



# A Sociological study of the religious identity of young people in Central Asia and Europe (following the example of Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Poland)

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## Abstract

The purpose of the article is to determine the situation in the field of religious preferences of young people in the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Poland by studying the specific features and dynamics of the development of traditional beliefs in the Central Asian and European regions. The main methods used in the preparation of the work were the system-analytical method and the statistical method. The characteristic features of different areas of religion in Asia, as well as the origins and root causes of the formation and development of religious trends in Kyrgyzstan, are studied. The key moments in the history of the transformation of the Kyrgyz society in the XVIII-XXI centuries are outlined in the context of the influence of this process on the emergence of specific signs of local religious trends. Different approaches and concepts to the study of the young generation of the Central Asian Republic and Poland are evaluated by considering the qualitative and quantitative results of a number of sociological surveys. The results and conclusions of this work can be used as a basis for the development and implementation of a number of political and social reforms with an emphasis on raising awareness of the issue among the younger generation of Kyrgyzstan.

**Keywords:** religiosity, sociological survey, Islam, Christianity, ethnicity

## Introduction

Rapid transformations due to armed conflicts, confrontations on the basis of various problems, in particular, gender, ethnic give rise to quite logical questions regarding the semantic content of the future existence of mankind in general and individual peoples in particular (Hubeladze, 2023). Society in the process of its historical development, regardless of the geographical location of the state, region or continent, has always tried to find an explanation for this or that phenomenon,



object, or situation (Chorna, 2021). And religion plays an important role in finding answers to these questions. The aspects of faith and spiritual development were often called upon as a help in times of catastrophes of a global or personal nature (Spytska, 2023). The Kyrgyz Republic, like other Central Asian states, is now one of the most active subjects of international relations on the Eurasian continent. The study of the subject of the religious identity of the young generation in Central Asia and Europe is relevant and timely. The events and processes of recent years have led to an unprecedented increase in threats to national security and identity, and have created conditions for the radicalization of society. Determining the dynamics and trends in the perception of religion among young people makes it possible to monitor the situation in this area and form an ideologically correct position for the successful implementation of strategies and plans for state development.

Tolerance as a value of civil society, consisting of liberal and conservative cultural values, according to Mirzakhmedov et al. (2021), is the main condition for the free choice of religious preferences in society. Konzhak and Chebi (2022) believed that the national identity of most countries in all regions of the planet was formed due to the unification of residents around a single belief, a spiritual centre. Osmonova (2018) suggested that the younger generation of the countries of Central Asia is gradually becoming more religious, focused on the spiritual development of the individual and the formation of character. Firstly, this concerns Kyrgyzstan, where the relevant policy is being pursued. Murzakhililov (2019) acknowledged that insufficient educational activities in schools and higher educational institutions have contributed to the strengthening of radical sentiments in Kyrgyz society, particularly among young people.

Analysing the current trends in the development of Muslim beliefs in the Kyrgyz Republic, a group of scientists represented by Yusuf et al. (2023) came to the conclusion that today several new forms and types of this religion are developing in the country such as the Sunni Hanafi school of thought, Shiite Muslims (Ja'fari school of thought), Tablighi Jamaat, the Ahmadyia community, proponents of Hizb ut-Tahrir, Salafis, and Wahhabis. Strong influence on the transformation of the existing customs of the traditional Islamic faith in the Republic, according to the findings of Kudayarov (2021) are provided by Turkey and Pakistan, UAE religious organizations, which are actively functioning in Bishkek and all regions of the country.

Considering the structural state and analysing the qualitative and quantitative indicators of the functioning of various religious trends and beliefs in European countries, Galletti and Ghizzoni (2022) concluded that the Christian population is getting smaller, while the number of atheists and Muslims is increasing. According to Mazurkiewicz (2020), the influence of religion on political, economic and social issues in the European Union in the 21st century quite large, especially in countries such as Romania, Moldova, Poland. The need to search for new scenarios for the interaction of the Catholic Church with civil society, according to Wadowski (2019), is caused by the danger of a high level of distrust of citizens in religion in general and the loss of spiritual contact with the main representatives of religious communities in Poland.

The purpose of the work is to review and analyse the features of the development of modern Kyrgyz society through the prism of its attitude to religious issues by studying Central Asian and European trends in this direction.

## **Materials and Methods**

The main methods that were used during the preparation of the presented scientific work were system-analytical, historical, statistical, as well as methods of forecasting and analysis. The system-analytical method was used to identify and examine the key characteristics and features of youth attitudes towards religious dogmas, traditions, and beliefs in Central Asia and Europe. It enabled an analysis of the dynamics and major trends in how students and young people in Kyrgyzstan and Poland assess the role and influence of religion on various aspects of life. The historical method helped to summarise the specific characteristics of the policies of Central Asian states in engaging local populations with religion and utilising it as a key political tool.



Statistical data from sociological surveys conducted in Kyrgyzstan and Poland were presented, including main qualitative and quantitative indicators. The positive and negative aspects of the results were evaluated in terms of further impact on overall state development. Using the data obtained in the course of the work, the most probable scenarios for the development of the future influence of religion on the spheres of political structure, economic and social development have been developed and presented. General practical recommendations are presented to improve the quality of monitoring and control over the sphere of cultural and traditional development of the Kyrgyz society through the prism of the involvement of certain bodies and representative offices of local and supreme authorities in this issue. The assessment and analysis of the attitude of young people in higher educational institutions of Kyrgyzstan and Poland to the problems of religious education and the preservation of traditions and forms of rituals of individual beliefs in the region was carried out using the analysis method.

The surveys conducted between 2019 and 2022 were analysed in this research. The first one was conducted in 2019 by the Research Institute of Islamic Studies in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (Vulnerability and resilience of young people in Kyrgyzstan, 2019). It involved 1050 people under the age of 29 (35% schoolchildren, 25% madrasah students, 19% university students, 15% employed and 6% unemployed) in the cities of Bishkek and Osh. The survey focused on topics such as politics, religion, demographics, and socialization. Specific questions relevant to this study assessed freedom of religion, views on Muslims as the majority, and adherence to religious rules and traditions. In Poland, the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Kraków conducted a survey in 2019-2020 (Zellma et al., 2022). An online questionnaire was used to question 1171 students aged 15-20 in grades 7-9, as well as university students under the age of 29. The survey included questions about participation in religious activities. The text discusses groups/associations, frequency of visiting religious places, appealing to prayers, and opinions on offering religion classes at universities. The data for the EU was sourced from the Importance of Religion report from 2022, which surveyed approximately 1000 people per country across EU member states (Importance of religion to Europeans, 2022). The report included relevant questions that assessed the importance of religion in daily life and the levels of religiosity among Europeans.

In the process of preparing this study, various scientific sources were selected and used, the main focus of which is on the relationship between religion and other spheres of society. Such materials included: critical and analytical reviews (Zellma et al., 2022), statistical data (Migration and migrant population statistics, 2023), and methodological materials (Guidelines on the Legal Personality of Religious or Belief Communities, 2015). For a more detailed analysis of the presented topics, a number of legal documents and fundamental acts in the field of monitoring and control over various areas of religious beliefs in Central Asia and Europe were considered and studied (Concept of the State Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic in the religious Sphere for 2021-2026 (2021), Freedom of religion or Belief and Security: Policy Guidance (2019), Constitution of the Republic of Poland (1997)).

## Results

History knows many examples of the decisive role of religion during armed confrontations, natural disasters, and other catastrophic events (for example, the Crusades in the Middle Ages) (Lähdesmäki, 2022). At the same time, the attitude to this sphere of spiritual perception of the world is ambiguous: from elevation to the rank of the main decisive force in all spheres of state building to persecution and prohibitions up to criminal punishment. In order to consider in detail the role and strength of the influence of religion on different spheres of life, it is necessary, firstly, to understand the terminology. Thus, there is no single concept of the term religion. Among the many peoples in different countries, there is their own explanation for this phenomenon. In general, religion can be considered as certain actions, customs, beliefs, and ideas associated with certain spiritual experiences (Fatima, 2021). In other words, religion is a belief in the existence of higher forces that are considered more powerful than a person and control all life and spiritual events in the life of both an individual and the whole world (Artman, 2018). Based on this definition, the attitude towards religion in different countries and regions is very interesting, diametrically different from each other,



and in which the emphasis on spiritual development and adherence to religious traditions is quite different in forms, tools, and mechanisms.

Central Asia is an interesting region: being in many respects at the same time a mono-unified association, at the same time, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan have unique features of cultural development, the formation of their own independent national state (Engvall, 2020). However, the general situation with rights and freedoms regarding religion and religious preferences remains quite complex and contradictory. Due to the strong authoritarian mode of government in the countries of the region, this sphere of the spiritual life of the population is still tightly controlled. Instances of intimidation, persecution, and the imposition of severe penalties on religious grounds continue to be a prevalent practice among local authorities. The resurgence of Islam, initiated after the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), has been characterized by a significant rise in the number of Islamic religious organizations. This resurgence has now granted religion a substantial role in both the public and governmental spheres of Kyrgyzstan. In general, there is a very mobile Islamization in Central Asia, including in Kyrgyzstan. Islamization in Kyrgyzstan is carried out through the construction of mosques, the distribution of religious literature, the opening of madrasas, and the training of Muslim clergy in the educational institutions of the Arab states.

As of the beginning of 2021, the State Commission for Religious Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic had registered a total of 3,348 religious associations. Among these, 2,930 were associated with Islamic beliefs, 404 with Christian denominations, along with 12 Baha'i communities, 1 Jewish community, and 1 Buddhist community. Over the years of independence, more than 2669 mosques and 125 madrasahs have been built; in Soviet times, there were only 39 mosques throughout the country. Therefore, the religious market in modern Kyrgyzstan is very controversial, in some of its manifestations it does not lend itself to certain accounting and control (Ergun, 2022). But, nevertheless, tendencies of improvement of the situation on these issues are outlined. In particular, the possibility of expanding the access of religious figures to public life and active participation in public processes is being considered. This primarily applies to Kyrgyzstan, where the role and place of religion is determined by the most active participants in state and social development, namely, representatives of the younger generation (Myrzabaeva, 2017). Among the states of the region with the largest number of believers, as of the end of 2020, Tajikistan is in the lead – 85%, then Turkmenistan – 80%, Kyrgyzstan – 72%, Uzbekistan – 59% and Kazakhstan – 43% (Ireland, 2020). The data includes statements about the full observance of all holidays, customs and rituals, visits to holy places and religious buildings, prayers, communication with spiritual mentors.

By its size, the Kyrgyz Republic ranks fourth in Central Asia (among such countries as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan). The population of the Republic is 7 million people (also the fourth largest in the region and 112 in the world). The vast majority of the population professes Islam (90%), among the Kyrgyz there are adherents of Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism and other directions (Explore all countries – Kyrgyzstan, 2023). In the XVIII-XIX centuries, the peoples living on the territory of modern Kyrgyzstan were mainly Christians and Muslims (Karabalaeva, 2023). This situation has created unique cultural and traditional customs and beliefs that characterize the modern development of the Republic. However, in Soviet times, the union government set itself the goal of creating a new “Soviet” nation, with distinctive ideological features (Kokaisl, 2015). To some extent, this goal was achieved, but in Central Asia the diversity of cultural features, traditions, and symbols testified that even during the period of Kyrgyzstan’s stay under the control of Moscow, the country managed not only to maintain, but also to some extent develop its identity and originality.

In the first years after the declaration of independence of the Republic in 1991, movements aimed at resolving religious issues became more active in the country. It was believed that it is the sphere of spiritual development and faith that contributes to an increase in the level of consciousness and is a tool for strengthening the independence of the state. Due to the active spread of mass media (radio, television, and later the Internet), Kyrgyz society began to show signs of a new form of traditional religion, the meaning of which was to combine traditional aspects and beliefs with the





modern realities of the world, as well as the needs and desires of society. The most active adherents of the new form of religion were predicted to be the young generation of the country

(Abdiev, 2019). Being the most productive, efficient and proactive social group in the demographic aspect of the Republic, many experts, and analysts, in particular, Shukuralieva and Lipinski (2021), as well as Makna (2019), consider it promising to study the trends in behaviour and perception of the world through the prism of spirituality among young people.

The main problem of the Kyrgyz society at the moment is the threat of an increase in the level of radicalization of young people due to the activity of such groups as, for example, Tablighi Jamaat, Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami, Islamic Party of Turkestan, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Mun Church (Makna, 2019). However, due to the low level of awareness of the activities of these and other radical associations, at the moment they do not have a very large number of followers (16% for Tablighi Jamaat and less than 6% for others) (Vulnerability and resilience of young people in Kyrgyzstan, 2019). At the same time, there are trends towards an increase in the intensity of the penetration of information into the broad masses – mainly through the Internet and social networks.

For an organized and effective fight against the consequences of the radicalization of the Kyrgyz youth, as well as in order to minimize the number of ways to get information about extremists, the state has developed a certain system. So, for example, in Concept of the State Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic in the Religious Sphere for 2021-2026 (2021) refers to the main task of the country – the prevention of conflicts on religious grounds and the elimination of radical sentiments. The key tasks of this and a number of other documents (Constitution, Laws) in the field of religious policy are the creation of conditions for the peaceful development of the state and society, the setting up of a dialogue between secular and religious figures. In 2019, the Research Institute of Islamic Studies in Bishkek initiated a large-scale project, the essence of which was to determine the role and place in the life of students and youth of Kyrgyzstan of religion and all its aspects (Vulnerability and resilience of young people in Kyrgyzstan, 2019). After the study, the experts presented the results of a sociological survey conducted in the cities of Bishkek and Osh among local youth, among whom were mainly students of higher educational institutions. 1050 people under the age of 29 were interviewed (35% of them are schoolchildren, 25% are madrasah students, 19% are students, 15% are employed and 6% are unemployed) (Figure 1).

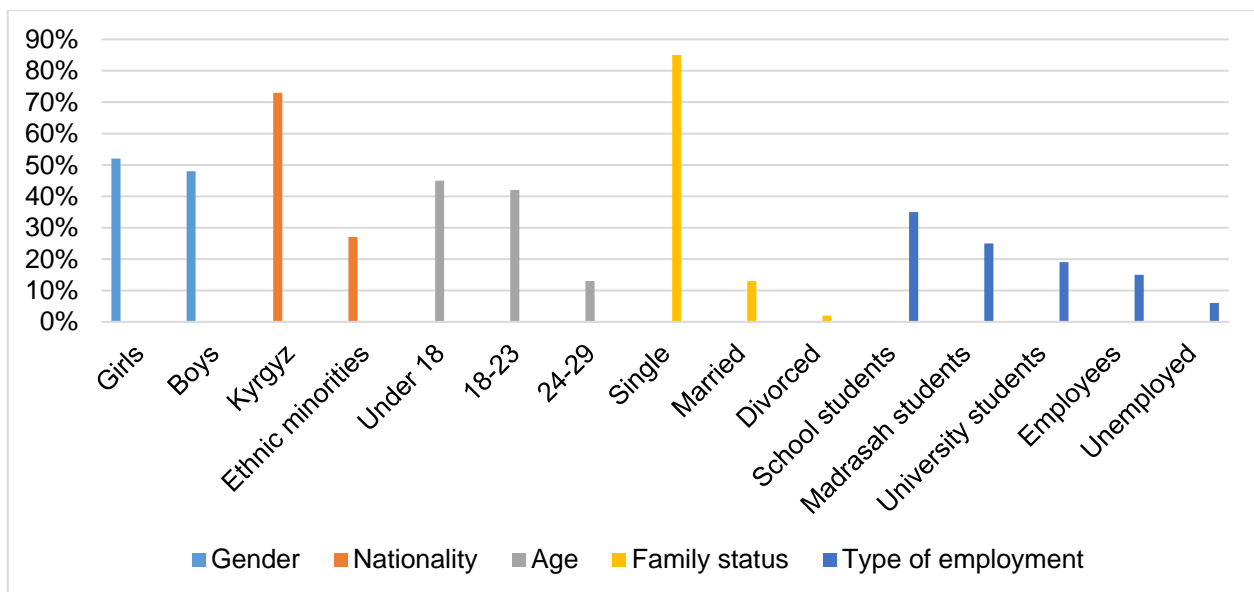


Figure 1: Data on participants in a sociological survey conducted by the Research Institute of Islamic Studies in Bishkek (2019).

Source: based on the data from the Vulnerability and resilience of young people in Kyrgyzstan (2019)



The questionnaire consisted of 50 questions, which included topics such as politics, religion, demography, socialization. Among a number of questions regarding freedom of choice, political ideas, social impulses, questions of assessing freedom of religion, perception of the position of Muslims as the majority in the state, observance of rules and traditions were raised during the survey (Table 1) based on the Vulnerability and resilience of young people in Kyrgyzstan (2019) and How do Kyrgyz youth feel about Sharia law? (2019) articles.

Table 1. Results of a sociological survey of students in the cities of Bishkek and Osh regarding issues of religion and spiritual development (non-exhaustive list). \* – on a scale from 1 (minimum indicator) to 5 (maximum indicator); \*\* – two or more answers could be chosen

Religion	
Muslims	97%
Christians	2%
Atheists	1%
Traditions	
Fast	3.73 points*
Prayer	3.35 points
Attending religious classes	2.87 points
Visiting the mosque	2.31 points
Introduction of Sharia law into the system of government of the country	
Yes	33.5%
No	32%
Difficult to answer	34.5%
Sources of information about religion	
Books	58%**
From family and friends	54%
In religious lessons	49%
From the Internet	42%
From Imams	39%
When leaving for davat	14%
On radio and television	12%
Nowhere	2%

Thus, the vast majority of respondents consider Kyrgyzstan the most loyal country in the region in terms of freedom of religion (4.08 points on a scale of 1 to 5). In second place are all the states of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan – 3.19 points, followed by Russia (2.84 points) and the most difficult situation with freedom of choice of religion, according to the surveyed youth, in the Middle East (2.3 points). Studying results of a sociological survey, specialists from the Research Institute of Islamic Studies in Bishkek noted a number of characteristic features, in particular, regarding the mood of young people towards the education system in Kyrgyzstan. their questions.

A person who does not have a complete understanding of certain problems becomes defenceless, more susceptible to outside influences, especially negative and aggressive ones. Also, the study noted the comments of some respondents about the low level of participation of religious leaders in the public and political life of the state. Many confessors and trusted persons from among authoritative imams are still forbidden to actively interfere in the processes of resolving issues in the field of social and educational life of young people (Jones & Menon, 2022). Summing up, it is possible to say that, in general, the level of religious education and the need for spiritual development among the youth of Kyrgyzstan is gradually increasing. The younger generation is looking for answers and support in spiritual practices, support in difficult periods for themselves. At the same time, low



information awareness due to a poorly developed state strategy in the field of religious education and religious culture provides the ground for the emergence and spread of radical and extremist ideas among students and young people (Alfasi, 2023). This picture, in general, is very typical for the countries of Central Asia – to a greater or lesser extent.

In recent decades, the ethnographic composition of the inhabitants of European countries has changed significantly: mass migration as a result of humanitarian disasters and military operations has created a significant percentage of a new social group, some of which are not assimilated and support the traditional beliefs of their homeland, thereby creating centres of existence for religious trends uncharacteristic of Europe (Haynes, 2022). The largest percentage of migrants to European countries are young people under the age of 35-40 years (23.8 million people (5.3%) of the total population of the European Union (EU) (Migration and migrant population statistics, 2023). Sociologists and experts from other fields from time to time conduct various studies with the aim of clarification of the religious cross-section of modern European society. Recent data indicate a sharp increase in the number of Muslim populations, especially in the central and western states of Europe. Christianity remains the most common religion in the EU (over 70%), followed by Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism. It should be noted that the religious moods of the population of the EU countries are very different: the basic factors that determine one or another attitude to religion and faith are, in particular, the level of education, gender, financial income, and place of residence (Table 2).

Table 2. The importance of religion in the everyday life of EU citizens, the amount of support among the population (as of 2022) (Importance of religion to Europeans, 2022)

No.	A country	Population
1	Greece	55%
2	Bosnia and Herzegovina	54%
3	Romania	50%
4	Moldova	42%
5	Croatia	42%
6	Portugal	36%
7	Serbia	34%
8	Poland	29%
9	Slovakia	23%
10	Spain	22%

Thus, the highest level of religiosity is common among people above middle and old age, as well as middle-aged women – with a basic level of education (58%). In general, the level of religiosity and support for traditional rites and customs among Europeans has been gradually declining since the 2010s. Experts attribute this, firstly, to financial turmoil, political destabilization, military conflicts – with those events that religion cannot influence (McCrea, 2022). It is important to note that there is no unified system of normative regulation of the sphere of religion and spiritual development in the EU. Basically, the activity is built around the national legislations of individual member countries (Chidester, 2018). For example, the Estonian Constitution spells out the task of equal and mutually beneficial cooperation between representatives of the secular and religious spheres in the country, and France (as a country with the largest number of diverse beliefs) has adopted a number of laws aimed at combating religious fundamentalism (Lähdesmäki, 2022). Although in the last decade, Brussels has become seriously concerned about the situation in religious relations, primarily because of the growing number of non-European, radical movements. So, the Organization of security and cooperation in Europe accepted a document under title “Guidelines on the Legal Personality of Religious or Belief Communities” (2015), and “Freedom of Religion or Belief and Security: Policy Guidance” (2019). The main objectives of these regulations are the development of a policy of interaction between all participants in the religious process and the state, as well as the fight against extremism and radical sentiments, to which young people are most exposed.

From the point of view of religiosity and attitudes towards issues of faith and spiritual development, studies on the attitude of the younger generation to this issue in Poland are very interesting. The country occupies an area of more than 312 thousand square kilometres (71st place in the world ranking). With a population of almost 38 million, over 20 million of which are people aged 15 to 35

(data at the end of 2022), where Poles make up 97% of the total, Poland is in fifth place in terms of the number of people living in it (Explore all countries – Poland, 2023). Poland is one of the most religious countries in the European Union: as of the end of 2021, Christianity was the dominant religion in the state (over 90% of adherents, 139 confessions); Buddhism, Judaism, and new religious beliefs are much less widespread (Figure 2).

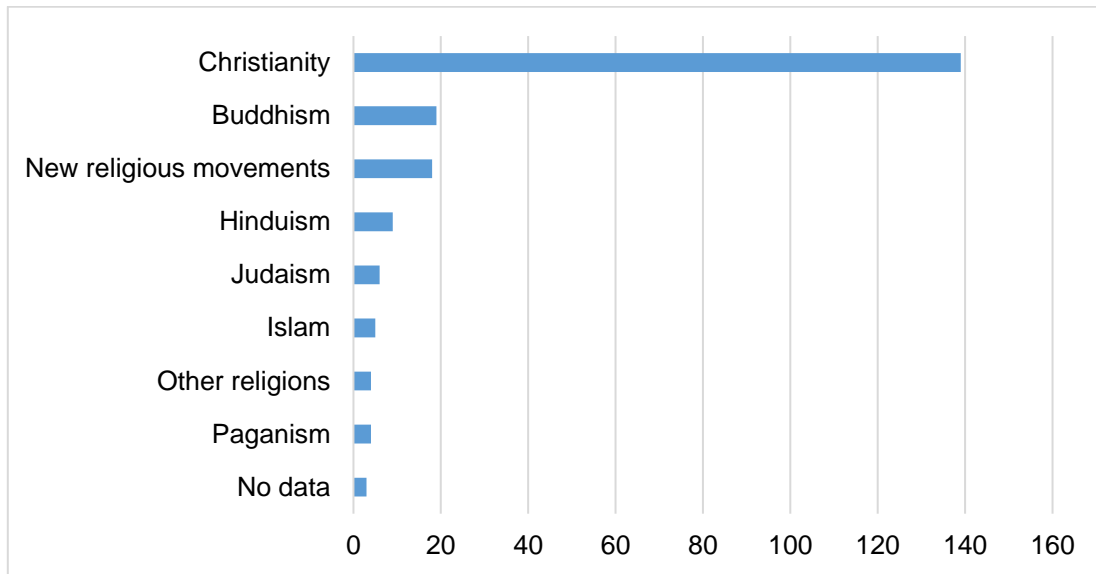


Figure 2: Number of religious directions and number of denominations in Poland in 2021 (2022)

It should be noted that the problem of the general religiosity of the Poles is the subject of increased attention of both local and European researchers. Religion is an important element of everyday life in the country, so the study of this phenomenon has very practical purposes. The legal framework of Poland in the field of religion consists of a number of documents, among which the Constitution of the Republic of Poland (1997), which provides for the equality of all churches, freedom of choice of religion and beliefs, act of 6 January 2005 on National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Language (2005), according to which the process of preserving and developing the cultural identity of national and ethnic minorities, as well as religious associations and cults, is regulated. The decisive role of Catholic forces in the country is confirmed by the situation with the ban on abortions. A law passed in 2016 prohibits this procedure under threat of criminal penalties. Poland has become one of the few countries where such rules have been introduced regarding women’s rights and freedoms, which are especially infringed upon among the younger generation. In the period of 2019-2020, Representatives of the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Kraków conducted a study on the religiosity of young people in the state. The sociological survey was organized in the form of an online survey, in which, 1171 people took part – students in grades 7-9 of the Malopolska Poland and Podkarpackie voivodeships aged 15 to 20, as well as students under 29 years old (Table 3).

Table 3. The results of a sociological survey of students in grades 7-9 of the Malopolska Poland and Podkarpackie voivodeships (non-exhaustive list) (Zellma et al., 2022)

Age	
13-14 years old	6.7%
15 years	17.7%
16 years	16.2%
17 years old	26.9%





18 years	22.3%
19-21 years old	9.7%
Over 21 years old	0.5%
Participation in religious groups/associations	
Active member of a Christian (Catholic) association	51.1%
Ordinary member of another association	16.7%
Not in groups, believer	10.2%
Not a member of groups, atheist	15.8%
No answer	6.2%
Visiting religious places (churches, mosques, synagogues)	
Often	13.7%
Often	32.5%
Occasionally	17.4%
Rarely	16.2%
Never	8.8%
No answer	11.4%
Appeal to prayers	
Often	36.7%
Often	21.2%
Occasionally	19.4%
Rarely	12.8%
Never	6.7%
No answer	3.2%
Religion lessons in higher educational institutions	
Strongly against	10.6%
Against	19.3%
Neutral	25.8%
Rather approve	27.8%
I fully approve	4.5%
No answer	12%

The results of the study showed that, in general, the youth of Poland support the traditional state development policy with an emphasis on religious principles. The tightening of control and monitoring over the sphere of religion, freedom of religion, in the majority, is positively assessed by students. Basically, the dominant religion among the younger generation is Christianity (Catholic), however, at the same time, society is open to new trends and beliefs, in particular, very exotic ones (for example, shamanism, paganism, cults of African peoples).

Such characteristics are partially applicable to other EU states, especially Eastern European ones, where the percentage of the believing population is traditionally high. Comparing attitudes towards religion among young people in Central Asia and the EU, in particular, on the example of Kyrgyzstan and Poland, one can note the similarity of opinions regarding some aspects of the issue.

For example, the level of spiritual education in higher educational institutions is an important issue for young people in both countries. Also, the population actively supports the influence of religion in the social and political life of society. At the same time, in Kyrgyzstan, the prospect of introducing Sharia law as a way of governing the state (clear control of religious leaders in all spheres of life of citizens) is supported by a third of the younger generation, while in Poland they actively oppose the church's interference in certain ethical issues (for example, abortion ban).



Practical recommendations are presented in accordance with the responsibilities of the authorized bodies and representative offices responsible for conducting and implementing possible reforms (primarily for the Republic of Kyrgyzstan), for which the following points are given:

1. Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic, SAMK (Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan) responsible departments of the state and local levels. Introduce appropriate norms and standards into the curriculum of various educational institutions, update existing programs (in madrasah – methodological materials and manuals for future imams, at Universities and other higher educational institutions – to increase the number and quality of religious studies (courses and specialities).
2. Ministry of Culture, Information, Sports, and Youth Policy. Carry out work to popularize the spiritual and moral values of the religious beliefs of traditional Islam among the population, especially young people. Informing about the dangers of radical movements and extremism through the media (television, Internet, social networks, print media).
3. State security committees, other responsible departments. Monitoring and control of the Internet and social networks for the spread of ideas of radicalism on portals and websites popular among young people. Control over the activities of foreign cells of religious organizations in the territory of Kyrgyzstan.
4. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Support for close international bilateral and multilateral contacts with religious organizations, groups, and confessions that support sustainable development and are resistant to radicalization processes.
5. Other ministries, representations, bodies. Form and update the legal framework in the field of religion. Ensure the implementation of all tasks outlined in the Concept of the State Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic in the religious Sphere for 2021-2026 [13], in particular, on financial and technical aspects.

Religion has a significant impact on shaping societal attitudes, as demonstrated by its varying influence across different regions, ranging from veneration to persecution. In Kyrgyzstan, particularly in Central Asia, there has been a notable increase in Islamic organizations following independence, indicating a significant trend towards Islamization. A 2019 survey of Kyrgyz youth highlighted strong support for religious freedom and tradition, but also raised concerns about potential radicalization linked to inadequate religious education. In the European Union, where Muslim populations are growing, Christianity remains dominant, but religiosity is on the decline. This is often attributed to various crises shaking faith in institutional religion. A survey conducted in 2019-2020 among Polish youth indicated a general support for traditional religious principles, but a clear opposition to Church interference in ethical matters. Regional comparisons reveal some commonalities, such as the value placed on religious education, yet also stark differences. Central Asian youth appear more receptive to religious governance, while European youth generally reject Church involvement in legal affairs. To tackle these complexities, experts recommend expanding international religious dialogues, revising legal frameworks, and promoting traditional beliefs over extremist ideologies through comprehensive cooperation across state, political, military, and social domains. In conclusion, these findings indicate that attitudes towards religion among young people differ depending on the context. Therefore, it is essential to improve religious education and engagement to prevent radicalisation. This requires cohesive national policies and international collaboration to maintain a balance between religious freedom and security.

## Discussion

Studying the problems of religious identity of young people in Central Asia and Europe, using the example of Kyrgyzstan and Poland, it is possible to state the following: the subject of this study, in the context of increasing threats to national identity, which exists inextricably, including with religion, is widely discussed and studied. A significant contribution to the consideration of this issue, namely, the religious self-identification of young people in the Central Asian region, was made by Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Kazakh experts. The results of their scientific research significantly supplemented the existing data on the issue under study, updated the statistical indicators, indicating a gradual transformation of existing trends and trends in the field of spiritual development. Scientists from the European Union focused in their work on a detailed examination of the changed picture of the



religious cross-section of the average European by analysing the results of sociological surveys and online questionnaires. An important result of the research work of sociologists and experts in the field of religious teachings and new beliefs, as well as financiers, sociologists, political scientists and economists, was the presentation of practical scenarios for solving certain issues related to the gradual radicalization of youth (Kyrgyzstan) and the growing distrust of the official church (Poland).

The presented work voiced the idea that the concept of religion can be viewed from several sides, depending on the geographical region, social and political stage of development of a particular state. This assumption continues the conclusions made by Fatima (2021) regarding the disclosure of the essence of such a phenomenon as religion and faith, from the point of view of sociologists, historians, and anthropologists. The author argued that it is impossible to clearly formulate a single explanation of the phenomenon, one can only outline it in general terms, since spirituality, faith, and inner development are individual for each person. A poorly controlled flow of migrants, refugees who do not want to assimilate and continue to live, adhering to their traditional foundations already in new territories, was presented in this work as one of the mechanisms for the emergence of radical and extremist movements. Haynes (2022) came to similar conclusions regarding the causes of this phenomenon and the need to tighten control of religious movements around the world. Thus, the author cited as an example the tragic events of September 11, 2001 in the United States, when terrorist acts were committed by Arab extremist groups with many victims in the name of religion. The specialist concluded that the weak control of religious movements, including non-traditional in the country, ultimately leads to such incidents. However, at the same time, it was announced that even in the case of complete control over the representatives of the religious minority, today it is no longer possible to protect the country and its population from outside encroachments.

The tendencies of strengthening the entry of church representatives into all spheres of the public sector of state development, such as the right to have a child, the choice of a form of partnership cohabitation, are intensifying as the scale of negative phenomena expands in various areas, both in individual countries and regions, and entire regions, continents. A group of experts came to similar conclusions, including Zellma et al. (2022), declaring alarming events in Polish society, when the traditional church influences the population with great force in order to form the point of view necessary for religious leaders. Analysing the results of a sociological survey conducted among the youth of Poland, the authors revealed a noticeable decrease in the level of church attendance and participation in traditional services of numerous young people, due to the strong interference in their personal lives by the supreme representatives of the Catholic Church.

The search for answers in radical and non-traditional religions and cults among young people is driven by their vulnerability to modern world threats. This is fuelled by inadequate religious education in schools, limited religious studies courses in higher education, and weak student-teacher connections in madrasahs. This conclusion was voiced in the presented work, analysing a number of scientific works devoted to the formation of Islam in the Central Asian region, its development and transformation in modern conditions. Makna (2019) also confirmed the fact that the lack of tangible spiritual support for students and young people from parents, teachers, and, most importantly, the religious elite of imams and other spiritual mentors, ultimately leads to a strong radicalization of society – due to the unwillingness of the responsible parties to delve into the problems and needs of young people. However, the specialist also called the option of transforming traditional forms of Islam into modern forms by combining familiar traditions and rituals with the modern needs and interests of young people as a security threat to the state.

The unification of the three sectors of state development (military, political and social) to address issues of religion, in order to prevent the radicalization of Islam and minimize the consequences of this process for society, primarily the younger generation, is called the main condition for the peaceful existence of both the spiritual and secular aspects. national development. Osmonova et al. (2022) and Zhunushova (2020) also came to similar conclusions, based on the results of the analysis of the Central European legal framework of the sphere and considering national legislation, in particular,



Kyrgyzstan. It was announced that in order to protect the population from excessive radicalization of traditional Islam, it is necessary to take a number of measures in three areas: military (minimization and elimination of risks associated with a security threat by all available means), political (development and updating of all regulatory documents regarding the control of the activities of religious organizations and groups) and social (carrying out large-scale work aimed at promoting traditional beliefs and the dangers of extremist groups and ideologies).

After reviewing the scientific literature on the religious identity of young people in Central Asia and the European Union, with a focus on the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Poland, it can be concluded that the issue of religious self-determination among young people and students will remain a significant topic in academic research and political discourse in the near future. The key problems that require immediate solutions regarding the Central Asian region, its radicalization, the growing popularity of extremist groups, especially among the younger generation, will be tasks in the field of education, international relations and state security. European policy, in turn, will have to be more careful and careful in dealing with the growing number of adherents of new religions, mainly due to mass migration. Excessive control and infringement of rights and freedoms on religious grounds threatens with outbreaks of public disobedience and protests. Analysing the scientific results of European and Central Asian experts and specialists, the following is summarized: only after the combined efforts of all participants in the political, social, economic and other areas of development of both the country and society, in matters of religion and faith, it is possible to talk about the normalization of the mutually beneficial synergy of the secular and the spiritual aspect of the formation of the national state.

## Conclusions

In the process of scientific research on the religious identity of young people in Central Asia and the European Union, using the example of Kyrgyzstan and Poland, the features of religious policy in the countries of the regions were studied, in particular, regarding the interaction of political authorities, public figures in relation to the spiritual education of the younger generation. It was found that the main problems of youth regarding the issues of perception of religious teachings, practices of spiritual development both in the Central Asian countries and in the member states of the Union is the lack of information support of responsible persons in this direction in the media. That is why students have to get information from friends, acquaintances or on the Internet.

The study showed that according to the population under the age of 29, in Kyrgyzstan, as in other countries of the region, religion, as a tool to combat the challenges of the modern world, is a basic element of the successful development of the Republic (the introduction of Sharia law into the processes of government). Polish youth, however, believe that the excessive interference of representatives of the religious sphere in matters of a public nature and personal data is a violation of fundamental human rights and freedoms (the law banning abortions). Analysing statistical and quantitative indicators, it was demonstrated that, despite a rather open attitude towards representatives of other religions, a single religion prevails among Kyrgyz and Polish youth: in Kyrgyzstan – Islam, in Poland – Christianity. In order to improve control and monitoring of the situation in relation to religious policy and the spiritual and moral development of the younger generation, according to the results of scientific work, it is necessary, firstly, to pay more attention to expanding international contacts between various representatives of certain areas both on the territory of Kyrgyzstan, and Poland, but also in other countries. It is also focused on the mandatory improvement and updating of the regulatory framework of the religious sphere and national legislation in general.

Presentation of practical recommendations for improving the level of control and monitoring of activities in the field of religion in Kyrgyzstan by studying the attitude of young people in the Central Asian and European region to issues of spiritual development against the backdrop of growing threats to national identity and the spread of radical ideas at the global level. In order to obtain a wider array of useful information and statistical data on the religiosity of young people in the countries



of Central Asia and the European Union, in particular, in Kyrgyzstan and Poland, it seems promising for future scientific research to carefully study the issues of interaction between spiritual leaders of different religions on the territory of these states in order to preventing hostilities and solving global problems.

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**Conflict of Interest Statement:** *The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.*



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