

IRI Kazakhstan Index

OSCE and the Human Dimension

Only weeks remain until Kazakhstan assumes the role of Chairman of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and as a member, Kazakhstan has committed to respecting certain human rights and fundamental freedoms. IRI's poll explored Kazakhstani voters' perceptions about the government's performance ensuring these rights and freedoms.

The government received its highest positive ratings on allowing freedom of religion (68 percent) and ensuring equality of women and men (67 percent). The government received its lowest positive ratings on allowing freedom of assembly (42 percent) and ensuring the right to a fair trial (54 percent). In addition, 47 percent of the population said that they do not have confidence in the fairness of the judicial system or courts in the country, while 27 percent expressed confidence.

In September, a court sentenced Yevgeny Zhovtis, Director of the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law to four years in jail for manslaughter. Supporters of the human rights activist say the case was an effort to silence a critic of the government. The case was followed closely by the OSCE and internationally as there were reports about questionable procedural rulings that may have violated Mr. Zhovtis' right to a fair trial. Respondents were asked if they had heard about the trial and jailing of Zhovtis. Twenty percent of population claimed that they had some information about the case. This group was then asked if they believe Zhovtis's legal proceedings were consistent with Kazakhstani law. Thirty-three percent said the legal proceedings were unfair and 25 percent felt the legal proceedings were fair; 34 percent said that they did not know.

As chairman, Kazakhstan will be expected to work in close coordination with the OSCE's Representative on Freedom of the Media to advocate and oversee full compliance with OSCE principles and commitments to freedom of expression and free media.

Voters were asked whether people in Kazakhstan are afraid to openly express their political views. Nineteen percent of respondents said that the majority of people are afraid, while another 20 percent said many people are afraid. Twenty-four percent said that nobody is afraid of expressing their political views. The main reasons given for being afraid were fear of pursuit by the authorities and fear of losing a job.

A plurality of respondents, 45 percent, felt that the mass media in the country is influenced by powerful people and organizations, while 34 percent said that mass media is independent.

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Social Indicators

Over the past year, IRI polling has tracked a number of indicators in order to gauge the overall mood of the population. Currently 74 percent of the population believes that Kazakhstan is heading in the right direction and 11 percent believe the country is heading in the wrong direction.

Those who believed that the country is moving in the right direction attributed their answers to good security and peace. Those who said it is going in the wrong direction cited a low standard of living and bad economic conditions as primary reasons.

Twenty-four percent claimed that their economic conditions worsened in the past year, 50 percent said there is no change in their economic condition, and 23 percent said their economic condition improved. When compared to the [May 2009](#) IRI poll, the latest poll showed a decrease in people saying their personal financial situation had worsened (down 14 percent) and an increase in the number saying that it stayed the same (up 11 percent).

When respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the idea that Kazakhstan is experiencing a serious financial crisis, 73 percent agreed and 20 percent disagreed. Further, when asked if they personally felt the effects of the world financial crisis in their city or village, 64 percent said yes and 28 percent said no.

The poll notes significant improvement in respondents' outlook for Kazakhstan's economic future when compared to the [May poll](#). Fifty-four percent reported that they felt the economy will get better over the next year (up eight percent); while 10 percent felt it will get worse (down four percent); and another 26 percent felt that it will be about the same.

Issues and Attitudes

Regardless of the attention focused on the OSCE chairmanship, bread and butter issues remained at the forefront of the minds of Kazakhstani voters. When asked to name the issue most important to them, 29 percent cited inflation and price increases, 23 percent selected low standard of living and low income, and 22 percent chose unemployment and the possibility of losing a job.

While government ratings remained relatively low on some key economic issues, the poll does note some positive movement when compared to the [May poll](#). The government's performance received its worst ratings on poverty reduction with 43 percent rating it poor, followed by employment at 36 percent and housing and corruption at 35 percent. Of all the issues addressed, the government received its best rating on electricity availability (64 percent), national security (54 percent) and foreign policy (54 percent).

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Fifty-six percent of respondents rated the government's handling of the problems caused by the world financial crisis as good, while 24 percent rated their handling as bad.

When asked about President Nursultan Nazarbaev's economic policies, 43 percent stated that they have made economic conditions better, six percent believed they have made conditions worse, and 37 percent believed they have had no effect so far.

Kazakhstanis continue to get most of their political information from television. When asked about the accuracy of television reporting of the country's economic situation; 49 percent said it was accurate, while 30 percent said it was inaccurate. A majority (62 percent) of those who said the reporting was inaccurate do not blame journalists but said it is due to censorship.

A majority of voters (52 percent) believed that corruption is widespread throughout the government, while 14 percent believed it is not. When asked if they are satisfied or unsatisfied with the government's recent efforts to fight corruption, 53 percent were satisfied and 26 percent were unsatisfied.

Finally, respondents overwhelmingly expressed a desire for a better distribution of the country's oil wealth; 85 percent agreed that the government should do more to spread the country's oil wealth to ordinary citizens.

Elections

Recently opposition parties in Kazakhstan have joined forces, giving rise to hopes that a more balanced political system will emerge. Three opposition parties - the People's Party Alga, National Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party of Kazakhstan - united to form a democratic opposition alliance called For a Just Kazakhstan. The parties in the alliance plan to keep their independence but will support common projects. Respondents were asked whether they would support this alliance. Seventeen percent replied yes, 27 percent replied maybe and 18 percent replied no.

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