

ISLAMIC REVIVAL, EDUCATION AND RADICALISM IN CENTRAL ASIA

Dilshod Achilov*
Renat Shaykhutdinov**

Abstract:

This article identifies two types of regulatory policies employed by secular states towards Islam in Central Asia, and examines their effects on religious radicalism. Conceptually, we develop two prevalent kinds of state regulation of religious practices, permissive and dismissive regulations. Empirically, we investigate their effects by analyzing state policies toward Islamic education and their cumulative effects on the religious dynamism with reference to what is termed as the religious extremism or “Islamic radicalism” in the post-Soviet Republics of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

The findings indicate that permissive state regulations in Kazakhstan impedes the threat of radical extremism, whereas dismissive state regulations appears to exacerbate the level of the same threat in Tajikistan. The findings further suggest that Islamic education is in need of urgent and comprehensive reforms, and that permissive state policies seeking to supplement institutional infrastructures, are likely to help revive and revamp Islamic education at large. These policies can be an effective tool for retarding the recruitment lifeline of militant religious organizations in Central Asia. The author profiles the entire scenario of religious radicalism in Central Asia within two fundamental questions: ‘To what extent does Islamic education matter in explaining the dynamics of Islamic radicalism?’ and ‘Does state regulation of religion promote or hinder religious radicalism?’

Keywords:

Islamic Revival, Islamic Education, Radicalism, Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan.

Introduction:

There is little doubt that the resurgence of Islam has been influencing the social and political landscape of the Muslim world. The Islamic revival brought new actors into the political arena, including Islamist movements that began to challenge the status quo in the Muslim-majority states. A number of authoritarian regimes were targeted by such movements. As a viable response to these challengers, the incumbent authoritarian governments of the Muslim world have sought to “discover through trial and error a formula with which to counter the ‘threat’ posed to their rule by Islamist opposition.”¹ Their response and reactions varied vastly from

* Assistant Professor of Political Science, East Tennessee State University, 100 CR Drive, Johnson City, TN 37614, USA: achilov@etsu.edu.

** Assistant Professor of Political Science, Florida Atlantic University, 777 Glades Rd., SO 391B, Boca Raton, FL 33431, USA: rshaykhu@fau.edu.

¹ M. H. Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel? Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World*, Boulder, CO, Lynne Reiner, 2004, 4.

complete repression (e.g., Syria in 1982, Algeria since 1992), to some form of inclusion (e.g., Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan) and a mix of toleration and repression (e.g., Egypt, Kazakhstan).

After the collapse of the USSR, the process of Islamic revival swiftly accelerated as new Central Asian states began to re-establish their historical links with the Muslim world reinforcing their Islamic identity, which had defined Central Asian culture, traditions, and the way of life for centuries. According to Peyrouse, the new Central Asian states were now free to seize their “religious identity in order to turn it into an element of national assertion as well as social bases of political power.”²

While the Islamic revival has been generally accepted as a positive development within the framework of identity-building and “reclaiming” traditional cultural heritage, the fear of Islamic resurgence appears to emanate from Islam’s potential to mobilize elites and masses in a political movement (e.g., as an Islamic political party) to challenge the incumbent regimes. Thus, fearing threat to the secular regimes of Central Asia, many authoritarian regimes including Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, currently employ restrictive policies with regard to Islamic practices to maintain the political status quo.³

Generally, we can divide the new Islamic actors in Central Asian politics into two categories: (1) moderate and (2) radical movements. In defining these terms, we follow Hafez’s conceptualization of moderates as “individuals and groups that shun violence and insurgency as a strategy to effect social change and, instead, seek to work through state institutions, civic associations, or nonviolent organizations.” On the contrary, radicals are actors who “reject accommodation with the state regime, refuse to participate in its institutions, and insist on the necessity of violent revolution or mass mobilization to Islamize society and politics.”⁴

Even though many, if not all, among the regions’ Islamic actors were moderates, the Muslim Central Asian regimes were ill-prepared to adequately channel the post-Soviet Islamic revival. Specifically, the

² S. Peyrouse, “Islam in Central Asia: National Specificities and Postsoviet Globalisation,” *Religion, State and Society*, 35(3), 2007, 253.

³ A. Freedman, “Civil Society, Moderate Islam, and Politics in Indonesia and Malaysia.” *Journal of Civil Society*, 5(2), 2009, 107-127; A. An-Na’im, “Religion and Global Civil Society: Inherent Incompatibility or Synergy and Interdependence?” *Global Civil Society*, Ed. M. Glasius, M. Kaldor and H. Anheier, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002; G. Fuller, *The Future of Political Islam*, New York, Palgrave, 2003; N. Feldman, *The Fall and Rise of the Islamic State*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2008.

⁴ Mohammed M. Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World*, Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003.

institutional infrastructure to handle the rapidly growing Islamic resurgence was inadequate. Perhaps most importantly, all Central Asian states were ill-prepared for the sudden influx of foreign radical preachers and recruiters. In this respect, the issue of Islamic education became a leading concern, which demanded immediate attention in the context of the post-Soviet Central Asia. While the threat of radical extremism is often exaggerated and misused by the incumbent autocratic regimes in the region, the underlying danger of global religious radical networks is real, posing an imminent danger to all Central Asian Muslim-majority states.

While the role of Islamic education is an important social prerequisite for deterring Islamic radicalism, Islamic education is an explanatory variable to prevent radicalization. Clearly, systematic analysis of the state, trends, and patterns of Islamic education, and its implications on the Muslim world, remains a high priority for both scholars and policymakers. In an attempt to bridge this gap, this article asks two pressing questions: ‘To what extent does Islamic education matter in explaining the dynamics of Islamic radicalism?’ and ‘Does state regulation of religion promote or hinder religious radicalism?’ We analyze both questions in the context of a comparative study of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

In contrast to most of its Central Asian neighbours, Kazakhstan pursues less repressive, and relatively more tolerant and permissive actions toward Islamic practices. Its support for Islamic educational institutions thus far has facilitated the integration of the Islamic revival into the mainstream Kazakh society while significantly deterring the spread of radicalism. On the other hand, Tajikistan has pursued strictly repressive policies, which resulted in marginalization of Islam.

At the turn of the 21st century, a decade after its independence religious freedoms in Kazakhstan began to improve as the conditions deteriorated in Tajikistan. Both of these trends are reflected by sharp differences in state policies toward the Islamic revival. The following Table 1 summarizes the 2008 US Department of State’s International Religious Freedom report. In this report, the level of religious freedom was coded as “moderate” for Kazakhstan, while in Tajikistan “religious freedom does not seem to exist.” Furthermore, as of 2009, the level of persecution of religious clerics was “low” in Kazakhstan and “high” in Tajikistan.⁵ While the censorship of Islamic texts and clergy was relatively limited in Kazakhstan, by contrast, the Tajik government

⁵ The Cingranelli-Richards (CIRI) Human rights database, <http://ciri.binghamton.edu/>.

pursued high levels of suppression. Nevertheless, in terms of democratic indicators (e.g., political rights, electoral transparency, and rule of law), both countries scored low suggesting that the difference between overall freedoms is virtually indistinguishable.

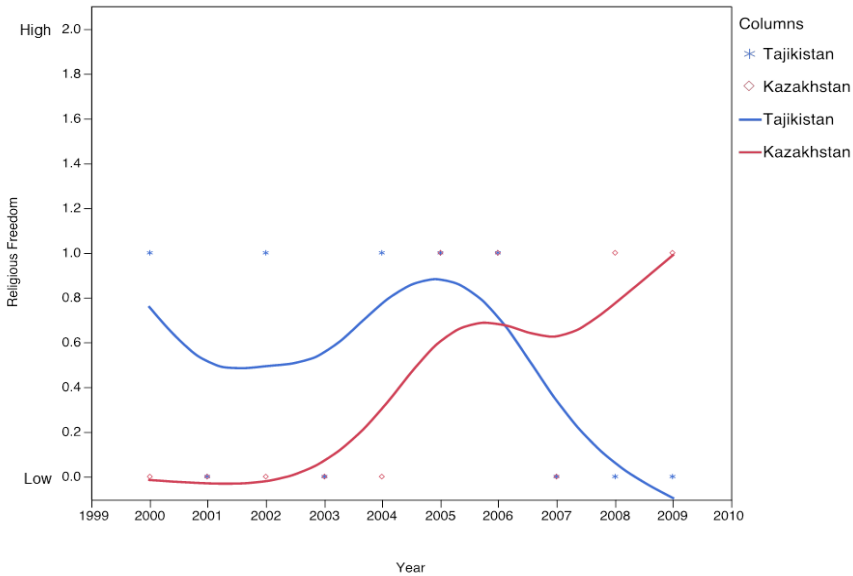
Table 1⁶
Islamic Education, Religious Freedom, Radicalism and Social-economic Indexes in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan

Islam, Education, Freedom and Radicalism Index	Kazakhstan	Tajikistan
Religious Freedom - 2008 (U.S. State Dept. International Religious Freedom Reports) [#]	Moderate freedom	Religious freedom does not seem to exist
Freedom of Religion, CIRI Human Rights Data Project ²	Moderate govt. restriction on religious practice	High government restriction on religious practice
Persecution of religious clerics/activists	Low	High
Censorship of religious texts	Low	High
Censorship of religious clerics	Moderate	High
Institutionalization of Islamic Education at Higher Education score (0-100)	Emerging	Very low
Level of Religious Radicalism	Low	High
Freedom in Political System (2009)		
Political Rights (1-7 scale, less is more freedom) ³	6/7	6/7
Electoral Process (0-12, lower is a less free) ³	2/12	2/12
Rule of Law (0-16, lower is weaker rule of law) ³	4/16	4/16
Independence of the Judiciary (2008) ²	Not independent	Not independent
Socio-economic Indicators⁴		
Human Development Index (HDI) (2010)	0.71	0.58
Adult Literacy Rate (% ages 15 or older who are literate, most recent measure during 2005-08)	99.70%	99.70%
Net Secondary Enrollment Rate (% secondary school age enrolled in secondary ed.) –2009.	86.90%	82.50%

⁶ Brian Grim and Roger Finke (2006): derived from the US State Department’s International Religious Freedom reports in 2003, 2005 and 2008. Coded by the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA); The Cingranelli-Richards (CIRI) Human Rights Dataset; Freedomhouse annual reports on political and civil liberties; The 2010 Human Development Index (HDI) by the United Nations.

When levels of religious freedom are plotted over time (2000-2009), as shown in figure 1, the patterns indicate that restrictions on religious practices have systematically increased in Tajikistan, while the limitations on religious freedoms decreased in Kazakhstan.

Figure 1
Level of religious freedom in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, 2000-2009



The above trends are explained under the following denominators:

Theoretical Linkages: Radicalism, State and Islamic Education:

Three major theories compete to explain the genesis of religious radicalization in the post-Soviet Muslim Central Asia: (1) relative deprivation theory, (2) democratization, and (3) predatory state repression.

According to relative deprivation theory, the emergence of Islamic radicals is often associated with poverty or economic deprivation which stems from their socioeconomic and psychological alienation. This alienation, in turn, deprives new Islamic actors of expressing their voices in the political arena.⁷ Whether the nature of alienation is economic or physiological alienation, the proponents of failed modernization theory assert that the roots of the radicalism originate from developmental

⁷ M. A. Faksh, *The Future of Islam in the Middle East: Fundamentalism in Egypt, Algeria and Saudi Arabia*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997; H. Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World*, 2nd ed., Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995.

crisis.⁸ The proponents of democratization, on the other hand, argue that democratic institutions can effectively discourage contestation over the structure of political and social institutions and thus hinder political violence.⁹ Said otherwise, democracies are largely successful in addressing group grievances helping prevent political violence.¹⁰ Conversely, a lack of civil and political liberties could potentially marginalize the moderates by pushing them towards more radical means of redressing grievances.¹¹

The critics of relative deprivation thesis, however, argue that almost all Muslim majority states have, to a great extent, experienced social, economic and political crises, rooted in poverty and colonial repression. However, since relatively few Muslim societies experienced a surge in radical militancy or rebellion, the explanatory power of the deprivation theory diminishes. Scholars also recognize predatory state repression and institutional exclusion as leading factors that explain why Muslims rebels. Hafez maintains that an unfortunate combination of institutional exclusion and indiscriminate state predatory repression “force[s] Islamists to undergo a new universal process of radicalization” underlying that the lack of institutional access is a necessary condition for Islamist rebellion.¹²

In this study, we apply, extend, and test Hafez’s theoretical framework of institutional deficiency by introducing an additional dimension of institutional exclusion through which governments regulate religion. Specifically, we examine the explanatory power of (semi-) institutionalized institutional deficiency of Islamic education within the framework of permissive and dismissive state regulation of religion. Before we proceed, the genesis and theoretical relevance of Islamic education must be explored.

Islamic Education: Why and How does it Matter?

Islamic educational institutions (IEIs) fulfill three major functions that can potentially deter the spread of religious radicalism by: (1) providing a source for the mainstream teachings of Islam; (2) offering opportunities

⁸ N. Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World*, London, Routledge, 1991.

⁹ K. Dassel and E. Reinhardt, “Domestic Strife and the Initiation of Violence at Home and Abroad,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 43(1), 1999, 56-85.

¹⁰ T. R. Gurr and W. H. Moore, “Ethnopolitical Rebellion: A Cross-Sectional analysis of the 1980s with Risk Assessments for the 1990s,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 41(4), 1997, 1079-1103.

¹¹ M. Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” *Comparative Politics*, 13(4), 1981, 379-399.

¹² *Why Muslims Rebel? Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World*, 22.

to study both aspects of *Shari'a* (Islamic law): *Ibadat* (worship, prayers and technical rituals) and *Mu'amalat* (social relations); and (3) affording an effective antidote to radicalized (and often foreign supported) Islamic teachings and interpretations.

Above all, educational opportunities for teaching and learning the moderate messages of Islam must emanate from institutions perceived as legitimate and reliable, that employ qualified and locally trained educators (e.g., Islamic scholars). In this regard, educational institutions can play an important role in meeting the popular demands for re-discovering Islam in the post-Soviet space.

Second, although many Muslims, on average, are knowledgeable about the technical aspects *ibadat*, very few are versed in its *mu'amalat* (the way Islam affects everyday life and its social implications). It is relatively easy to teach the basic tenets and daily rituals in Islam. However, it is more challenging and perhaps more important to *contextualize* Islamic teachings in the modern social, political, and economic realities of the 21st century. Therefore, Islamic educational institutions can play a central role in providing opportunities to learn about contemporary applications of concepts pertaining to personal matters and social relations (e.g., *jihad*) in Islam. However, finding reliable books, brochures, and other printed resources on Islam, which espouse moderate interpretations has been a challenge in most Central Asian states. Consequently, in addition to live recruiters, the impact of cyberspace preaching is on the rise, featuring extremist websites, blogs, and the online forums publishing unverifiable *fatwas* (Islamic rulings on specific issues) and justifying various radical actions of social networks which openly promote extremism.¹³

Third, Islamic educational institutions can be among the most effective tools for impeding the spread of radicalism.¹⁴ Young Muslims who do not have much prior knowledge of Islam are more susceptible to accepting radical teachings as “genuine” Islamic teachings as they often hear them for the very *first time* from radical preachers.¹⁵ In fact, one of the main reasons why religious extremists target teenagers is because “[the youth] do not yet have fully formed ideals and they are easier to

¹³ A. N. Awan, “Virtual Jihadist Media: Function, Legitimacy, and Radicalizing Efficacy,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10, 2007, 389-408.

¹⁴ A. Evans, “Understanding Madrasahs,” *Foreign Affairs*, 2006; C. C. Fair, “Militant Recruitment in Pakistan: A New Look at the Militancy-Madrasah Connection,” *Asia Policy*, 4(2), 2007, 107-34; A. M. Rabasa, C. Benard, P. Chalk, C. C. Fair, T. Karasik, R. Lal, I. Lesser, and D. Thaler. “The Muslim World After 9/11,” *RAND Project Air Force*, 2004.

¹⁵ Ahmad Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2002.

manage.”¹⁶ In the very *first* encounter, the radical preachers present their ideology as “true Islam” and make a seemingly convincing case for the target individual to obey the call from God. Without any background knowledge base for evaluating claims about Islam, those exposed to radical preaching may develop sympathy for those views. On the other hand, those who are versed in the core tenets of mainstream Islamic teachings may potentially be less likely to be dogmatized by a radical ideology.

Permissive and Dismissive State Regulation of Religion:

The concept of “regulation” may imply a negative connotation, as it is associated with government “control of religion.” However, in the wake of the Soviet collapse, an urgent need for state co-ordination and active involvement in religious affairs has arisen to adequately channel the rapidly increasing religious revival. Each Central Asian state established a central agency to conduct state-regulated institutional oversight over the newly emerging and yet overwhelming public interest toward Islam. With no exception, each regime sought to protect the Soviet legacy of secularism. In his novel work, Kuru formulates *passive* and *assertive* secularism as two categories which explicate the ways in which secular states pursue rather different policies in regards to religion.¹⁷ In this respect, both Kazakhstan and Tajikistan actively pursue assertive, or combative secularism which aims to largely and systematically limit religious expressions in the public sphere. While these categories offer important insights, they come short of capturing the *variation* that exists *within* assertive regulation of religion by the state in the context of post-Soviet Central Asia. In this paper, therefore, we introduce a fine-grained variation of assertive secularism in terms of permissive and dismissive state regulation of religion.

In the absence of state intervention, the newly independent states of Central Asia were perceived to be highly vulnerable to radical religious teachings of foreign origin. From this perspective, a degree of government regulation may be justified or even deemed to be necessary to institute new venues for Islamic learning (e.g., an Islamic University and *madrasas*), worship (e.g., mosques, prayer houses, and prayer rooms) and community associations (e.g., local Masjids – community

¹⁶ Y. Sorokina, “Kazakhstan Concerned Over Radical Movements Influencing Children,” *Internet Gazeta*, October 15, 2010.

¹⁷ A. T. Kuru, *Secularism and State Policies Toward Religion: The United States, France, and Turkey*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2009; A. T. Kuru, “Secularism, State Policies, and Muslims in Europe: Analyzing French Exceptionalism,” *Comparative Politics*, 41(1), 2008, 1-19.

Mosques). Although all Central Asian states established central agencies to regulate Islamic affairs, including new Islamic institutions, the goals, means and resources allocated by the Central Asian varied vastly. While some adopted harsh, repressive and dismissive means of state regulation (e.g., Tajikistan), others pursued more tolerant and permissive policies toward Islamic resurgence (e.g., Kazakhstan).

Permissive State Regulation of Religion (PSRR):

We conceptualize *Permissive State Regulation of Religion (PSRR)* as the regulatory policies by the government, which seek to monitor religious affairs in a largely tolerant, non-dismissive manner. Such policies regulate attitude toward religious revival in ways that improves access to worship, education or association with the mainstream religious institutions.

Employing PSRR policies toward Islamic resurgence could potentially revive and/or promote institutionalization of Islamic education in the form of opening new educational facilities (e.g., Nurmubarak Islamic University in Kazakhstan) that offer advanced degrees, or in a smaller context, initiating educational projects by offering structured courses or programmes in Islamic studies. This in turn can translate into more opportunities to teach and/or learn Islam in contemporary context. Perhaps more importantly, new venues for higher Islamic learning are vital in educating locally trained indigenous cadres of Islamic scholars. It is particularly important to highlight that the increasing number of mosques across Central Asia are not staffed with adequately trained *Imams* (Mosque leaders) who are in charge of spiritual guidance in local communities. As a whole, permissive state regulation could be an effective method to keep religious extremism “at check” while preventing the uninformed or ill-informed youth of the Muslim Central Asia from falling prey to radical ideology.

Dismissive State Regulation of Religion (DSRR):

We conceptualize *Dismissive State Regulation of Religion (DSRR)* as government policies and regulations that seek to monitor religious affairs in the country with more dismissive, than tolerant, attitude toward religious revival that impedes or denies access to worship, education or association with mainstream religious institutions.

Employing DSRR policies toward Islamic resurgence could potentially impede the development of indigenous institutional infrastructure of Islamic education. Further, insufficient access and fewer opportunities to study mainstream Islam, at a time when a country is experiencing Islamic revival, can potentially prevent the emergence of

indigenous Islamic scholars. Consequently, at the shortage of adequately trained *Imams*, the Mosques could be vulnerable to the influence of self-proclaimed *Imams* with potentially radical agendas. In sum, the chain effect of these dismissive state policies can increase the risk of radical extremism to spread. To this end, we test the following hypothesis:

Permissive state regulation of religion diminishes the effects of radical extremism while dismissive state regulation of religion is associated with higher levels of radical extremism.

Methodology:

To test the validity of our theory we employ an in-depth study of two Central Asian cases, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. We employ the Most Similar Systems (MSS) design to address these cases. MSS allows us to control both the most relevant competing theoretical variables identified in the literature and a number of cultural and historical factors, which may potentially influence validity of the results. Both countries are classified as medium development states with Human Development Indexes (HDI) of 0.673 for Tajikistan and 0.794 for Kazakhstan in 2007-2008,¹⁸ which renders them relatively similar with respect to the objective conditions of the relative deprivation theory. In a similar vein, the levels of democratization (or lack thereof) in both Kazakhstan and Tajikistan are indistinguishable. Both cases are classified as “Not Free” in the Freedom House Report of 2012 with the scores for political rights (“6”) and civil liberties (“5”) identical in both cases.¹⁹ The levels of democracy are also indicative of the similar degrees of predatory state repression, in which the governments of both countries engage.

In addition to these factors, the majority of Kazakhstan’s and Tajikistan’s populations are Muslim. Both countries were the first-tier Union-level Republics within the USSR and enjoyed similar levels of political relationship with Moscow. Consequently, many of the factors related both to culture and history are either identical or similar in these cases, fleshing out the significance of education as an important causal variable affecting religious extremism.

¹⁸ *Secularism and State Policies Toward Religion: The United States, France, and Turkey*, 256-257.

¹⁹ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2012: The Arab Uprisings and their Global Repercussions*.
http://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/inline_images/Table%20of%20Independence%20Countries%2C%20FIW%202012%20draft.pdf. Accessed February 4, 2012.

Kazakhstan: A Model State?

After the demise of the USSR, the Kazakh nation embraced Islam to re-establish the missing link with its historical and cultural heritage. In the early years of independence, President Nazarbayev was highly supportive of the Islamic revival in order to bolster Kazakh nationalism on the basis that post-Soviet Islam would add distinction to the new Kazakh national identity as the titular ethnic group within a multi-ethnic society.²⁰

Kazakh Muslims practice Sunni Islam (the *Hanafi* school of interpretation). In 2000, approximately 80% of Kazakhstanis indicated that they believed in God.²¹ Moreover, 48% of the survey respondents stated that they “believe in God, but do not practice Islam,” while approximately 38% responded that they “believe in God, but partly practice Islam” in daily life.²² According to SAMK (Spiritual Association of Muslims of Kazakhstan), approximately 10% of Kazakhs today, nearly one million people, actively “follow the Qur’an, pray five times a day and wear *hijab* (Islamic veil).”²³

Notwithstanding his secular background, the Kazakh President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, has made numerous concessions to the Islamic identity of the Kazakh people. Although he was the last of the Central Asians leaders to undertake the *Hajj*, the fifth pillar of Islam, he has made public appearances at religious ceremonies, personally sponsored the construction of many mosques, and founded the Islamic University in Almaty in cooperation with the Egyptian Al-Azhar Islamic University, the largest Islamic educational institution in the world. These actions by Nazarbayev further bolstered Islamic values and orientations.

For almost 20 years, President Nazarbayev has maintained a full control of all state institutions. In 1995, he banned religiously affiliated political parties by constraining Islam’s role to individual-level social life. When compared with its neighbours, however, the Kazakh government’s pressure on religion has been comparatively low and more transparent. It is important to highlight that the Kazakh leader has shown

²⁰ A. Khalid, “A Secular Islam: Nation, State, and Religion in Uzbekistan,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 35, 2003, 573-98; S. Cummings, “Legitimation and Identification in Kazakhstan,” *Nationalism and Ethnicity Politics*, 12(2), 177-204.

²¹ Centre for Public Opinion Research and Analysis (CPORA), “Report on Research Results of Public Social Orientations in Kazakhstan (Отчет об изучении установок и ориентаций населения Казахстана),” Almaty, Kazakhstan, 2000.

²² “Report on Research Results of Public Social Orientations in Kazakhstan,” 2000.

²³ A. Kuanyshbekova, “Halal Markets Gain Popularity in Kazakhstan,” *Central Asia Online*, 2010 URL: http://centralasiaonline.com/cocoon/caii/xhtml/en_GB/features/caii/features/main/2010/09/04/feature-02.

a significantly less repressive approach with regard to Islamic resurgence in the country. For instance, Kazakhstan was the first Central Asian state to allow Islamic banking in the Republic. Nonetheless, the restrictions on religious *political* mobilization remain strictly enforced.

Before independence, Kazakhstan had never had its own indigenous network of Islamic educational institutions, such as *madrasas*,²⁴ to train indigenous *imams* (spiritual leaders). With few exceptions, all *imams* were trained in and sent from Uzbekistan to all Muslim Central Asian states during the Soviet rule. Filling in the gap vacated by the Communist ideology, motivated by the surge of Islamic traditions across the country, a number of mosques, *madrasas*, and Islamic departments of higher education emerged with state approval. A central administrative body, the SAMK, also known as the Muftiyat of Kazakhstan, was established in 1991 to oversee and co-ordinate the newly established and growing number of Islamic social institutions.

The newly founded SAMK was compelled to address one pressing issue rather quickly: offering new venues for Islamic education in order to adequately address the public demand to study Islam. More specifically, the shortage of locally trained *imams* had become a leading concern. The Kazakh government was not prepared to meet this challenge. There was an apparent institutional and intellectual (e.g., locally trained Islamic scholars) gap between the increasing demand for Islamic education and the limited governmental resources available at that time. Nazarbayev recognized this misbalance and thus allowed multiple religious groups to register and operate in the country during the early years of independence. As a result, two types of Islamic educational institutions were established: (1) traditional Islamic *madrasas* and (2) secular, public institutions of higher education offering Islamic studies. Even though the state of Islamic education in Kazakhstan remains largely underdeveloped, it is important to emphasize that the early steps taken by Nazarbayev were important in establishing the first institutions of Islamic education, which, in fact, also laid the foundation for Kazakhstan's *permissive* state regulation of religion.

The development of Islamic educational institutions was uneven, unbalanced, and unsystematic, with poor co-ordination by SAMK in Kazakhstan. The main reason for this inconsistency was the lack of funding, which continues to impede SAMK to effectively coordinate all religious affairs in the country.

²⁴ Madrasa—a traditional Islamic or secular educational center or institution. Translated from the Arabic, it refers to a place where learning and studying are done.

It is important to note, however, that even though the incumbent Kazakh regime is highly authoritarian, Nazarbayev enjoys significant political support from the public. This high public approval of the president is often justified by the fact that people view Nazarbayev as a guarantor of the country's continued stability.²⁵

Islamic Educational Institutions in Kazakhstan:

The educational system of Kazakhstan largely mirrors that of the old Soviet system. With respect to educational policies and state curricula, very little has changed since 1991. Given that Kazakhstan does not have historical roots of indigenous Islamic educational institutions (IEI), virtually all its Islamic schools and *madrasas* opened after 1991. It is possible that the efforts in the early years of independence (1990s) to build Islamic educational institutions contributed to today's relative stability and might have reduced the early influence of foreign-supported radical recruiters. Although Nazarbayev has been very supportive of Islamic educational institutions (IEIs) compared with his Central Asian counterparts, IEIs are not completely free from governmental pressure.

Pursuing assertive secularist ideology, Kazakhstan has not allowed any religious education to be officially taught in public schools, both elementary and secondary. There are approximately forty after-school Islamic-based private gymnasiums which are operated by highly trained scholars, mostly educated in Turkey and Egypt, who teach the basic principles of Islam and the *Qur'an* (the central religious text of Islam). The history of these gymnasiums goes back to foreign volunteers who came to establish these institutions to help educate the Kazakh youth on the main pillars of Islam. These volunteers mainly represented the *Sulaymaniye Jamaat*, a group dedicated to teaching the recitation of the *Qur'an* and basic tenets of Islam in an after-school or summer-school setting.²⁶ The *Sulaymaniye* volunteers do not appear to hold any political ambitions and are devoutly committed to promoting the moderate voice of Islam by teaching the youth the basics of Islamic faith and the *Qur'an*.

The gymnasium classes start after school when pupils have finished their regular school day. The capacity of these gymnasiums is very small. The selection of pupils is usually made on the basis of dedication to academic excellence. These are among a few institutions

²⁵ M. B. Olcott, *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise*, Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Distributor, Brookings Institution Press, 2002.

²⁶ *Sulaymaniye Jamaat* (aka *Sulaymancilar*)—is a peaceful, non-political, highly spiritual group, which originated in Turkey and was founded by Suleyman Hoca Efendi (1888-1959). The movement's mission is to help people learn how to read, recite *Qur'an* and understand the core pillars of Islam in contemporary context.

that offer Islamic education to the youngest groups in the population (elementary and secondary levels) in a structured, transparent, and systematic fashion. Nevertheless, the number of these gymnasiums is extremely small compared with the growing demand within the total population of Kazakhstan. In this respect, the level of access to Islamic education for mainstream school pupils is extremely low (less than 5 per cent). Overall, the contributions of *Sulaymaniye* volunteers to Kazakh society have been beneficial to local Kazakh communities in the context of offering a venue for mainstream (non-radical) Islamic teachings.

There is one functional Islamic University (Nur-Mubarak Islamic University), sixteen small *madrasas*, and three departments of Islamic Studies within the state university system. Most of the graduates from the Islamic University and *madrasas* take *imam* positions in mosques. According to the deputy Mufti (Grand Imam) of SAMK, understanding and teaching the mainstream (non-radical) message of Islam is an important prerequisite for Kazakhstan, and the youth should have an adequate knowledge of Islam in order to channel their preferences in society: “The youth should know that Islam teaches peace, freedom of choice, moderation and tolerance. During the Soviet Union, we could not speak about Islam’s linkage to democratic ideals. Right now, we have the opportunity with our growing number of Islamic educational institutions to teach these facts to our youth. The government is highly supportive of our endeavors.”²⁷

According to annual terrorism overview report by the US State Department, in 2010 alone, Kazakhstan actively promoted intercultural and religious dialogue both at national and international levels. For instance, Kazakhstan hosted OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) conference on “Tolerance and Non-Discrimination” in June 2010 followed by the president Nazarbayev’s proposal to establish a permanent institution-Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Center – in Central Asia.²⁸ As a chairman of the OSCE, Kazakhstan also actively advocated for the establishment of an OSCE high commissioner for inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue to play an active role in the Republic.

Overall, it appears that Nazarbayev realized that heavy-handed repressive policies toward Islam have not proven effective in the Islamic world. Therefore, he embraced a relative “toleration” and “permissive strategy” to tackle the resurgence of Islam in a rapidly forming Kazakh

²⁷ Personal interview with the Deputy Imam of SAMK, Mr. A. Davronbekov, Almaty, Kazakhstan, July 2008.

²⁸ US State Department country reports on Terrorism, 2010, accessed January, 2012.
URL: <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/index.htm>

social fabric. As evidence suggest, permissive policies appear to have worked to stabilize Kazakhstan, allowing access to Islamic educational institutions while sharply reducing the threat of religious radicalism. The evidences suggest that permissive state regulation of religion is associated with the diminished levels of radicalism in Kazakhstan.

Islam, Education, and (In) Stability in Tajikistan:

In contrast to Kazakhstan, Tajikistan has recently experienced serious repression of Islamic education and an increase in violent acts, which has serious implications for a country with a Muslim majority population. According to various estimates, between 90%²⁹ and 97%³⁰ of the Tajik population is Muslim. Despite their sheer numbers, the Muslim population of the country varies both by the level of religious practice and by confession. Up to 40% of the rural and 10% of the urban residents either regularly attend mosques or engage in Islamic religious practices.³¹ Further, the Sunni majority constitutes some 85%³² of the entire population, or 94.44% of all Tajikistani Muslims, whereas the Shia minority are 5%³³ of the total population, or 5.56% of all Muslims. Most Sunnis are Hanafis, with a small section of *Salafis*; the Shia are either *Ismailis* or the Twelvers; in contrast to Hanafis and Twelvers, who reside throughout Tajikistan, *Ismailis* and *Salafis* are regionally concentrated.³⁴

As was the case with other Central Asian states, Tajikistan did not fight a war of independence in order to gain a full autonomy from the USSR. Nevertheless, in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet dismemberment, the native neo-communist leadership that took the reign of power in their hands was supported by Moscow.³⁵ In the early years after independence, the Tajik government was threatened by the opposition, which consisted of the religious, democratic, and liberal forces, opting to suppress the movements of political discontent. Consequently, a significant part of the opposition forces took up arms

²⁹ The total population of Tajikistan is 7,627,200 (July 2011 est.), of them 90% are Muslim (85% are Sunni and 5% Shia) (2003 est.); ethnic Tajiks are 79.9% (2000 census). CIA-The World Factbook. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ti.html>.

³⁰ Karagiannis, Emmanuel, "The Challenge of Radical Islam in Tajikistan: Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami," *Nationalities Papers*, 34 (1), 1-20.

³¹ "The Challenge of Radical Islam in Tajikistan: Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami."

³² CIA - The World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ti.html>.

³³ CIA-The World Factbook.

³⁴ "The Challenge of radical Islam in Tajikistan: Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami," 1-20.

³⁵ K. Savin, *The Republic of Tajikistan: Islamic Fundamentalism v. the New World Order*, MA Thesis: Southern Connecticut State University: New Haven, CT, 1993, 1.

and employed more fundamentalist rhetoric than political appeals based on democratic ideals. Severe civil war that ensued ended only in 1998. With numerous states and international organizations acting as mediator peace agreement between the government and armed opposition was eventually reached. As a part of the deal, the Tajik government agreed to devolve some 30 percent of the positions in the state apparatus to the opposition. The opposition would, in turn, give up its radical demands and violent tactics. It is noteworthy that despite the interpretation to the contrary by some factions within both warring parties and outside observers: “The Tajik civil war can hardly be interpreted as a conflict between Islam and secularism; some Muslim religious leaders stayed loyal to the Rahmonov regime despite its secularism and Communist credentials, while secular-oriented parties such as the Democratic Party joined the IRPT’s rebels in their struggle against Dushanbe. Instead, the causes of Tajikistan’s civil war lie in the clash of interests among different regional clans, which used ideology as a pretext to mobilize support both within and outside the country.”³⁶

The fact that a substantial part of the general opposition consisted of the democratic and liberal forces may have helped them overcome radical views and brutal tactics. The Tajik experience offers a model of a post-communist authoritarian regime co-opting political extremists by offering them to join the ranks of state bureaucracy and civil service. As Malashenko points out, “since 1998, one-third of the seats in the ruling coalition have been assigned to the United Tajik Opposition, which is influenced by fundamentalist ideology...”³⁷ Even though fundamentalist slogans have incrementally subsided, the government is far from treating unsanctioned manifestations of religious and political views with tolerance and respect. The state mandates every religious association, including schools that teach the Qur’an in Tajik *mohallas* (local neighborhood communities) to register with the proper state agencies. Religion is under state surveillance, and religious policies require every association, even neighborhood Qur’an teaching schools, to register with the government.³⁸

In addition to these limitations, a number of religious organizations are banned in Tajikistan. These include *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, *Islamic*

³⁶ “The Challenge of radical Islam in Tajikistan: Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami,” 4.

³⁷ A. Malashenko, “Islam in Central Asia,” In *Central Asian Security: The New International Context*, edited by R. Allison and L. Jonson, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001, 50.

³⁸ O. Roy, “Is the Conflict in Tajikistan a Model for Conflicts Throughout Central Asia?” In *Tajikistan: The Trials of Independence*, edited by M.-R. Djalili, F. Grare, and S. Akiner, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997, 142.

*Movement of Uzbekistan, Bayyat, Salafiya, and Tablighi Jamaat.*³⁹ Tajikistan hosts the only in-system religious political party in the entire region. Further, official restrictions on religious dresses and Islamic movements were enacted relatively late, yet much earlier than in Kazakhstan. As religiously dressed women were not admitted to schools since 2007, the *Salafiya* movement was declared illegal by the Supreme Court of the republic in January, 2009.⁴⁰

Yet, fresh reports point to an escalation of the situation between the Rakhmon regime and the former opposition. On September 19, 2010, the military of the Tajik Defense Ministry were attacked resulting in three deaths and two injuries.⁴¹ One interpretation of this move deals with Rakhmon's desire to do away with the former opposition figures even though they are absorbed in the country's bureaucracy.⁴² Consequently, the calls against the fight on terror and extremism are only a pretext for getting rid of the opposition.⁴³ Yet, President Rakhmon has been accused for collaborating with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and providing them with weapons during the 1998 invasion of Uzbekistan in order to "punish and frighten Tashkent;" it is further suggested that the secret friendship between Rakhmon and IMU continues to exist as it benefits Rakhmon, according to the leader of the *Vatandor* (Patriot) movement leader and opposition journalist Dodozhon Atovulloev.⁴⁴

Islamic Education in Tajikistan:

After the emergence of the Soviet rule in Central Asia, the region came to be isolated from the rest of the Islamic world in regards to religious

³⁹ T. Rasul-zade, "Tadzhikistan: Posledovatelye 'Salafii' ne vidno na ulitsakh. No oni est." ["Tajikistan: The Salafiya Followers are not Seen on the Streets. But They Exist."] In *Ferghana.ru* News Agency. July 20, 2009. <http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=6237>.

⁴⁰ "Tadzhikistan: Religioznoe dvizhenie 'Salafii' ob'yavleno vne zakona" ["Tajikistan: Religious Movement Salafiya Declared Illegal"]. *Ferghana.ru* News Agency. <http://www.ferghana.ru/news.php?id=11004>.

⁴¹ "Tadzhikistan: V Rashtskoi doline proizoshlo boestolknovenie, pogibli neskol'ko voennosluzhashchikh Minoborony" ["Tajikistan: Militarized Dispute Took Place in Rasht Valley, Defense Ministry Suffers Human Losses"]. *Ferghana.ru* News Agency. <http://www.ferghana.ru/news.php?id=15569&mode=snews>.

⁴² "Dodozhon Atovulloev: Moi simpatii na storone tek, kto voiet v gorakh" ["Dodozhon Atovulloev: I Sympathize with Those Fighting in the Mountains"]. *Ferghana.ru* News Agency. <http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=6751>.

⁴³ "Dodozhon Atovulloev: Moi simpatii na storone tek, kto voiet v gorakh" ["Dodozhon Atovulloev: I Sympathize with Those Fighting in the Mountains"]

⁴⁴ "Dodozhon Atovulloev: Moi simpatii na storone tek, kto voiet v gorakh" ["Dodozhon Atovulloev: I Sympathize with Those Fighting in the Mountains."]

education; in the period of the “Godless five years” (1932-1937) scores of Islamic intellectuals were physically exterminated and religious literature destroyed.⁴⁵ In spite of the brief periods of relief for religious life allowed by Stalin during the World War II and later by Khrushchev as a part of his liberal “thaw”, religious education in Tajikistan (and elsewhere in the region) went into deep underground.⁴⁶ According to Tajik political scientist, Abdullo Rakhnamo, Islamic education was spread out in hundreds of small home and family-based schools where religious knowledge was relayed from generation to generation in strict secrecy. Such education was pursued using cell-like methods under the cover of “visiting friends,” parties or “treats.” For example, in the private school of Mavlavi Mukhammadzhon Hindustani, of the *Shelkokombinat* district of Dushanbe, courses were held even around 3 or 4 a.m. before the Morning Prayer. Despite such secrecy, the teacher (master) would often change the location for instruction. Such methods contributed to the preservation of a number of pedagogical and methodological traditions, programs, and textbooks inherited from the pre-revolutionary system of religious education.⁴⁷

In the post-Soviet period, the web of private Islamic school came to exist as a parallel “system” of education to the officially sanctioned religious institutions in the country. However, in comparison to Kazakhstan, the number of officially recognized religious institutions in Tajikistan is currently much lower. For an estimated Muslim population of 7,295,515,⁴⁸ Kazakhstan has some 40 private Islamic afterschool gymnasias, while for a comparable 6,864,480⁴⁹ Tajikistani Muslims there

⁴⁵ A. Rakhnamo, “Chastnoe religioznoe obrazovanie v Tadjikistane: sovremennoe polozhenie, problemy i vyvody” [“Private religious Education in Tajikistan: Current Situation, Problems, and Conclusions”] In *IslamNews.TJ* November 1, 2011, <http://islamnews.tj/analitic/99-chastnoe-religioznoe-obrazovanie-v-tadjikistane-sovremennoe-polozhenie-problemy-i-vyvody.html>.

⁴⁶ “Chastnoe religioznoe obrazovanie v Tadjikistane: sovremennoe polozhenie, problemy i vyvody” [“Private religious Education in Tajikistan: Current Situation, Problems, and Conclusions.”]

⁴⁷ “Chastnoe religioznoe obrazovanie v Tadjikistane: sovremennoe polozhenie, problemy i vyvody” [“Private religious Education in Tajikistan: Current Situation, Problems, and Conclusions”]

⁴⁸ The total population of Kazakhstan is 15,522,373 (July 2011 est.), of them 47% are Muslim; ethnic Kazakhs (Qazaq) are 63.1% (2009 census), CIA - The World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kz.html>.

⁴⁹ The total population of Tajikistan is 7,627,200 (July 2011 est.), of them 90% are Muslim (85% are Sunni and 5% Shia) (2003 est.); ethnic Tajiks are 79.9% (2000 census), CIA-The World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tj.html>.

are only 19 *madrasas*, one Islamic University,⁵⁰ one school for the students of the *Qur'an*, and two preparatory departments.⁵¹

The lack of tolerance toward religious symbols in educational institutions as representative of the public spaces, at large, in Tajikistan is illustrated by the following incidents. The president of the country Emomali Rakhmon issued a decree prohibiting female students and pupils who wear *satr* or *hijab* from attending educational institutions starting in 2008.⁵² The actual implementation of the ban began even earlier as the decision by the Tajik Ministry of Education to prohibit wearing *hijab* in state and educational facilities was promulgated as early as 2007.⁵³ Ironically, according to the vice rector of the Dushanbe Foreign Language Institute Zieev, in addition to the *hijab* wearers, the students in mini-skirts and “lightheaded” blouses were to be banished from the university as well.⁵⁴ The same year a Dushanbe court upheld the Ministry’s position denying a woman wearing *hijab*.⁵⁵ More recently, in September 2010, Rakhmon demonstrated his peculiar interest in female clothing by criticizing Tajik women for wearing foreign-styled cloths. In a speech delivered at the Tajik National University and broadcasted on all channels of the state-controlled TV, Rakhmon pointed out that “if any of you [women] likes the styles of some [other] country, I will send you [there].”⁵⁶ In a related clarification, Tajik President’s press secretary stated that the President meant women wearing traditional clothing of

⁵⁰ “The Challenge of Radical Islam in Tajikistan: Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami,” *Nationalities Papers*, 1-20.

⁵¹ S. Olimova, “The current State of religious Education in Tajikistan: an Overview of the Situation with Recommendations,” In *From Confidence Building towards co-operative Co-existence. The Tajik Experiment of Islamic-secular Dialogue. Democracy, Security, Peace # 172*, edited by J. N. Bitter et al., Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, Germany, 2005, 243.

⁵² L. Isamova, “Rakhmon kritikuet zhenshchin za ispol’zovanie zarubezhnykh stilei v odezhde” [“Rakhmon Criticizes Women for Using foreign Styles in Clothing.”] *RIA Novosti News Agency*, September 1, 2010, <http://www.rian.ru/society/20100901/271115364.html>.

⁵³ A. Sarkorova, “Musul’manka suditsia za pravo nosit’ khidzhab” [“A Muslim Woman Sues for the Right to Wear Hijab.”] *BBC Russian*. July 10, 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/russian/international/newsid_6288000/6288126.stm.

⁵⁴ “Musul’manka suditsia za pravo nosit’ khidzhab” [“A Muslim Woman Sues for the Right to Wear Hijab.”]

⁵⁵ A. Sarkorova, “Tadzhikskoi studentke zapretili nosit’ khidzhab” [“A Tajik Student Is Prohibited from Wearing Hijab.”] *BBC Russian*. July 12, 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/russian/international/newsid_6895000/6895965.stm.

⁵⁶ “Rakhmon kritikuet zhenshchin za ispol’zovanie zarubezhnykh stilei v odezhde.” [“Rakhmon Criticizes Women for Using Foreign Styles in Clothing.”]

Indian, Pakistani, Iranian, Arab, and Turkish origin.⁵⁷ The president has repeatedly called on the ban of Muslim female head scarves in Tajik schools.

While the supreme organ governing Tajikistan's Islamic establishments—the Council of Ulema—is disappointed with the headscarf ban, the only religious party in the post-communist Central Asia, Islamic Party of Tajikistan's Revival, claimed that the prohibition was unconstitutional.⁵⁸

After the civil wars, the Tajik society became more conservative “as evidenced by the revival of polygamy, the growing number of women wearing *hijab* and the November 2004 government ban on women attending mosques to pray.”⁵⁹ The economic problems exemplified by widespread unemployment, poverty and social issues of substance abuse, human trafficking and prostitution “has led to a revival of “Muslim values”, which in effect is contributing to the popularity of radical groups,” according to some scholars.⁶⁰ However, it has also been pointed out that the overall social Islamization in Tajikistan may not have necessarily resulted in better quality of Islamic education.⁶¹ An ethnographic account from the Kamarob gorge of Tajikistan in fact shows the reverse, that “Most young men who joined the mujohid groups during the war were not well-educated in Islam” but rather fought due to their kin or neighborhood ties. Moreover, while among the (re)militarized fighters there are some who practice prayers and good behavior, others, in the view of the fighters, engage in substance abuse and do not exhibit good morality. The women of Kamarob see the difference between those men that employ Islam to patronize over women and “well educated religious authorities.”⁶²

There are indications that the suppression of Islamic education may lead to radicalization among Tajikistan's Muslims: “the government's response to the violence [in the Rasht valley] *has the potential to 'radicalize' some Muslims*, not just because of the nature of the military campaign in the Rasht valley, but *as a consequence of*

⁵⁷ “Rakhmon kritikuet zhenshchin za ispol'zovanie zarubezhnykh stilei v odezhde.” [“Rakhmon Criticizes Women for Using Foreign Styles in Clothing.”]

⁵⁸ “Musul'manka suditsia za pravo nosit' khidzhab” [“A Muslim Woman Sues for the Right to Wear Hijab.”]

⁵⁹ “The Challenge of Radical Islam in Tajikistan: Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami,” 14.

⁶⁰ “The Challenge of Radical Islam in Tajikistan: Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami,” 14.

⁶¹ J. Heathershaw and S. Roche, “An Ethnographic Perspective on the Causes and Consequences of the 2010 Armed Conflict in the Kamarob Gorge,” *Ethnopolitics Papers*, 8, 2011, 9, <http://www.ethnopolitics.org/ethnopolitics-papers/EPP008.pdf>.

⁶² “An Ethnographic Perspective on the Causes and Consequences of the 2010 Armed Conflict in the Kamarob Gorge,” 9.

*repressive state policies against Islamic education...*⁶³

Religious education provides the most significant source of understanding and knowledge in today's Tajikistan. Consequently, the clampdown on such institutions of learning by the secular government has been acknowledged as an important source for future unrest in the country: "Firstly, students of Islam have found their education impossible or extremely difficult to continue. Most mullahs have stopped their teaching programmes, leaving thousands of young motivated people insecure about their future. Islamic education may provide the most important source of teaching and knowledge in today's Tajikistan... In recent weeks, hundreds of scholars studying in various Muslim countries have been called back under the pretext that they were studying in illegal religious institutions. They were portrayed as potential terrorists 'in need of special supervision' on the national TV airwaves. Recent research on Central Asian students in the Middle East has demonstrated that in fact they travel abroad for a complex mixture of reasons, many of which have nothing to do with radicalization. It is not known how many of these international students have been arrested and how many are controlled 24 hours a day. But we can certainly say that such a campaign will have ramifications. It will make people try to avoid official authorities as much as possible; potentially, *it could lead to resistance.*"⁶⁴

The assault on religious education in Tajikistan has been documented by such incidents as burning down of a mosque and the cultural center of the Islamic Revival Party (IRP) in October of 2010. The center established after the peace agreement of 1997 provided education to many women for more than a decade. A day earlier, a Friday prayer was disrupted as the government forces search the building of the center confiscating technical equipment and computers.⁶⁵ Yet, "The religious education initiatives of the IRP have become a particular target of the government campaign against Islamic revival as it intensified during the Kamarob conflict."⁶⁶ The conflict in Rasht that took place in September of 2010 "cannot and should not be fully explained in terms of militant Islam. It has complex roots in Tajikistan's political and economic struggles." However, what is more worrying is "the Government's response to the conflict may increase the likelihood

⁶³ "An Ethnographic Perspective on the Causes and Consequences of the 2010 Armed Conflict in the Kamarob Gorge," 13, emphasis added.

⁶⁴ "An Ethnographic Perspective on the Causes and Consequences of the 2010 Armed Conflict in the Kamarob Gorge," 16, emphasis added.

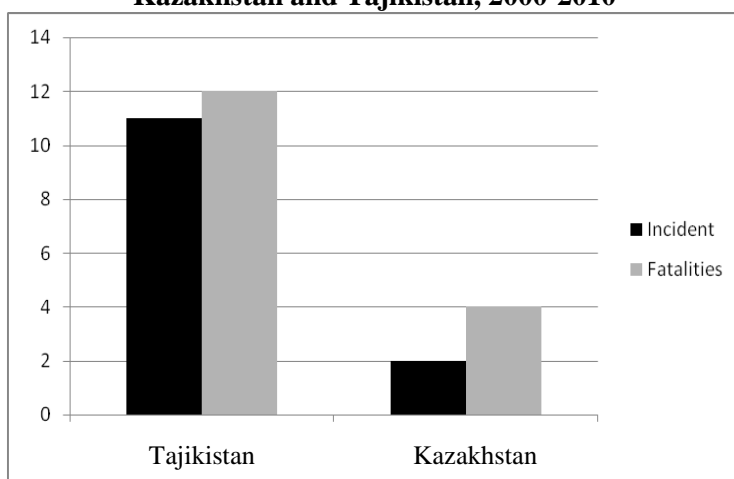
⁶⁵ "An Ethnographic Perspective on the Causes and Consequences of the 2010 Armed Conflict in the Kamarob Gorge," 17.

⁶⁶ "An Ethnographic Perspective on the Causes and Consequences of the 2010 Armed Conflict in the Kamarob Gorge," 18.

of outbreaks of Islamic militancy in the longer term.”⁶⁷

In-line with our hypothesis, the adverse relationship between dismissive state regulation of Islam and the ensuing low institutionalization of Islamic institutions of teaching and learning, on the one hand, and violence, on the other, is exhibited by the fact that in Tajikistan the number of incidents of terror and its fatalities is higher (11 and 12, respectively) than in Kazakhstan (2 and 4) between 2000-2010 (Figure 2).

Figure 2
The Level of Terrorist Incidents and the Ensuing Fatalities in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, 2000-2010



Conclusion:

In the light of above discussion, one understands that permissive state regulation of religion diminished the effects of radical extremism in Kazakhstan, whereas dismissive state regulation of religion increased the level of radical extremism in Tajikistan. The lack of Islamic educational institutions seems to threaten the stability and the long-term sustainability of Islamic revival in the post-Soviet Muslim Central Asia. Further, the lack of Islamic educational institutions can potentially produce unprecedented social, political, and security challenges in the region.

Islamic educational institutions appear to play a central role in educating *imams* (religious leadership and scholars) and developing in them a rich global outlook, so that they may be not only versed in

⁶⁷ “An Ethnographic Perspective on the Causes and Consequences of the 2010 Armed Conflict in the Kamarob Gorge,” 19.

Islamic knowledge but also literate in social and scientific innovations of the twenty-first century. In this respect, Islamic educational institutions may be instrumental in educating and imbibing the *indigenous* Islamic scholars with non-radical teachings. Consequently, this may serve as an effective antidote against radicalism.

Dismissive state regulation of religion toward Islamic education, in case of Tajikistan, appears to undermine national security by attracting radical elements seeking to export radical ideologies. Moreover, the lack of access to mainstream Islamic learning seems to increase the chances for radicals to recruit from un-informed or ill-informed Central Asian youth. Our findings support Heathershaw and Roche's (2011) claim that state sponsored suppression of Islamic education (or in our terms, dismissive state regulation of Islamic education) is leading to radicalization of Tajikistan's Muslims. On the other hand, permissive state regulation of religion seems to promote mainstream Islamic learning, in case of Kazakhstan, by allowing the youth to seek formal education in Islamic studies and thereby develop educational backgrounds, which may allow citizens to objectively evaluate various claims about Islam in general.

It is important to acknowledge that increased state regulation of religion may also increase the likelihood of abuse or discrimination of religion by state security institutions. However, when assessing the costs and benefits of government regulation and state funding of Islamic education in the wake of rising religious radicalism, permissive state regulation of religion may be the right strategic policy to provide financial support to build and sustain Islamic educational institutions at this *initial* and *transitional* stage in the post-Soviet Muslim Central Asia.

