societies see spirituality as commitment to the common good and connection with nature. In Hinduism, spiritual intelligence is a tool for self-knowledge, whereas the Western approach to spiritual values and spiritual intelligence goes hand in hand with egocentrism and utilitarianism (Fidelis et al., 2024) – see Table 1.

<b>Table 1: Comparison of Hindu and Western Approaches to Spiritual Intelligence</b>		
<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Hindu Perspective</b>	<b>Western Perspective (modern interpretations)</b>
<b>Core aim</b>	<b>Self-realisation and liberation (<i>moksha</i>)</b>	<b>Personal development and well-being</b>
<b>View of the self</b>	<b>The self is something to transcend (the ego is an illusion)</b>	<b>The self is something to develop and strengthen</b>
<b>Role of spirituality</b>	<b>A path to the ultimate truth and unity with the divine</b>	<b>A tool for improving life satisfaction and performance</b>
<b>Relation to ego</b>	<b>Emphasis on reducing or dissolving the ego</b>	<b>Often centred on self-actualisation and identity</b>
<b>Practical function</b>	<b>Intrinsic (valuable in itself)</b>	<b>Instrumental (valuable for its outcomes)</b>
<b>Typical practices</b>	<b>Meditation, yoga, ascetic discipline, ethical living</b>	<b>Mindfulness, coaching, therapy, and leadership training</b>
<b>Philosophical orientation</b>	<b>Transcendental, metaphysical</b>	<b>Pragmatic, psychological, sometimes secular</b>
<b>Source: Authors' development based on data from (Fidelis et al., 2024).</b>		

At the same time, other regional and cultural aspects can also form the basis of spiritual values. In particular, this refers to collectivism, which is one of the foundations of traditional values. At the same time, the level of collectivism varies significantly across regions (from the highest in Africa to the lowest in Western Europe) (Pelham et al., 2022). Thus, cultural aspects and their various manifestations are considered when examining the factors that shape spiritual values. In this context, digitalisation should be seen as a separate layer of influence on spiritual and religious practices. The digital environment has a global impact on the context. It shapes a new understanding of opinion leaders and changes the conditions for creating communities, including religious communities. Thus, digital religious content influences social contacts and the creation of authority figures for Generations Y and Z (Liu et al., 2025; Missier, 2025), and, of course, other upcoming generations.

**Spiritual Values in Central Asia and Global Trends**

When it comes to the similarities in the formation of spiritual values between cultures, the regional aspect cannot be ignored. The political independence in the Central Asian

region following the period of cultural oppression under the Soviet Union also entailed spiritual independence (Yunusalieva, 2022). This liberation overlapped with other global trends, such as urbanisation, globalisation and digitalisation. In Kazakhstan, the spiritual environment is characterised by the harmonious coexistence of Asian and European cultures, relative political stability, and steady economic growth (Adilova et al., 2021). The three-factor model (urbanisation–globalisation–digitalisation) can be viewed as a set of mechanisms rather than a general backdrop. Urbanisation changes in the spatial and institutional context of socialisation; globalisation increases intercultural contact and, as a result, competition between value systems; digitalisation shifts a significant share of communication online. Thus, for example, urbanisation leads to the urban context creating specific risks and advantages for development and socialisation, changing the conditions of family life (Sen & Gredebäck, 2025).

**Research Trends and Gaps in the Study of Spiritual Values**

While the role of new social trends in personality formation and spiritual development has been widely researched, the reverse influence of

traditional values on society warrants further attention amid social transformation. Thus, there is no reflection of the approach in which issues of spiritual transformation are at the intersection of the processes of urbanisation, globalisation and digitalisation in their entirety. A significant part of the research is descriptive in nature, whereas a comparison of official statistical data with less formal surveys would provide a more realistic picture.

### **Problem Statement**

This study aims to examine the role of traditional values in shaping personality within the context of a new social reality, particularly in Central Asia. The study provides insights into the context in which the Republic of Kazakhstan operates. Exploring the impact of spiritual values on personality formation amid ongoing social changes and identifying related mediators enables researchers to make influence tools more effective. The objectives of this study are thus (1) to grasp the place of spiritual values in the modern society of Kazakhstan; (2) to identify the main social changes that take place within the country and their impact on spiritual beliefs; and (3) to explore how the influence of spiritual values manifests itself through concrete examples.

### **Materials and Methods**

#### **Data Sources**

The current work leverages statistical data from multiple sources: the 2022 dataset released by the World Values Survey (WVS), Globalisation Index (The Global Economy, 2022), UN report on digital transformation in the public sector of Kazakhstan over the past two decades (United Nations, 2025), a report on Countering Domestic Violence released by the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights in the Republic of Kazakhstan (Commissioner for Human Rights in the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024), and the country office reports on the number of marriages and divorces, number of youth and rural-to-urban ratio of young people in Kazakhstan from the Bureau of National Statistics (QAZSTAT, 2025). In addition, the study draws on social media statistics provided by Data

Reportal (BYYD, 2025) and Wunder Digital (2024).

The use of several independent data sources (international databases, national statistics, reports from human rights institutions, and data from digital platforms) aims to achieve methodological triangulation. This allows us to partially compensate for the limitations of each individual source and to compare declarative values with institutional and behavioural indicators.

#### **Study Design**

In this study, the research process consisted of three stages: (1) through a cross-sectional analysis, gaining insights into the social transformations (that is, urbanisation, globalisation and digitalisation) faced by the population in Kazakhstan over the period from 2000 to 2025 and their relationship with core beliefs; (2) examining the extent to which the values being propagated correspond to reality; and (3) investigating the role of social media in shaping spiritual values. The core values for the analysis were extracted from the WVS-7 dataset; the priority was given to the averaged data about attitudes and beliefs. The urban and rural population dynamics were examined over the 2000-2025 period (QAZSTAT, 2025). The level of globalisation (as measured by the Globalisation Index) is presented for the period from 1991 to 2022 (The Global Economy, 2022). The country's level of digitalisation was monitored using the UN's E-Government Development Index (EGDI) and E-Participation Index (EPI) (United Nations, 2025). Since the country's identity-shaping efforts are directed primarily towards young people, a decision was made to review additional statistics on the nation's youth (QAZSTAT, 2025).

The study design is explanatory descriptive in nature. It does not seek to establish strict causality at the level of individual variables but rather aims to identify consistency between macro-level social transformations and changes in value indicators.

Here, the focus was on an underlying factor that Kazakh respondents perceived as the most

important in the seventh wave of the WVS survey: family. To check whether the position of family values in the WVS ranking aligns with social reality, marriage and divorce rates, birth rates, and domestic violence statistics were reviewed. In addition, researchers compared the declared attitudes of Kazakh respondents and their actual attitudes towards religion. According to the WVS data, religion is among the declared priority values and is also an integral part of spiritual life in Kazakhstan; hence, it was selected for analysis. The choice of indicators (family and religion) is due to their empirical measurability and their representation of various components of spiritual values according to the proposed typology. At the same time, the study does not cover the entire spectrum of spirituality but focuses on its institutionally expressed forms, allowing for a comparison of declarative attitudes and behavioural indicators. The online survey was not considered a representative measurement tool but was used as an illustrative empirical module to verify the consistency between macro-level trends and young people's subjective assessments. Its function is analytical comparison, not statistical extrapolation to the general population. To examine the impact of social changes on young adults' attitudes towards family and religion, an online survey was additionally administered. The final step of the study was to assess social media use in terms of the most popular social media platforms, the largest accounts by followers per platform, and the generated content. The criteria for including influencers were a combination of two parameters: (1) an audience of over 1 million subscribers; (2) belonging to the most popular accounts in the national TikTok segment according to open ratings. The sample is purposive and focused on analysing symbolically significant actors in the digital space, rather than providing a statistical representation of the entire blogosphere.

### **Timeframe and Participant Selection Procedure**

The study covers the period from 2000 until 2024 ( $\pm 3$  years if data is available). The Globalisation Index (1991-2022) extends beyond this period, showing changes in Kazakhstan's

level of globalisation throughout the period of independence. The stated temporal coverage is sufficient to draw conclusions about the state of society in Kazakhstan, and to disregard data collected during the pandemic period, as the latter is not indicative of globalisation-induced social transformation. The year 2020 saw an increase in digital transformation, which makes it possible to assess the dynamics of social transformation with respect to the following driving forces: urbanisation, digitalisation and globalisation. The selection of participants for the survey investigating the impact of rural-urban migration on attitudes towards family and religion was based on two factors: age (that is, respondents aged 18 to 24 years) and time elapsed since migration (that is, 1 year or more). The choice of the 18–24 age group is based on the theoretical assumption that this stage of the life cycle is particularly sensitive to changes in the context of socialisation. The non-representative nature of the sample is acknowledged and limits the possibility of generalising the results; the data is interpreted analytically rather than population-wise. Respondents were recruited through emails. For the analysis of social media's role in shaping core values, it was decided to review statistics on TikTok, a social media platform with the largest number of young followers (aged 18 to 24). In addition, 11 Kazakhstani influencers with more than 1 million followers were examined. The limitation of the analysis to 50 posts per account is due to the need to ensure comparability of content between blogs and a manageable volume of quality analysis. Posts were selected chronologically (the latest available at the time of data collection), which excludes selective selection of materials.

### **Limitations**

The survey has a limited sample size of 100 respondents (50 males and 50 females). The small sample size of the online survey ( $n=100$ ) does not allow for parametric statistical generalisations or the identification of stable correlations. Therefore, regression analysis and factor modelling methods were not used in the study; the analysis is limited to comparing

distributions and identifying logical correlations between indicators. Data regarding the marriage-divorce ratio and the degree of domestic violence were limited to official statistics and do not take into account cases of non-legal separation and latent crime. When analysing the content generated by Kazakhstani influencers on TikTok, only 50 posts per blog were considered. Since it is not possible to aggregate a blogger's viewers by nationality (citizenship) and because the blogs were mainly in Russian, the dominance of Kazakh viewers can only be assumed.

The study relies primarily on descriptive statistical indicators, as its objective is to compare institutional trends and value declarations at the macro level. Similarly, the analysis of bloggers' content is qualitative and descriptive in nature and does not claim to be a full-format thematic coding with inter-coder agreement. These limitations define the study as a pilot in terms of digital analysis.

The study does not stratify the data by ethnicity, which limits the ability to analyse intracultural differences in the formation of spiritual values.

## Results

### Factors of Social Transformation in Kazakhstan (2000-2025)

Social change is a dynamic and ongoing process. In the 21st Century, Kazakhstan has been

witnessing the bidirectional transformation of core beliefs, that is, the revival of old values targeted for eradication during the Soviet period, and the rise of new values that accompany the changing modern world. This duality indicates not only quantitative changes in value orientations, but also a redistribution of their hierarchy in the context of changing socialisation. In the 1930s, the Soviet government forced Kazakh tribes to a sedentary lifestyle, which not only broke their traditional way of life but also led to catastrophic consequences and mass deaths through the production of deliberate famine (Cameron, 2016). Today, the subjects of influence have changed, and the global events have altered the course of spiritual development among the Kazakh people. While transformation during the Soviet period was forced, contemporary value dynamics are shaped by structural macrofactors—urbanisation, globalisation, and digitalisation—which act indirectly through changes in everyday practices.

In the WVS survey, traditional values (e.g., family and national identity) were mentioned more often than new values (e.g., career), with family (93 per cent) and work (49 per cent) ranking highest (World Value Survey, 2022). Overall, the people in Kazakhstan have nine major priorities (Table 2).

Variable	Percentage Frequency
Family	93
Work	49
Safety	35
National identity	33
Culture, education, science	31
Collectivism and mutual support	24
Social justice	22
Religion	22
Material and career growth	14

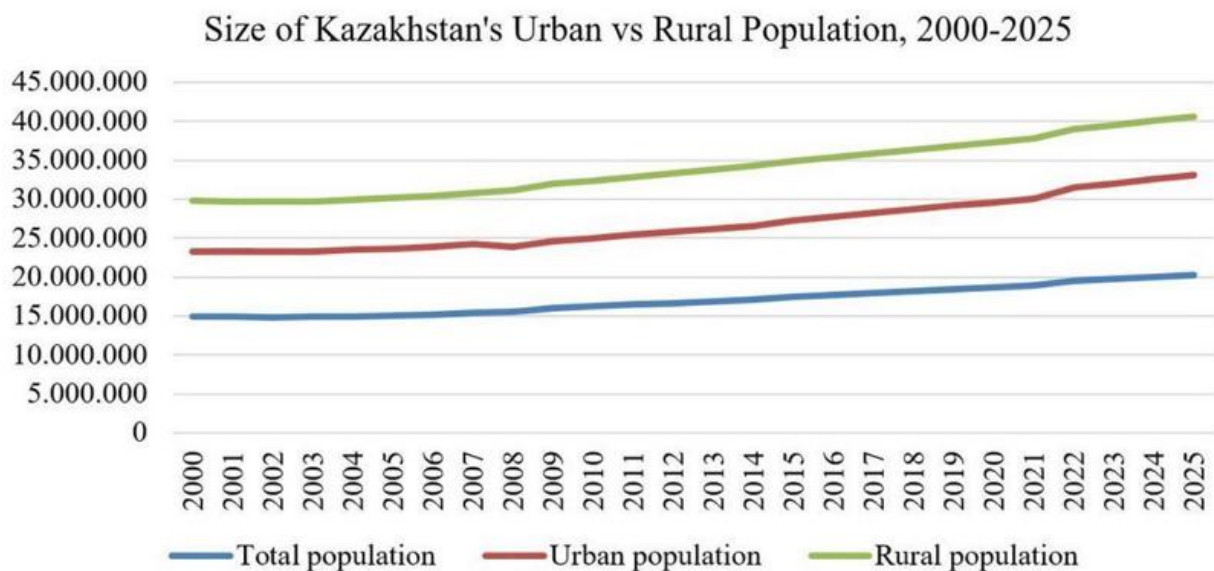
**Source: Authors' development based on World Value Survey (2022)**

The high declarative priority given to family, with relatively less emphasis on career, indicates the preservation of the moral and normative

component of spiritual values. However, further analysis reveals a discrepancy between value declarations and behavioural indicators.

The first factor underpinning social transformation in Kazakhstan is urbanisation. Despite an increase in the number of urban and rural dwellers in Kazakhstan over the past 25 years, urban regions are more populated (Figure 1). In 2025, people living in urban and rural areas accounted for 63 and 37 per cent of the total population, as reported by the Bureau of

National Statistics (QAZSTAT, 2025). This difference is likely to be even greater, as some sources predict an increase in the share of the urban population to 74.1 per cent (ULYS Media, 2024). This comes as no surprise, for unlike rural regions, cities offer more economic and cultural opportunities (World Bank, 2018).



**Figure 1: Kazakhstan’s population throughout a 25-year period**  
**Source: Authors’ development based on QAZSTAT (2025)**

The growth in the proportion of the urban population means a weakening of the traditional, close social ties characteristic of rural areas and an expansion of anonymous interactions, which may transform forms of family solidarity and religious practice among young people.

The second factor is globalisation. As shown in Table 3, Kazakhstan's position in the Globalisation Index ranking has changed drastically since independence.

<b>Table 3: Globalisation Index for Kazakhstan from 1991 to 2022</b>									
	1991	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>GI (max 100)</b>	<b>26.57</b>	<b>62.07</b>	<b>64.34</b>	<b>64.68</b>	<b>64.14</b>	<b>64.64</b>	<b>64.00</b>	<b>64.00</b>	<b>64.36</b>

**Source: Authors’ development based on The Global Economy (2022)**

The average for Kazakhstan has been consistently high since the acceleration in 199, indicating the country's deep involvement in global processes. Kazakhstan has also been recognised as a sub-regional leader in this area (United Nations, 2025). At the same time, the country’s public sector shows a steady upward

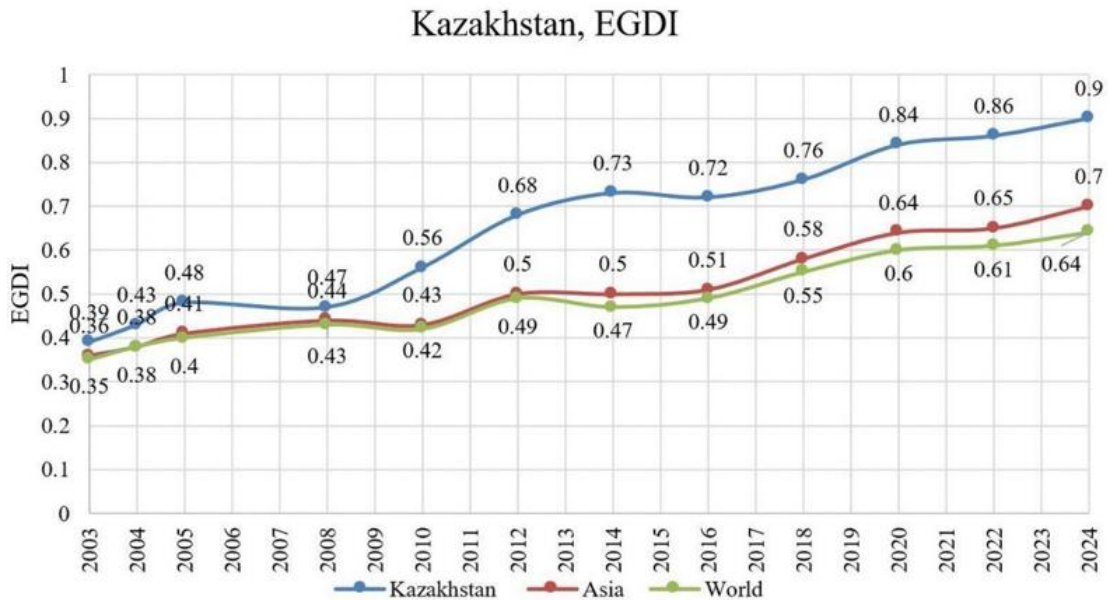
trend for digital transformation (Figure 2), paving the way for full-scale digitalisation.

Globalisation expands the range of symbolic models and normative guidelines that the younger generation encounters, intensifying competition between traditional and modern

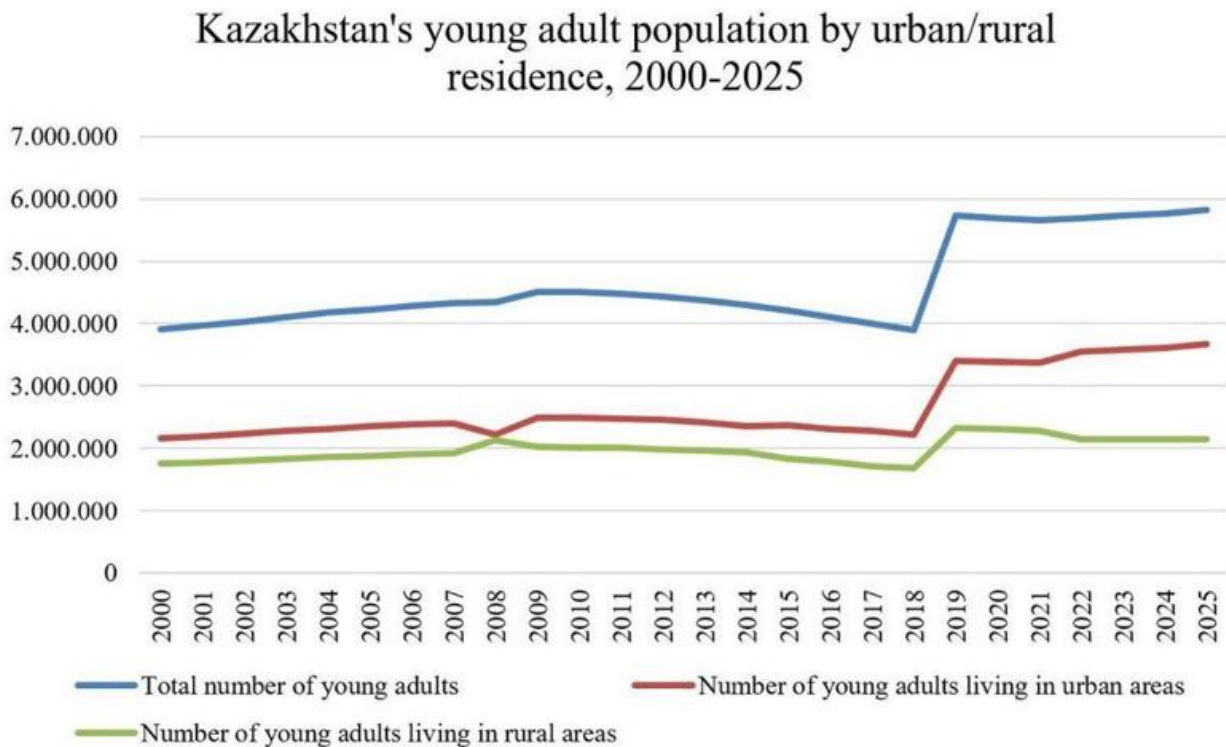
value systems. Digitalisation, in turn, accelerates the circulation of these models and makes them part of everyday communication.

Young people constitute the primary target of the interventions designed to instil core values. According to population estimates from the Bureau of National Statistics, the percentage of

young adults in Kazakhstan has been increasing since 2018. An upward trend, however, was observed for the most part in cities, whereas rural areas exhibited a downward trend. The urban-rural divide in the young adult population became wider over time, as evidenced by data in Figure 3.



**Figure 2: Kazakhstan’s EGDI values from 2003 to 2024**  
 Source: Authors’ development based on the United Nations (2025)



**Figure 3: Number of young adults from 2000 to 2025**  
 Source: Authors’ development based on QAZSTAT (2025)

The concentration of young people in cities intensifies the impact of urban environments and digital communications, making this age group key to rethinking spiritual values.

Note that Kazakhstan has been experiencing the consequences of three overlapping processes (that is, urbanisation, globalisation and digitalisation) since 2020, and these processes may interfere with the core values that underpin Kazakh society. The fact that the country is currently enjoying a surge in young people is also crucial. The coincidence of the demographic "youth window" with the acceleration of digitalisation and globalisation integration increases the likelihood of value transformation, particularly in terms of generational differences.

**Family and Religion as Spiritual Pillars of Kazakh’s Society (Social Snapshot)**

To gain an overall understanding of the effectiveness of the core values pursued in Kazakhstan, we must evaluate the extent to which ordinary citizens commit to them in their everyday lives. It is important to emphasise that

family values in this work are not considered identical to spiritual values, but rather as one of the institutional carriers of the moral and normative component of spirituality. The family acts as a social mechanism for transmitting spiritual attitudes, but does not exhaust the concept of spirituality as such. The analysis is conducted by comparing the declarative level of values with behavioural indicators that reflect the degree of their internalisation.

The actual situation does not always reflect the declared priorities. With that in mind, family and family values were named as priorities by 93 per cent of respondents (World Value Survey, 2022). The official statistics on family relations, on the other hand, cast doubt on whether Kazakhs see family as important. The divorce rate, for example, has been steadily increasing since 2000 (Figure 4), before gradually declining in 2019. The decline in divorces occurred almost simultaneously with a drop in marriages, and the annual marriage rate was lower than the annual divorce rate.



**Figure 4: Number of marriages and divorces from 2000 to 2023**  
**Source: Authors’ development based on QAZSTAT (2025)**

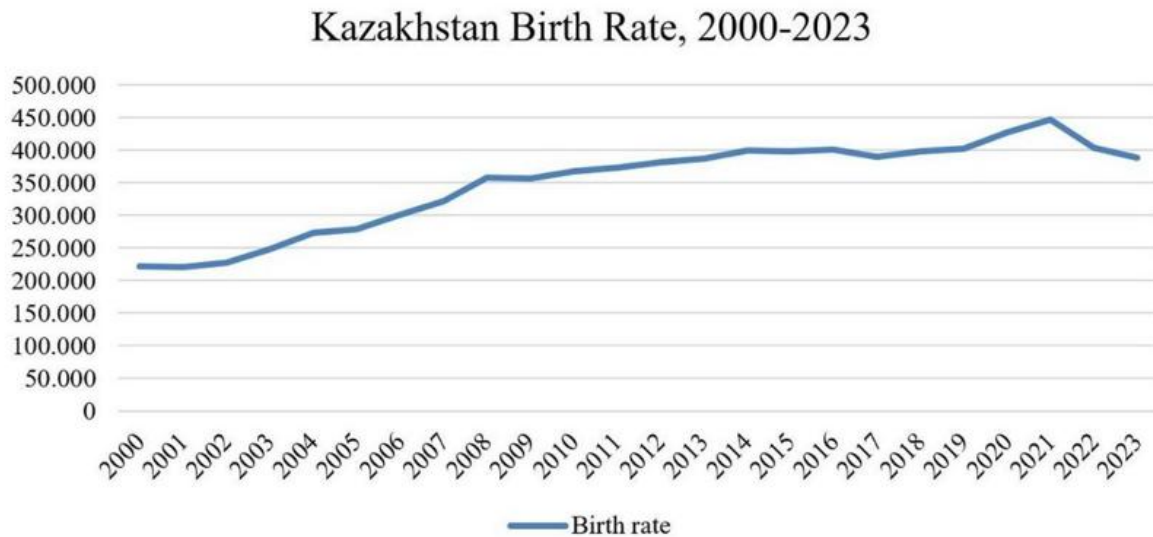
The high declarative priority given to family, with relatively less emphasis on career, indicates the preservation of the moral and normative component of spiritual values. However, further analysis reveals a discrepancy between the

declared values and behavioural indicators. This discrepancy is interpreted as a possible transformation of institutional forms of the family in the context of social dynamics, rather than as evidence of a loss of family values in

Kazakhstani society. The increase in divorces despite the high declarative priority of the family can be interpreted as a sign of a transformation in the understanding of the family itself: from a normative institutional model to a more individualised form of marital relations. At the same time, statistical data reflect institutional changes and do not allow conclusions to be

drawn about the depth of young people's personal convictions.

At the same time, the birth rate shows a steady upward trend from 2000 to 2021, followed by a downward trend (Figure 5). This variable can thus serve as evidence of commitment to traditional family values.



**Figure 5. Birth rate from 2000 to 2023**  
**Source: Authors' development based on QAZSTAT (2025)**

The decline in fertility after 2021 may reflect the influence of urbanised lifestyles and career strategies on young people's reproductive attitudes.

The level of domestic violence with lethal outcomes remains high (for more details, see Table 4).

Year	Domestic violence-related homicides	Total homicides	Share (per cent of total homicides)
2018	144	823	17.4
2019	116	747	15.5
2020	115	631	18.2
2021	141	579	24.3
2022	108	520	20.7
2023	108	472	22.8

**Source: Author's development based on the Commissioner for Human Rights in the Republic of Kazakhstan (2024)**

The existence of domestic violence indicates a discrepancy between the normative value of the family and actual practices of interaction, which raises questions about the depth of the moral and normative component of spiritual values.

However, official statistics only record legally registered cases and do not provide grounds for generalised conclusions about the values of an entire generation.

Even though available statistics imply a decrease in the severity of domestic violence, the share of homicides attributed to domestic violence is increasing. An important thing to consider here is what causes domestic violence and whether assailants understand family values and what behaviours are unacceptable in the context of family interaction. Based on data voiced in the press by representatives of the law enforcement agencies, the main causes of domestic violence in Kazakhstan are alcohol abuse, addiction, lack of morals, and neglect of family values (Tukusheva, 2024).

In Kazakhstan, the State treats family values as a cornerstone of Kazakh society. To this end, the government uses modern tools to provide families with the support they need and to ensure control over their well-being. One example is the Digital Family Map project, which enables the prompt identification and support of families at risk (United Nations, 2023).

When considered together, these data show that a declared attitude towards family somewhat aligns with the core value

implementation efforts pursued by the Kazakh government and ordinary citizens in practice. At the same time, there are areas for improvement.

As a country that has long been under Soviet influence, Kazakhstan is currently in a period of religious revival (Astana International Forum, 2025). Even though religion ranked eighth in the WVS-7 (World Value Survey, 2022), the dynamics of attitudes towards religion (Table 5) suggest that religion is becoming increasingly important in the daily lives of Kazakh people. The growing importance of religion amid low levels of institutional affiliation indicates a shift towards individualised, 'internal' religiosity, which is consistent with trends towards the personalisation of spiritual practices in the context of digitalisation. Within this model, religion is interpreted as an institutionalised form of the religious-transcendental component of spiritual values. However, spirituality is not limited to formal membership in a religious organisation, as evidenced by the high percentage of respondents who are not affiliated with any religious organisation.

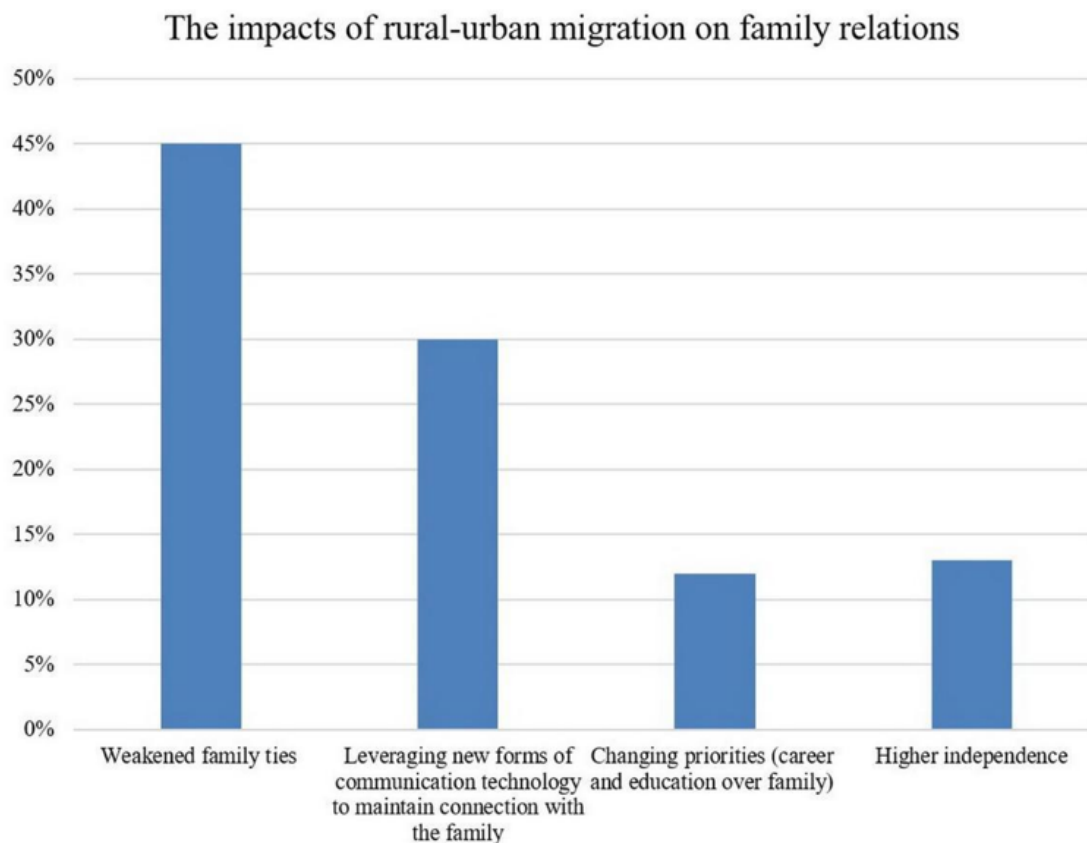
<b>Table 5: Changes over time in religiosity</b>		
<b>Importance of religion</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2018</b>
<b>Very important</b>	<b>21.5 per cent</b>	<b>28.7 per cent</b>
<b>Rather important</b>	<b>33.5 per cent</b>	<b>35.5 per cent</b>
<b>Not very important</b>	<b>33.6 per cent</b>	<b>24.3 per cent</b>
<b>Not at all important</b>	<b>11.4 per cent</b>	<b>8.9 per cent</b>

**Source: Authors' development based on World Value Survey (2022)**

More than 80 per cent of Kazakhs do not affiliate with any religious organisation, even though the number of respondents who belong to one increased by 10 per cent between 2011 and 2018. Unlike attitudes towards family, there are no significant contradictions within the data on religion. This can be interpreted to mean that the religious-transcendental component of spiritual values is increasingly being realised outside formal structures, through personal practices and digital channels.

At the same time, changes in the social environment (e.g., moving from a rural to an urban area) can also cause one's attitude towards family and religion to shift, bringing to

light how deeply these values are assimilated into society. When asked how their attitudes towards family and religion had changed after moving to a city, 45 per cent of respondents said their ties with their family had become weaker (Figure 6). This result confirms the hypothesis that urbanisation influences the transformation of forms of social closeness, but not necessarily the rejection of the value of the family as such. Some 12 per cent reported a shift in priorities from family life to career or education, and 13 per cent said they became more independent. At the same time, 30 per cent of respondents reported using digital technologies to maintain contact with their families.



**Figure 6: Family-related data from the survey on rural-urban migrants**

Source: Author's development

The results are rather ambiguous. On the one hand, almost half of the respondents argued that moving to an urban area had a negative impact on their family ties, but this consequence was natural, as it resulted from the impossibility of in-person communication. On the other hand, a third of the respondents continued to maintain contact with their family through digital means; hence, a factor in determining the strength of family ties is not cohabitation but rather a person's attitude towards family and desire to 'stay in touch' by all available means. A relatively low percentage (12 per cent) of those who admitted to prioritising building a career and gaining an education over interacting with their family after moving to a city provides evidence supporting the earlier statement.

Similarly, relocation to urban areas was reported to have affected the religious views of approximately half of the respondents (Figure 7). Changes in religious practices when moving to the city demonstrate the contextual dependence of spiritual attitudes on the social environment. While 31 per cent of the

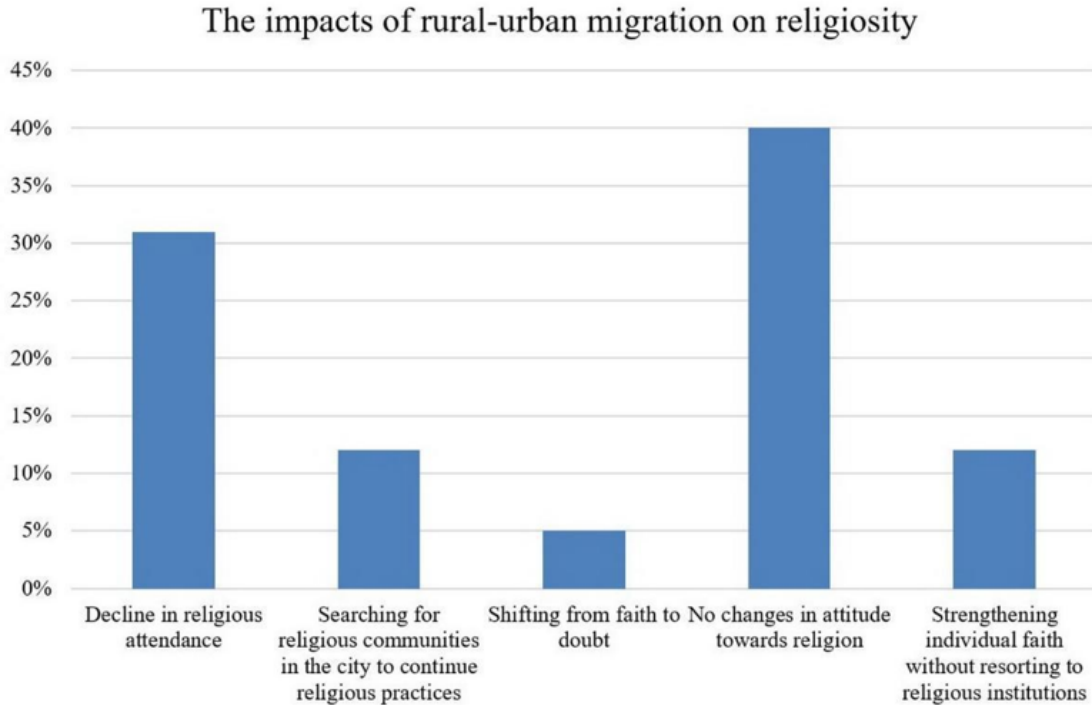
respondents complained about less frequent religious practices, only 5 per cent reported changing their faith. Additionally, 12 per cent of respondents reported that their faith grew stronger, even though they did not seek out religious groups or institutions to continue their practices. According to 40 per cent of the respondents, a change of residence did not affect their religious inclinations. At the same time, only 12 per cent reported approaching local religious communities after moving to a larger city. The most indicative piece of information is an expressed commitment to enter a new religious community as a function of religiosity. Overall, the survey data show that attitudes towards religion can change along with the social environment.

#### **Core Values Promoted by Kazakhstan's Top Influencers on Social Media**

According to Data Reportal (BYVD, 2025), Kazakhstan had 15.7 million social media users in 2025, accounting for 76 per cent of the total population. This level of social media

engagement implies that social media platforms may be used to instil and propagate core values. The high level of engagement among young people on digital platforms makes them a key channel for shaping values. The most popular social media platforms in Kazakhstan are TikTok

(14.1 million users) and Instagram (12.5 million users); the number of users across other platforms does not exceed 3.37 million (Wunder Digital, 2024). Most TikTok and Instagram users are under 34 (Figure 8).



**Figure 7. Religion-related data from the survey on rural-urban migrants**  
 Source: Author’s development



**Figure 8: TikTok and Instagram users in Kazakhstan by age as of 2024**  
 Source: Author’s development based on Wunder Digital (2024)

According to previous research, personality matures between ages 12 and 25, and one is most susceptible to external influence during this period (Van Dijk et al., 2020). Hence, social media platforms like TikTok are likely to shape

young people's personalities. Table 6 presents a list of Kazakhstan's influential bloggers across various categories, each with more than 1 million followers.

<b>Table 6: Most popular TikTok bloggers in Kazakhstan as of April 2025</b>			
<b>Name/nickname</b>	<b>Username</b>	<b>Follower count</b>	<b>Content categories</b>
<b>Алина Ким (Alina Kim)</b>	<b>@homm9k</b>	<b>53.4 million</b>	<b>Entertainment, music, dance</b>
<b>Омар Алиев (Omar Aliyev)</b>	<b>@omari.to</b>	<b>47.5 million</b>	<b>Entertainment content that requires proficiency in foreign languages; some blogs are co-created with his sister</b>
<b>Кика Ким (Kika Kim)</b>	<b>@kikakiim</b>	<b>36.9 million</b>	<b>Entertainment, music, dance</b>
<b>BIP House</b>	<b>@bip.house</b>	<b>26.2 million</b>	<b>Entertainment, music, dance, giveaways, competitions</b>
<b>Даша Дошик (Dasha Doshik)</b>	<b>@i_am_doshik</b>	<b>24.0 million</b>	<b>Entertainment, music, dance</b>
<b>Kagiris Twins</b>	<b>@kagiristwins</b>	<b>21.7 million</b>	<b>Entertainment, music, dance</b>
<b>Женис Омаров (Zhenis Omarov)</b>	<b>@zhekafatbelly01</b>	<b>7.9 million</b>	<b>Entertainment content featuring positive family moments, good-natured surprises for strangers, and moral arguments against casinos and gambling ads</b>
<b>Ерболат Жанабылов (Erbolat Zhanabylov)</b>	<b>@zhanabylov</b>	<b>4.7 million</b>	<b>Family life, relationship with his wife and children, upbringing, mutual support in marriage</b>
<b>Айсулу Нуртаева (Aisulu Nurtaeva)</b>	<b>@fancy_smth</b>	<b>1.6 million</b>	<b>Handmade, craft, design, DIY home repairs</b>
<b>Улан Усенов (Ulan Usenov)</b>	<b>@wannabeteacher</b>	<b>1.6 million</b>	<b>Educational content with entertaining elements</b>
<b>Анзор Гасаев (Anzor Hasaev)</b>	<b>@vkadre_kz</b>	<b>1.5 million</b>	<b>Educational content about the nature of Kazakhstan</b>
<b>Source: Authors' development</b>			

Out of 11 influencers on TikTok, only one (@zhanabylov) publishes content dedicated exclusively to family values (Table 7). The low proportion of content focused on moral and normative values indicates the dominance of entertainment, which may contribute to a shift in young people's focus from traditional spiritual values to consumerist and individualistic models. At the same time, this statement applies exclusively to the analysed sample of the most popular accounts and reflects the structure of

digital attention, rather than providing an exhaustive characterisation of the value orientations of Kazakhstani youth.

Another blogger (@zhekafatbelly01) focuses on moral values in general, and another influencer (@vkadre\_kz) popularises native nature, thereby fostering love for Kazakhstan.

Bloggers whose content influences the formation of core values only account for 27 per cent of the top blogs on TikTok. Thus, the digital

environment is not neutral: it structures priorities of attention and symbolic models, influencing identity processes and the re-evaluation of spiritual values among young people. We are talking about the potential influence of digital practices identified in the data under study, rather than a direct replacement of traditional spiritual guidelines.

At the same time, the follower gap between them and other content creators reveals an even more alarming trend. Entertainers have larger audiences than bloggers whose content is educational and morally driven; the former's follower counts are 2.7 to 6.7 times those of the latter.

**Table 7: Religious TikTok bloggers and their ranks among the most popular TikTok bloggers in Kazakhstan as of April 2025**

Bloggers	Content	Follower count	Rank
@zhekafatbelly01	Moral values as part of the entertainment content	7.9 million	7
@zhanabylov	Family values	4.7 million	8
@vkadre_kz	Kazakhstan's natural landscapes	1.5 million	11

Source: Authors' development

## Discussion

The trends of social development in the modern world do not carry an evaluative burden regarding their role in personality formation, as evidenced by the results of the rural-urban migration survey tracking urbanisation-induced changes in core values. These trends only create new conditions for personalities to take shape. This can be interpreted to mean that urbanisation and digitalisation cannot be viewed solely as factors that weaken spiritual values; they create space for their rethinking and reinterpretation. The changes affected both the value system and individual behaviour. Such influence is not always positive, and the fact that individuals can leverage digital technologies makes this process practically uncontrollable. One example of this is shaming, a crude form of public censure that has rather negative consequences (McDonald, 2020). This does not mean that advanced technologies have unambiguously negative effects on personality. In some cases, the digital environment contributes to strengthening religious identity through the formation of online communities, expanded access to religious knowledge, and a stronger sense of belonging. Our understanding of the extent to which value guidelines need correction is distorted, and this distortion may

stem from a generational gap. The said problem often manifests itself in cases of child abuse (Serban, 2025). This once again brings us back to the topic of family and its role in shaping spiritual values, a distorted understanding of which results in them being aspirational rather than operational. In some cases, the digital environment contributes to strengthening religious identity through the formation of online communities, expanded access to religious knowledge, and a stronger sense of belonging. In general, moral responsibility for the formation of spiritual values falls primarily on whoever serves as a source of information (Desmond, 2024), regardless of the tools used to transmit knowledge. As modern people have the right to freedom of thought and expression, one of the most pressing issues today is the admissibility of controversial theories and statements in education (Malgarayeva et al., 2025). The results of this study, however, show that social media influencers rarely take it upon themselves to promote spiritual values and instead focus on providing entertainment. In Kazakhstan, those who offer entertainment content were found to have much higher subscription rates, which can pose a potential threat to a society's spiritual stability. Nevertheless, the popularity of entertainment

content does not preclude the possibility of integrating spiritual and moral meanings into new forms of communication, which opens potential for hybrid forms of spirituality. Using social media is a promising, though unconventional, way to instil spiritual values among the younger generation. Yet, the topic of spiritual values is not as popular among viewers as entertainment, discouraging bloggers from capitalising on it (Fuhrer & Cova, 2023).

A crucial step in shaping an individual's moral character is cultivating ethical reasoning skills, which enable critical reflection on personal beliefs and engagement in moral discourse (Meyer, 2024). The present findings show that a person may have a distorted understanding of values and declare commitment to those values that underpin socially approved behaviour without putting them into action. The data from the study suggest that there may be differences between declared attitudes and their practical implementation; however, it is not claimed that such discrepancies are universal in nature. Not to mention that declared values often do not withstand competition with social problems. This takes place in the context of an ever-increasing flow of information. As the number of pseudo-experts increases, it becomes vital to develop intellectual autonomy (Worsnip et al., 2025), enabling individuals to assess the proposed values adequately. The data from the study suggest that there may be differences between declared attitudes and their practical implementation; however, it is not claimed that such discrepancies are universal in nature.

According to data from the currently available literature, modern tools for influencing society cannot be considered in isolation from each other, nor do they have unambiguously positive or negative effects. Previous research shows that urbanisation invariably affects social ties (Bandile, 2024), but the vector of change depends on how well the social networks are managed. With regards to digitalisation, it is indicated that technologies such as virtual reality are neither good nor bad for spirituality; it all depends on what people make of them (Kaewkitipong et al., 2023). Thus, modernisation

processes cannot only erode traditional forms of spirituality but also contribute to their adaptation to new social conditions.

The conceptual ambiguity of spirituality is not only a theoretical problem, but also a reflection of its multi-layered nature. Nevertheless, analytical rigour requires distinction between spiritual values and socially approved norms. The typology proposed in the study makes it possible to avoid reducing spirituality to religion, morality or cultural tradition in isolation.

There is no single concept of spirituality (Rocha & Pinheiro, 2021); whether or not something is 'spiritual' depends on the approach used. Nevertheless, the formation of spiritual values requires reliance on genetic moral principles, which makes moral education more natural and effective (Aloni, 2020). At the same time, in the context of globalisation and digitalisation, spiritual values can take on a hybrid character, combining elements of religious tradition, national identity and individualised meaning.

In the 21st Century, the appeal to the nation's genetic code finds a modern expression in the use of appropriate tags in the virtual environment. The path towards spirituality in Kazakhstan, as has been shown in this study, is rather peculiar — an entire generation of young people grew up during the period when traditional spiritual practices and beliefs, actively suppressed by the Soviet government, had not yet had time to fully revive, but the new values were already taking shape, leaving people without reliable moral support. However, it is precisely this historical specificity that creates the conditions for active reflection on values and an independent search for spiritual guidance by the new generation.

The processes of globalisation and urbanisation are a severe test for family values. Globalisation has led to a shift from the nuclear family structure to unconventional family patterns, the weakening of family ties, the marginalisation of older family members and children, and a decline in affection within the family (Rahman & Zhang, 2017). At the same time, urbanisation and digitalisation often break social bonds, depriving individuals of hope for spiritual

support. Nevertheless, an alternative interpretation could be that family ties are being transformed rather than destroyed, with forms of support moving into the digital space and becoming less formal but no less meaningful. From this perspective, a globalised society requires the development of spiritual security upon which spiritual intelligence can be built (Pirnazarov, 2024). Spiritual intelligence, in turn, serves as an adaptive tool that enables people to fit a rapidly changing reality.

The family creates a favourable environment for personality development (Kozhahmetova & Nauryzbai, 2021), so its role in society cannot be underestimated. Family values can be both a goal of and a tool for personality development; yet they are only effective if an individual lives, rather than simply declares them. Family education is closely interconnected with the cultivation of religious and moral values (Sari et al., 2023). At the same time, it is important to take into account the social context in which these values are being formed. It is precisely by taking social context into account that we can move beyond the dichotomy of "tradition versus modernity" to an understanding of the complex dynamics of value negotiations, in which contemporary Kazakh youth are active participants.

## Conclusion

The rapid social changes in the 21st Century led to a clearer division of value orientations into traditional (family, national identity and religion) and new (personal effectiveness, career growth, and material success) values. The process of core values formation in Kazakhstan has its specifics associated with the seventy-year period of Soviet oppression. Modern-day Kazakhstan has witnessed both the revival of traditional values and the emergence of new ones. The fact that these processes take place simultaneously necessitates that the government ensure that the two categories of values are balanced.

The Kazakh society is deeply involved in the major social transformations that take place in the 21st Century, including urbanisation, globalisation and digitalisation. Even though urbanisation has a substantial impact on the

formation of core values, its contribution is not necessarily decisive. Digital transformation is a countermeasure against the negative effects of urbanisation: it compensates for lost opportunities in communication and expands the circle of communication. However, only 10 per cent of respondents reported an ample change (that is, a rethinking of attitudes toward religion or a significant shift in priorities) in their value orientation amid social transformations.

At the same time, digitalisation can partially offset the negative impact of urbanisation by enabling new forms of communication and helping maintain social ties.

Findings on the share of the young population targeted by values-formation programs provide additional evidence to encourage further research in this area. Note that young people in Kazakhstan are shaping their identities amid the revival of traditional values and the rise of new ones, creating uncertainty about guidelines for spiritual living. In the thick of doing so, the young population of Kazakhstan seems to prioritise traditional values, in particular family values.

A discrepancy was found between the stated values and the actual behaviours demonstrated by the young adults. Even though Kazakhs define family as a cornerstone of society, the statistics show that this declaration often does not correspond to reality, as evidenced by the growing number of divorces and a high rate of crimes related to domestic violence. The discrepancies identified arise from comparing individual statistical indicators with declarative statements and do not permit general conclusions to be drawn about the value system of all young people in Kazakhstan.

In addition, a third of the respondents declared a weakening of the family's role in their lives after their place of residence had changed.

Overall, core values can be considered thoughtfully developed if external factors no longer play a decisive role in their existence. If the influence of the family or community weakens during the personality formation phase, the related values will continue to take shape under new conditions. An analysis of blogs

on TikTok, Kazakhstan's most popular social network, found that young people show little interest in value guidelines. The analysis of digital content reflects the distribution of popularity within the selected sample of accounts and cannot be considered a direct indicator of the overall level of interest among young people in spiritual values outside the digital environment.

At the same time, social networks are becoming an independent channel for broadcasting information that replaces spiritual values. Most of this content is entertainment-oriented, which risks fostering a superficial attitude towards traditional values and shifting moral and value orientations. It would be more accurate to say that social networks form an alternative space for symbolic competition between values, in which entertainment content occupies a dominant position.

The conclusions drawn relate to general national trends and do not imply that the value orientations of all ethno-cultural groups in the country are uniform.

### Practical Implications and Further Research

The present findings can be applied both to further research on the correspondence between declared values and actual decisions and to individuals engaged in organising educational and cultural events. The results of this study can also be used to explore ways to actively promote the spiritual formation of young people through social media. Future researchers can apply the proposed approach to assess the formation of core values at the regional level (e.g., in Central Asia) and to examine the Asia-West or Asia-East dichotomy in the comparative aspect.

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### **Ethical Approval**

The study was conducted in accordance with the rules of the Declaration of Helsinki. The study was approved by Political Science and Religious Studies CS MSHE RK.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### **Artificial Intelligence (AI)–Assisted Technologies**

We confirm that this manuscript was not prepared using AI tools

### **Author Contribution Statement**

Gaukhar Barlybayeva, Gulnara Nussipova, Aiman Keldinova: Conceptualisation; Data curation; Formal analysis; Funding acquisition; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Writing - review & editing.

Gulnara Koyanbayeva, Dinara Zhanabayeva, Zhanyl Madalieva: Resources; Software; Supervision; Validation; Visualisation; Writing - original draft; Writing - review & editing.

### **Informed Consent**

Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

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All data generated or analysed during this study are included in this published article.