

religion remained quite strong through the Soviet era, particularly in the countryside where the great majority of Kazakhs lived and live. One might expect it to grow even stronger as there is now far greater opportunity to practice and propagate the faith, as well as a greater availability of the tools to do so (i.e. the rising numbers of mosques, and the availability of korans).

There is no question that there is also a revival of interest in Islam in the urban areas of the republic. This is part of a broader curiosity about the heritage of the Kazakh people among a group of the population that was more thoroughly secularized and russified.

On the other hand, there has been little evidence of tension between the secular government and Islamic clergy, and little evidence of Islamic political activity (in contrast to the activities of the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) in Tadzhikistan and Uzbekistan).²³ Islam traditionally has been far less doctrinally rigid in Kazakhstan than in Uzbekistan, to say nothing of Iran.²⁴ This reflects the differing nature of religious adherence among nomadic as opposed to settled peoples, as well as the variable experience and date of conversion of the three Kazakh hordes.²⁵

Where the revival of Islam is significant in politics lies perhaps most of all in the perception of it by the Russian community. They are deeply suspicious of Islam, and fearful of an "Islamic threat" not merely to their persons, but to Russia itself. In this sense, the rise of Islam is a significant indirectly destabilizing factor, since it enhances the perceived insecurity of the republic's most substantial non-titular minority.

iii) Political Process

By contrast to states in the region such as Uzbekistan and Turkmenia, Kazakhstan is liberal and democratic, but within bounds. The government displays great sensitivity to potentially destabilizing excesses of pluralism (e.g. expressions of

²³ And to judge from the programmatic statements of the IRP, this is hardly a fundamentalist organization.

²⁴ In fact, the practice of Islam in rural areas retains significant components of shamanism.

²⁵ See Rene Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes: A History of Central Asia* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1970), pp.521-7; Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1987), p.19; and Edward Allworth, ed., *Central Asia: 120 Years of Russian Rule* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1989), pp.562-3.