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WHICH NAME DO READERS STILL USE? FORMER NAMES OF RENAMED KAZAKHSTANI CITIES IN RUSSIAN AND KAZAKH WIKIPEDIA PAGE VIEWS, 2015–2026

Abstract: Several cities of Kazakhstan have changed their names: Semey was Semipalatinsk until 2007, Astana was Nur-Sultan from 2019 to 2022, and Konaev was Kapshagay until 2022. This paper asks how many readers still reach the Wikipedia article about such a city through a former name, how fast that share falls, and whether it differs between the Russian and the Kazakh Wikipedia. A title that only redirects to the article keeps its own count of page views, so the views of each former name can be separated. The study uses monthly page views of human readers from the public Wikimedia Pageviews API for 88 titles from July 2015 to September 2026, for the 14 cities and their names in the author's own list. Before the full data were downloaded, and with only the two Semipalatinsk figures quoted when the study was proposed to him, the author forecast that Nur-Sultan would fade fastest, that Semipalatinsk would last longest, and that former Russian names would be almost absent from the Kazakh Wikipedia. In the Russian Wikipedia in 2025, 6.4% of the views of the Semey article came through Semipalatinsk, 3.3% of the views of the Konaev article through Kapshagay and 1.2% of the views of the Astana article through Nur-Sultan. Over 2023–2025 the share through Nur-Sultan fell by about 20% a year and, less clearly, through Kapshagay by about 9%, while the shares through Semipalatinsk and through redirects that are other spellings and Kazakh forms of current names did not fall. Over 2016–2025 the Semipalatinsk share halved, but such redirects also lost share (4% to 12% a year), so how much of this decline is the name fading cannot be separated. In the Kazakh Wikipedia the two former Russian names that exist, Semipalatinsk and Alma-Ata, carried 0.18% and 0.09% of views in 2025. Kapshagay, which exists there in Kazakh spelling, had a median monthly share of 3.05% in 2023–2025, close to its 3.65% in the Russian Wikipedia, while Nur-Sultan, also in Kazakh spelling, stayed below 0.4% a year in 2023–2025. Former names of Kazakhstani cities remain a route by which a minority of readers reach the city articles, mostly in the Russian Wikipedia.

Keywords: toponymy, renaming, Kazakhstan, Wikipedia, page views, redirects

Introduction

The author describes how he became interested in the question in a paragraph he wrote on 15 October 2026, after he had chosen the study: "I belong to a generation for whom these cities have had their new names from the very start: for me Semey has always been Semey, Astana has been Astana, and I quickly stopped calling Konaev Kapchagay. But as soon as I talk with older people, other names come up: Semipalatinsk, Tselinograd, Chimkent, Kustanai. They say them not out of principle but out of habit, especially when they speak Russian. I became curious whether these names leave together with a generation or keep

living, and this can be checked by how people look up cities in Wikipedia" (original in the Note).

Kazakhstan has renamed many places since independence. A study of the north of the country compared the late-Soviet and the present map and described renaming there as part of a state policy of "cultural sovereignization" [11]. Several large cities were renamed, and some were renamed more than once. Semipalatinsk became Semey in 2007 [16]. The capital, Astana, was renamed Nur-Sultan on 23 March 2019 [13] and renamed back to Astana on 17 September 2022 [14]. Kapshagay in Almaty region was renamed Konaev on 3 May 2022 [15]. Other cities have a Kazakh and a Russian form of the same name in everyday use, such as Өскемен and Усть-Каменогорск (Oskemen and Ust-Kamenogorsk).

A decree changes a name on maps and documents, but it does not decide which name people use. Research on place names has moved beyond the origin and classification of names to the politics of naming [9]. In Bucharest, a market kept its socialist-era name in everyday use more than two decades after it was renamed; the authors found little evidence of conscious resistance and explained the persistence mainly by habit [10]. In Vinnytsia, Ukraine, a study of streets renamed in the 1990s, in 2015–2016 and in 2022 used a social experiment with passers-by, real-estate advertisements and interviews; it concluded that the move to new names takes several years or even decades, and that people's continued use of old names may be driven almost entirely by motives unrelated to ideology or politics [17]. This paper uses a record of such use that already exists for whole cities: how readers reach Wikipedia articles.

Wikipedia page views are published for every article and every month and have been used to measure public attention, for example to predict the box office success of films [7] and to monitor and forecast disease, using the language edition of Wikipedia as a proxy for location [8]. For the question of names, redirects are the key. A redirect is a Wikipedia page that only sends the reader on to an article, for example from an alternative spelling, a translation or a former name; when an article is renamed, MediaWiki creates a redirect in place of the old title, and redirects also help search engines and Wikipedia's own search box find the right page [6]. Wikimedia counts a view that arrives through a redirect under the title of the redirect, not under the title of the article [1, 2]. Hill and Shaw showed that ignoring redirects can change the results of Wikipedia research [6]. Here this property is used directly: the views of the redirect "Семипалатинск" are readers who typed, searched or clicked that name and then read the article "Семей".

Which name people use also matters for computers. A recent study found that the answers of large language models about the same entity often change when only its name changes, for example to an alias taken from Wikipedia redirects, and that the frequency of a name is linked to accuracy [12].

The paper asks three questions: (1) what share of the views of a renamed Kazakhstani city's Wikipedia article arrives through a former name; (2) how fast that share falls after the renaming; and (3) whether it differs between the Russian and the Kazakh Wikipedia.

The author's forecast

On 24 September 2026, for an earlier project, the author wrote down 14 Kazakhstani cities with the names that, in his experience, are in real use: Алматы and Алма-Ата, Астана and Нур-Султан, Өскемен and Усть-Каменогорск, Семей and Семипалатинск, Орал and Уральск, Петропавл and Петропавловск, Қостанай and Костанай, Қарағанды and Караганда, Қонаев with Капшагай and Капчагай, Балқаш and Балхаш, Екібастұз and

Экибастуз, Байқоңыр and Байконур, Түркістан and Туркестан, and Ақтөбе and Актобе. On 13 October 2026 he chose the present study from five research directions proposed by his mentors. The description of this direction gave one example: in the Russian Wikipedia, 12.7% of the views of the article about Semey came through the name Semipalatinsk in 2016 and 6.4% in 2025. He was then asked, before the calculations, which former name on his list would fade fastest, which would last longest and why, and whether the two Wikipedias would differ. On 15 October 2026 he answered: "'Nur-Sultan' will go fastest: the capital had this name for only three years, the name was political, and the return to 'Astana' in 2022 was covered by all the media, so people did not have to get used to anything new. 'Semipalatinsk' will last longest: the city is known under this name outside Kazakhstan because of the nuclear test site, and the name stands in thousands of historical texts and in old links. The difference between the Wikipedias will be large: in the Kazakh one there will be almost no old Russian names, because in Kazakh these cities were called Semey, Aqtöbe or Shymkent even in Soviet times, and the old name lives on mainly among those who think about the city in Russian" (original in the Note). The full set of page views for this study was downloaded on the morning of 16 October 2026, about ten hours after the forecast had been received. The forecast was therefore not blind: the only figures from the data he had been given were the two Semipalatinsk figures quoted in the description of the direction.

The forecast contains three claims that the data can test: (F1) of the former names on his list, Nur-Sultan declines fastest; (F2) Semipalatinsk stays in use longest; (F3) the Kazakh Wikipedia shows far smaller shares of former Russian names than the Russian Wikipedia. The reasons he gives (media coverage, the test site, historical texts) are explanations that page views cannot test directly.

Data and methods

Titles. For each of the 14 cities, the article about the city was identified in the Russian (ru) and in the Kazakh (kk) Wikipedia, together with three groups of redirects to it: redirects that spell the current name in another way (capital letters, "X қаласы" (X city), a dash or an explanation in brackets); redirects that carry the other name from the author's list exactly as he wrote it; and, where his exact string does not exist, the closest existing redirect (for example "Оскемен" instead of "Өскемен" in the Russian Wikipedia). Other former names of the same cities that exist as redirects (Целиноград, Акмола and Акмолинск for Astana, Кустанай for Kostanay, Актюбинск and Актюбе for Aktobe, Новоилийск for Konaev) were added as a separate group. Every title was checked through the MediaWiki Action API of each Wikipedia [3]: on 16 October 2026 all 88 titles in the sets existed, and every redirect led to the right article. The same API gave the log of article moves (renamings of pages) and, for each redirect, the number of articles that link to it on 16 October 2026. Whether the former-name redirects of the Russian Wikipedia had been redirects during the whole period was checked afterwards in their revision histories and the move log: "Семипалатинск", "Кустанай", "Актюбинск", "Актюбе" and "Целиноград" were redirects throughout, but "Акмола" was the disambiguation page of that name until 19 September 2022, so it is counted only from October 2022.

Page views. Monthly page views for each title, July 2015 to September 2026, were downloaded from the Wikimedia Pageviews API with the agent type "user" [1], which excludes traffic from programs that identify themselves as bots ("spider") and, since 29 April 2020, traffic identified as automated by other signs ("automated") [1, 4]. A page view is

counted under the title that the reader requested, so the views of a redirect are separate from the views of the article [2]. For the three former names on the list, the Russian Wikipedia views were also downloaded separately for desktop computers, the mobile web and the mobile apps on 26 October 2026.

The share through a name. For a city in one Wikipedia, the views of all titles in its set were added up per month, and the share through a name is the views of the redirects with that name divided by the views of the whole set, summed over a calendar year. Months in which the article was titled with a name other than a form of its current name, for all or part of the month, were left out. While the Astana article was itself titled Nur-Sultan (in the Russian Wikipedia from 23 March 2019 to 17 September 2022, in the Kazakh one from 14 May 2019 as "Нұр-Сұлтан" to 16 September 2022, according to the move logs; a move to "Нұрсұлтан (қала)" on 20 March 2019 was reverted the next day), the name Nur-Sultan was the article, not a redirect, so these months are reported separately. Before 23 March 2019 the Russian title "Нур-Султан" was an article about another subject, moved away that day, so its earlier views are not counted. As a check, the method gives 20,778 views through "Семипалатинск" out of 163,102 for the whole set in 2016 (12.74%) and 11,320 out of 176,657 in 2025 (6.41%), the same values as in the description the author was given.

Trends. The rate of decline was measured as the slope of the logarithm of the yearly share over full calendar years (2016 to 2025, or 2023 to 2025 for the names that became redirects in 2022) and is reported as a percentage change per year. Because three yearly values are very few, the slope was also fitted to the 36 monthly shares of 2023 to 2025, and a 95% interval was obtained by a moving-block bootstrap (blocks of six months, 5,000 resamples), which keeps the dependence between neighbouring months. The same was done for the number of views through each name. Because a share can also fall for reasons unrelated to a name, for example if readers move to devices that pass through redirects less often, the same share was computed as a benchmark for all redirects to the six Russian Wikipedia city articles whose city was not renamed in the period (Almaty, Oskemen, Petropavl, Karaganda, Ekibastuz and Baikonur), once with and once without "Алматы", the current official name. These redirects are other spellings and Kazakh forms of current names, which, it is assumed, readers do not forget in the way they may forget a former name. All calculations were done with the Python standard library.

Results

Which names can be measured

A name can be measured only if it exists in that Wikipedia as a redirect to the city article. Table 1 shows that this holds for 9 of the 14 pairs in the Russian Wikipedia and 6 in the Kazakh one. In the Kazakh Wikipedia most Russian forms from the list have no redirect at all, including "Капшагай" and "Капчагай"; the Kazakh spelling of the same former name, "Қапшағай", exists and was used. For Балқаш (Balkhash), Түркістан (Turkistan) and Орал (Oral) neither Wikipedia gives a measurable pair. In the Russian Wikipedia six articles (Almaty, Oskemen, Petropavl, Karaganda, Ekibastuz, Baikonur) are titled with the Russian form of the name, so there the other name in the list is a Kazakh form or the current official name, not a former one. The former official names on his list are therefore Semipalatinsk, Nur-Sultan and Kapshagay (Kapchagay), and in the Kazakh Wikipedia also Alma-Ata.

Table 1. Article titles and the measured other name for each city on the author's list

City	ru: article	ru: other name	kk: article	kk: other name
Almaty	Алма-Ата	Алматы, Алмата	Алматы	Алма-Ата
Astana	Астана	Нур-Султан, Нурсултан (город)	Астана	Нұр-Сұлтан
Oskemen	Усть-Каменогорск	Оскемен, Эскемен	Өскемен	Усть-Каменогорск
Semey	Семей	Семипалатинск	Семей	Семипалатинск
Oral	Уральск	–	Орал	–
Petropavl	Петропавловск	Петропавл, Петропавль	Петропавл	Петропавловск
Kostanay	Костанай	–	Қостанай	–
Karaganda	Караганда	Қарағанды, Караганды	Қарағанды	–
Konaev	Конаев (город)	Капшагай, Капчагай	Қонаев (қала)	Қапшағай
Balkhash	Балхаш (город)	–	Балқаш (қала)	–
Ekibastuz	Экибастуз	Екибастуз, Экибас-Туз	Екібастұз	–
Baikonur	Байконур (город)	Байконыр, Байконыр (город)	Байқоңыр (қала)	–
Turkistan	Туркестан (город)	–	Түркістан (қала)	–
Aktobe	Актобе	–	Ақтөбе	–

* "–": no redirect with the other name from the list exists (in the Russian Wikipedia "Орал" is a disambiguation page). The former names Кустанай (Kostanay) and Актюбинск, Актюбе (Aktobe) were measured separately.

Former names: levels and trends

Table 2 and Figure 1 show the share of views through each former name. In the Russian Wikipedia, Semipalatinsk carried 15.9% of the views of the Semey article in the second half of 2015 and 12.7% in 2016, eight to nine years after the renaming, and 6.4% in 2025. The decline stopped in 2023: the share was 5.2% in 2023, 5.6% in 2024, 6.4% in 2025 and 6.9% in January to September 2026, while the number of views through the name stayed between 11,300 and 11,800 a year and the views of the whole set fell from 224,841 in 2023 to 176,657 in 2025. Kapshagay carried 4.0% in 2023 and 3.3% in 2025, and Nur-Sultan 1.9% and 1.2%. The earlier former names of the capital (Tselinograd, Akmola and Akmolinsk, counted together) carried 1.3% in 2016 and 1.1% in 2025. Two former names that are not on the author's list of 24 September, although he mentions Kustanai in his paragraph of 15 October, show no clear trend: Kustanai carried 2.5% of the views of the Kostanay article in 2016, 1.6% in 2020 and 2.3% in 2025, and Aktyubinsk with Aktyube carried 4.2% of the views of the Aktobe article in 2016, 2.3% in 2018 and 4.2% in 2025. The views through these two names fell over the same years, by 15% and 39%, and part of their recent rise in share comes from falling totals: the Aktobe set had 215,131 views in 2023 and 158,020 in 2025.

Table 2. Share of views of the city article that arrives through a former name, %, and views through the name in 2025

Former name (Wikipedia)	2016	2023	2024	2025	2026, Jan–Sep	Views, 2025	Linking articles
Семипалатинск (ru)	12.74	5.23	5.64	6.41	6.88	11,320	658
Капшагай, Капчагай (ru)	–	4.00	3.44	3.28	3.69	2,263	90
Нур-Султан (ru)	–	1.94	1.34	1.24	1.13	6,587	8,528
Целиноград, Акмола, Акмолинск (ru)	1.32	0.68	0.93	1.05	1.05	5,572	257
Кустанай (ru)	2.51	2.50	2.05	2.27	2.15	3,277	166
Актюбинск, Актюбе (ru)	4.20	2.87	3.41	4.24	3.54	6,696	329
Семипалатинск (kk)	0.03	0.01	0.00	0.18	0.39	21	0
Қапшағай (kk)	–	3.16	2.57	3.83	1.94	160	47
Нұр-Сұлтан (kk)	–	0.18	0.10	0.34	0.53	170	19
Алма-Ата (kk)	0.08	0.01	0.02	0.09	0.33	33	11

* "–": the name was not yet a redirect to the article. "Акмола" is counted from October 2022, when it became a redirect. Linking articles: articles of that Wikipedia that link to the redirect, on 16 October 2026.

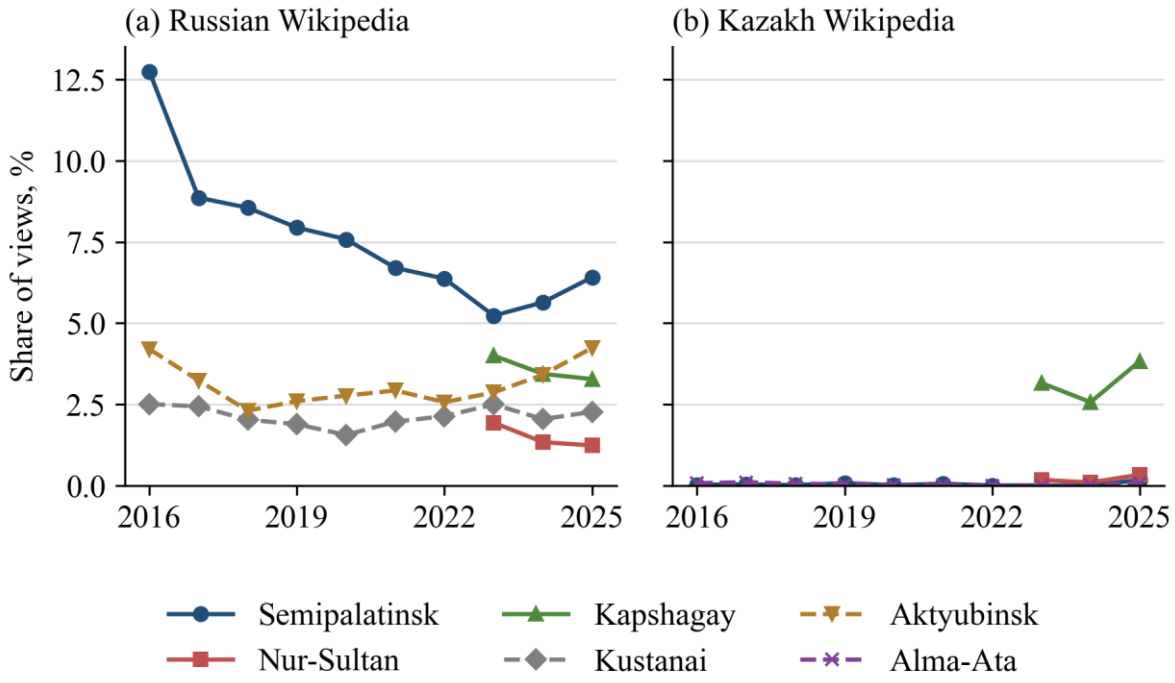


Figure 1. Share of views of the city article that arrives through a former name, by year, in the Russian (a) and Kazakh (b) Wikipedia, full calendar years 2016–2025 (agent type "user"). Nur-Sultan and Kapshagay became redirects in 2022 and are shown from 2023. Kustanai and Aktyubinsk are former names not on the author's list. In panel (b) the lines for Semipalatinsk, Nur-Sultan and Alma-Ata lie close to zero.

Table 3 gives the rates of change. Over 2023–2025 the share through Nur-Sultan fell by about 20% per year and the views through it by about 37% per year, faster than for Kapshagay

(about 9% and 22%). Most of the fall of Nur-Sultan came from 2023 to 2024 (−31%, then −7.5% from 2024 to 2025, against −14% and −5% for Kapshagay). Over the same years the share through Semipalatinsk rose while its views stayed flat, and the benchmark redirects also gained share (+3.5% per year without "Алматы", +6.3% with it). For Nur-Sultan the fall is clear on both kinds of device: from 2.10% to 1.52% of desktop views and from 1.91% to 1.16% of mobile-web views between 2023 and 2025. For Kapshagay it is smaller and seen mainly on the mobile web (from 3.68% to 2.84%), hardly on desktop computers (from 4.98% to 4.81%), so the decline of Kapshagay is less certain than that of Nur-Sultan. The monthly fits give almost the same rates as the yearly ones, but the intervals for Nur-Sultan and Kapshagay overlap.

Over the whole decade 2016–2025, Semipalatinsk lost 7.3% of its share per year. The benchmark redirects lost 12.1% per year without "Алматы" (0.56% of views in 2016, 0.19% in 2025), with the same sharp step from 2016 to 2017 (−27%, against −30% for Semipalatinsk), but only 4.1% per year with it, while the other former names measured over the decade changed little (Table 3). Readers also moved from desktop computers to phones: desktop computers gave 58% of the views of the Semey set in 2016 and 24% in 2025. Within each kind of device the share through Semipalatinsk also fell (from 15.5% to 7.2% on desktop computers and from 8.8% to 6.2% on the mobile web), so the move to phones explains only a small part of the decline. Since 2023 the mobile apps have recorded almost no views through any redirect (none through Semipalatinsk in 2023, 64 in 2025). Part of the long decline of Semipalatinsk is therefore shared with redirects in general, and how much of it is the name fading cannot be separated with these data.

Table 3. Rate of change of the share of views and of the views through a former name, % per year

Former name (ru)	Period	Share, yearly fit	Share, monthly fit [95% interval]	Views, monthly fit [95% interval]
Нур-Султан	2023–2025	−20.1	−19.7 [−32.3; −7.4]	−36.6 [−43.2; −30.1]
Капшагай, Капчагай	2023–2025	−9.4	−8.3 [−19.9; −5.0]	−21.8 [−31.6; −17.9]
Семипалатинск	2023–2025	+10.7	+10.7 [+4.1; +17.6]	−1.8 [−9.3; +3.5]
Benchmark without "Алматы"	2023–2025	+3.5	–	–
Benchmark with "Алматы"	2023–2025	+6.3	–	–
Семипалатинск	2016–2025	−7.3	−7.2 [−9.4; −5.0]	−5.1 [−6.3; −2.9]
Benchmark without "Алматы"	2016–2025	−12.1	–	–
Benchmark with "Алматы"	2016–2025	−4.1	–	–
Целиноград, Акмола, Акмолинск	2016–2025	−1.4	–	–
Кустанай	2016–2025	−0.3	–	–
Актюбинск, Актюбе	2016–2025	+0.9	–	–

* Benchmark: the redirects in the title sets of the Russian Wikipedia articles about Almaty, Oskemen, Petropavl, Karaganda, Ekibastuz and Baikonur. The yearly fits for Kustanai and Aktyubinsk are uncertain (approximate ±2 standard errors: −3.7 to +3.2 and −3.7 to +5.8).

The capital also allows the opposite comparison. While its article in the Russian Wikipedia was titled Nur-Sultan, the share of views that still arrived through the redirect "Астана" fell from 6.2% in 2019 (nine months) to 4.0% in 2020, 3.3% in 2021 and 2.9% in 2022 (eight months); in the Kazakh Wikipedia it was 5.8% in 2019, 2.9% in 2020, 1.8% in 2021 and 2.3% in 2022. In the Russian Wikipedia, about three years after each change, 2.9% (2022) and 1.2% (2025) of views still arrived through the other name.

Kazakh and Russian forms of current names

The other names on the list that are not former names behave differently. In the Russian Wikipedia the Kazakh forms Оскемен, Петропавл, Қарағанды, Екибастуз and Байконыр each carried 0.1% of views or less in 2025 (between 51 and 167 views a year). The exception is Almaty: its Russian Wikipedia article is titled "Алма-Ата", and the current official name "Алматы" (with "Алмата") brought 4.4% of its views in 2016 and 3.4% in 2025. In the Kazakh Wikipedia the Russian forms Усть-Каменогорск and Петропавловск carried 0.1% and 0.8% in 2025, that is 16 and 41 views, and most Russian forms on the list do not exist there as redirects at all.

The two Wikipedias and the case of Kapshagay

The difference between the Wikipedias is large for the former names that are Russian words. In 2025 Semipalatinsk carried 6.41% of views in the Russian and 0.18% in the Kazakh Wikipedia, and in the Kazakh Wikipedia Alma-Ata carried 0.09%. Over the 36 months of 2023–2025, the median monthly share through Semipalatinsk in the Kazakh Wikipedia was 0.00% and through Alma-Ata 0.02%. The Russian spellings of the third former name on the list, "Капшагай" and "Капчагай", do not exist in the Kazakh Wikipedia.

Two former names exist in the Kazakh Wikipedia in Kazakh spelling, "Нұр-Сұлтан" and "Қапшағай", and they behave differently (Table 2): Nur-Sultan carried well under half a percent of views in 2023–2025, Kapshagay about as much as in the Russian Wikipedia. Month by month over 2023–2025 the median share through Kapshagay was 3.05% in the Kazakh and 3.65% in the Russian Wikipedia, and the Kazakh share was the higher one in 11 of 36 months. In January to September 2026 it was 1.94% in the Kazakh and 3.69% in the Russian Wikipedia. The Kazakh numbers are small: a median of 17.5 views a month through "Қапшағай" in 2023–2025 (between 4 and 63), and 41 views in January to September 2026. They are also too small to rank the decline of the two names in the Kazakh Wikipedia: the views through "Нұр-Сұлтан" were 348, 130 and 170 and through "Қапшағай" 375, 214 and 160 in 2023, 2024 and 2025.

The Kazakh Wikipedia city articles also recorded far fewer views. The views of each of the 14 Kazakh city title sets fell by between 33% and 62% from 2024 to 2025 (Almaty from 87,488 to 37,727, Astana from 129,706 to 49,338, Semey from 23,844 to 11,779, Konaev from 8,339 to 4,176), much more than in the Russian Wikipedia (Semey from 200,400 to 176,657). Because the denominators fell, the Kazakh shares for 2025 and 2026 rise even where the number of views through a former name did not.

Discussion

The forecast against the data. The first claim (F1) is supported for the Russian Wikipedia over 2023–2025: of the three former names on the author's list, Nur-Sultan has the lowest share and the fastest decline, in share and in views, on desktop computers and on the mobile web, while the benchmark redirects did not lose share. The evidence covers three years after the name returned, most of the fall came from 2023 to 2024, and the monthly intervals for Nur-Sultan and Kapshagay overlap, so the order of the two is likely but not certain. In the Kazakh Wikipedia the counts are too small to test F1. The second claim (F2) is supported in level: in 2025 Semipalatinsk had the highest share of any former name measured, 18 years after the renaming, and since 2023 its share has not declined. The 2025 level itself (6.4%) was one of the two figures the author knew when he made the forecast; what he did not know was how it compared with the other names. In rate over 2016–2025 the evidence is mixed: the Semipalatinsk share fell, but other redirects also lost share, by 4% to 12% a year depending on the benchmark. The third claim (F3), as the author worded it ("in the Kazakh one there will be almost no old Russian names"), is supported: the two former Russian names that exist in the Kazakh Wikipedia carried well under 1% of views, and most Russian forms on his list do not exist there at all. Nur-Sultan and Kapshagay exist in the Kazakh Wikipedia only in Kazakh spelling and so lie outside F3; of the two, Kapshagay kept a share close to its share in the Russian Wikipedia in 2023–2025, and Nur-Sultan did not. As the author predicted, former Russian names live on mainly in the Russian Wikipedia.

Some of the reasons the author gave can be compared with the data. The number of linking articles alone does not explain why Semipalatinsk keeps the highest share: 658 Russian Wikipedia articles link to the redirect "Семипалатинск", against 8,528 that link to "Нур-Султан", the name with the lowest share. The worldwide fame of the test site and the number of historical texts were not measured. The renaming of the capital shows that readers changed quickly in both directions: about three years after each change, the share through the other name in the Russian Wikipedia was down to 2.9% and 1.2%.

Why Kapshagay is different: the mentors' reading. The author did not give his own explanation of the Kapshagay case; the reading below was written by his mentors from the data and has not been tested. Two features of the data set Kapshagay apart from Nur-Sultan in the Kazakh Wikipedia. First, the Kazakh Wikipedia article about the city was itself titled "Қапшағай" until 3 May 2022, when it was moved to "Қонаев (қала)" (move log, [3]), so for readers of Kazakh it was the city's own name until the renaming, while "Нұр-Сұлтан" was the title of the Astana article for about three years only. A similar history exists in the Russian Wikipedia, where the Semey article was titled "Семипалатинск" until 1 March 2012. Second, 47 articles of the Kazakh Wikipedia link to the redirect "Қапшағай", against 19 for "Нұр-Сұлтан", 11 for "Алма-Ата" and none for "Семипалатинск" (on 16 October 2026), so part of the views through "Қапшағай" may be clicks on old links rather than searches by name; without a clickstream for the Kazakh Wikipedia the two cannot be separated [5]. Both readings rest on small numbers: 375, 214 and 160 views a year through "Қапшағай" in 2023, 2024 and 2025, and 41 in January to September 2026.

What the results mean. Former names of Kazakhstani cities remain, years after a renaming, a route by which a minority of readers reach the city articles: in 2025 between 1.2% and 6.4% of the views in the Russian Wikipedia for the three former names on the list, about one view in sixteen for Semey. This is the kind of persistence that studies of street names

describe [10, 17], measured here for whole cities, and for Semipalatinsk, Kustanai and Aktyubinsk over ten years. Page views cannot show who used a former name or why. They carry no age, so whether such names "leave together with a generation", as the author asked, cannot be seen in them, and his view that older people use such names by habit, especially in Russian, agrees with the difference between the two Wikipedias but is not tested by it. For systems that handle Russian-language text about Kazakhstan, the results mean that former names still need to be linked to current ones; for language models this matters because their answers can change when only the name of an entity changes [12].

Limitations. First, a redirect counts only the readers who typed, searched or clicked the former name. A reader who searched "Семипалатинск" in a search engine and was given a link to "Семей" is counted under the current name, so the shares are a lower bound, not the share of people who use a former name. Second, part of the views of a redirect are clicks on links inside Wikipedia. The number of linking articles is known only for 16 October 2026, not for earlier years, and the clickstream data that could separate searches from link clicks cannot be used here: the Russian Wikipedia clickstream maps redirected requests to the article they lead to [5], and there is no clickstream for the Kazakh Wikipedia (the list of September 2026 has no file for it) [5]. Third, how often readers pass through redirects at all changes over time: other redirects also lost share over 2016–2025 (by 4% to 12% a year, depending on the benchmark), readers moved from desktop computers to phones, and since 2023 the mobile apps record almost no views through redirects. Long-run declines of a share are therefore not a pure measure of a name being forgotten, and the benchmark used here is one rough correction. Fourth, the agent type "user" excludes known bots, but traffic identified as automated by other signs has been separated only since 29 April 2020 [4], so earlier years may contain more automated views; single months show sharp peaks. Fifth, the renamings happened in different years, and the data start in July 2015, eight years after Semipalatinsk was renamed and three years after "Семипалатинск" became a redirect in the Russian Wikipedia, so the first years after renaming can be compared only for Nur-Sultan and Kapshagay, and only for three years. Sixth, the Kazakh Wikipedia is small: the views through former names there are tens or hundreds a year, so its shares change strongly from year to year, and the views of its city articles fell by about half in 2025. Seventh, page views are not people: one person can open a page many times, and shares compare readers within one article, so their level across cities also depends on how many readers reach each article through its current name (6,587 views went through Nur-Sultan in 2025, more than the 2,263 through Kapshagay, although its share was lower). Finally, names that do not exist as redirects (for Balkhash, Turkistan and Oral in both Wikipedias) cannot be measured by this method, for four Russian Wikipedia pairs the closest existing form was used instead of the author's exact string, and most redirects were checked only as they stood on 16 October 2026.

Conclusion

The three questions have these answers. (1) In the Russian Wikipedia, former names of renamed Kazakhstani cities still bring a share of readers to the city articles: in 2025, 6.4% through Semipalatinsk, 3.3% through Kapshagay and 1.2% through Nur-Sultan. (2) In the three years after the renamings of 2022, the share through Nur-Sultan fell by about 20% a year and, less clearly, through Kapshagay by about 9%, while the benchmark redirects did not lose share; the longer decline of Semipalatinsk since 2016 is partly shared with redirects in general and cannot be read as the name fading alone, and the older former names Kustanai and

Aktyubinsk show no clear trend. (3) In the Kazakh Wikipedia former Russian names are almost absent; Kapshagay, which exists there in Kazakh spelling, kept a share close to that in the Russian Wikipedia in 2023–2025, and Nur-Sultan did not. The author's forecast agrees with these results: Nur-Sultan declined fastest over 2023–2025, although its lead over Kapshagay is not certain, Semipalatinsk kept the highest share, and former Russian names are almost absent from the Kazakh Wikipedia. Former names of Kazakhstani cities leave use slowly and unevenly, and they remain mostly in the Russian Wikipedia.

Note: original quotations

The author's two paragraphs were written in Russian and sent on 15 October 2026; they are quoted in the text in the mentors' translation.

Introduction (15 October 2026): «Я из поколения, для которого эти города с самого начала звучат по-новому: Семей для меня всегда был Семеем, Астана Астаной, а Конаев я быстро перестал называть Капчагаем. Но стоит заговорить со старшими, и всплывают другие имена: Семипалатинск, Целиноград, Чимкент, Кустанай. Они говорят так не из принципа, а по привычке, особенно когда говорят по-русски. Мне стало интересно, уходят ли эти имена вместе с поколением или продолжают жить, и это можно проверить по тому, как люди ищут города в Википедии.»

Forecast (15 October 2026): «Быстрее всего, уйдет «Нур-Султан»: столицу так звали всего три года, имя было политическим, а возврат к «Астане» в 2022 году освещали все СМИ, так что людям не пришлось привыкать к новому. Дольше всего продержится «Семипалатинск»: под этим именем город знают за пределами Казахстана из-за ядерного полигона, оно стоит в тысячах исторических текстов и в старых ссылках. Между Википедиями разница будет большой: в казахской старых русских имен почти не будет, потому что по-казахски эти города и в советское время назывались Семей, Ақтөбе или Шымкент, а старое имя держится в основном у тех, кто думает о городе по-русски.»

Data availability

All page views used in this study are public and can be downloaded from the Wikimedia Pageviews API [1]; the redirects, move logs and links come from the public MediaWiki Action API of the Russian and Kazakh Wikipedias [3]. The downloaded series and the analysis programs are available from the author's mentors on request.

Author contributions and use of AI tools

The author compiled the list of 14 cities and the names in use (24 September 2026) for an earlier project of the same programme, and found the study [12] (1 October 2026). He chose the present study on 13 October 2026 from five research directions proposed by his mentors, who recommended it and formulated the question. He wrote the forecast (15 October 2026) and the paragraph quoted in the Introduction (15 October 2026, written for a popular article about the same study). He did not write the explanation of the Kapshagay case in the Discussion: it was written by his mentors from the data and is marked there as theirs. His mentors in the ADMIT mentoring programme, working with a generative AI tool (Claude, Anthropic), designed the method based on redirects, downloaded the data, wrote the analysis programs, computed every table and the figure, translated the author's paragraphs from Russian and drafted the English text. No number, quotation or reference was produced by a language model without being checked: every statistic is computed by the analysis programs

from the downloaded data, and on 25 and 26 October 2026 each statement about a cited work was checked against its published text or abstract.

Conflicts of interest

No research funding was received for this study. The author takes part in ADMIT, a paid university-admissions mentoring programme; his mentors, who did the work described under Author contributions, work in this programme. The author declares no other conflicts of interest.

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