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Mosque and State in Central Asia: Can Religious Freedom Coexist with Government Regulation of Islam?



DECEMBER 17, 2018

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Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
Washington, DC

The briefing was held at 3:04 p.m. in room 562, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, DC, Everett Price and Nathaniel Hurd, Senior Policy Advisors, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, presiding.

Panelists present: Everett Price, Senior Policy Advisor, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; Nathaniel Hurd, Senior Policy Advisor, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; Dr. Kathleen Collins, Associate Professor, Political Science, and Russian and Eurasian Studies, University of Minnesota; Dr. Emil Nasrutdinov, Associate Professor of Anthropology, American University of Central Asia; and Dr. Edward Lemon, DMGS–Kennan Institute Fellow at the Daniel Morgan Graduate School of National Security.

Mr. PRICE. Good afternoon. Thank you—we're very glad to have you here. My name is Everett Price, and this is my colleague Nathaniel Hurd. On behalf of our chairman, Senator Roger Wicker of Mississippi, and co-chairman, Congressman Chris Smith of New Jersey, we would like to welcome you to this Helsinki Commission panel entitled "Mosque and State: Can Religious Freedom Coexist with Government Regulation of Islam?" Nathaniel and I will be moderating this panel together, he in his capacity as a Helsinki Commission senior policy advisor for religious freedom, and I in my capacity as senior policy advisor with responsibility for Islamic affairs in Central Asia.

The gravity of the situation facing religious freedom in Central Asia is underscored by the U.S. State Department's decision just last week to redesignate Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, alongside eight other countries, as *countries of particular concern,* or CPCs, for engaging in or tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom. Turkmenistan and Tajikistan have appeared on the list for the past 3 years. A third Central Asian country, Uzbekistan, had also appeared on the State Department's list since 2016, but was upgraded this time to a special watchlist, reflecting modest improvements in its respect for the religious freedom of its citizens. Uzbekistan's positive

trajectory of incremental reforms began following the death of the country's longtime strongman leader Islam Karimov in 2016.

Since that time, Karimov's successor, current President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, has demonstrated his interest at opening the country to increase foreign investment in part by loosening some of the Karimov era's strictest regulations on public and private life. One element of this reform plan includes amendments to the national law governing religious affairs and institutions, which we understand the government is currently drafting and preparing for public comment. Nathaniel and I traveled to Uzbekistan last month to hear from Uzbekistani officials and civil society about the changes taking place there, particularly in the religious sphere. Despite the government's professed desire to enact more permissive regulations on religious life, the arguments opposing far-reaching reforms are cast in terms of national security and regime stability—namely, that the ebb of government control over religion will inevitably cede territory to religious-based political activism and potentially violent extremism.

Indeed, the terms of this argument are familiar in Central Asia, not to mention in other parts of the Muslim world, where Islam simultaneously occupied a revered position in national, social, and private life, while also preoccupying national security agencies and regime loyalists who fear its potential to catalyze political opposition and terrorism. These concerns have some merit. In one of the most recent and dramatic incidents of Islamic extremist violence in Central Asia, this summer an ISIS-linked terrorist cell in Tajikistan carried out the horrific murder of four cyclists, including two Americans, in the southwestern Danghara District. Such incidents only reinforce the inclination of all five Central Asian countries to prioritize national security and their administration of religious affairs, in particular by strictly regulating and often outright co-opting and controlling Islamic belief and practice.

In a statement for the record submitted today to this briefing, the renowned international religious freedom monitoring organization Forum 18 underscored how Islamic institutions are subject to particularly invasive state interventions, compared with minority faiths, effectively controlling Islam not just from the outside, but also from within. The statement reads: "These states have effectively subsumed the only permitted Islamic bodies into the apparatus of the state. The regimes control all clergy appointments, especially at senior levels, and remove clerics as they see fit. Some of them even dictate the sermons that imams are allowed to preach in the mosques they do permit to exist."

Yet such a heavy-handed and security-minded approach violates the religious freedom of individuals that is enshrined in the national constitutions and international commitments of these states. The resulting dilemma begs the question that serves as the subtitle to this briefing today: Can religious freedom coexist with government regulation of Islam?

To help answer this question, we have convened a superb panel of Central Asia experts who have studied these matters from numerous angles and over dozens of years. Their remarks will help us to understand the reality of state regulation of Islam, and the intended and unintended consequences of this heavily centralized policy. They will also help us understand the terms of the policy debate between religious freedom and national security, and hopefully suggest ways to escape this binary that appears to propose a zero-sum tradeoff between the two.

I'm sorry to say that our fourth panelist, Peter Mandaville, has taken ill and will not be able to participate. We will genuinely miss his contribution, which was to focus on policy lessons from other approaches to state regulation of Islam elsewhere in the Muslim world.

First this afternoon we'll hear from Professor Kathleen Collins of the University of Minnesota, who will provide a brief overview of her extensive research and of the mechanisms and consequences of state control of Islam in Central Asia. Next we will hear from Professor Emil Nasrutdinov of the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Professor Nasrutdinov will describe key conclusions from his research into radicalization, particularly in his home country of Kyrgyzstan, the only semi-free country in the region that applies somewhat less draconian approaches to Islamic practice when compared to other regional states. And finally, we'll have Dr. Edward Lemon DMGS–Kennan Institute fellow at the Daniel Morgan School, who will explore the case of Tajikistan, where he's conducted extensive research into the state's harsh counterextremism policy.

I will refer you to your audience folders for their full biographies, which are impressive, which goes without speaking, of course. And unless my colleague Nathaniel has any comments, I will turn the floor over to Dr. Collins.

Thank you.

Dr. COLLINS. Thank you very much. Good afternoon. Thank you for coming. And thanks especially to the Helsinki Commission and to Everett and Nathaniel for organizing this panel.

I will focus my brief remarks today on three points. First, religion in the Central Asian states, particularly Islam, continues to be the target of aggressively secular government policies. A few years ago, a young man I interviewed in Kyrgyzstan characterized the government as atheist oppressors even worse than the Soviet Union. The post-Soviet states are not any longer seeking to eradicate Islam, the way the Soviet Union was. However, despite some concessions to religious practice, government elites generally view any manifestation of independent Islam as inherently political, radical, and a threat to their survival.

Two caveats are in order, one of which Everett just talked about. One is that Uzbekistan has, over the past year or so, made some significant improvements under President Mirziyoyev, and things seem to be in process there to ameliorate the situation in terms of religious freedom for Muslims as well as Christians.

Second, there is also some variation, certainly regionally, de facto and de jure. My comments to initiate this panel are somewhat broad, sketching out the situation in the region. Turkmenistan still remains the worst-case scenario, as it has long been, and Tajikistan is still the best. And yet, many Soviet-style laws and practices on religion severely regulate Islam. The Soviet attitude of a sort of atheist suspicion of Islam I think still pervades the views of many government elites. These governments ban any political Islamic activity as extremist and terrorist, including not only violent organizations such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, but also the pro-democratic Islamic Renaissance Party in Tajikistan and the extreme, but nonviolent, party Hizb ut-Tahrir. Those accused of membership are subject to torture and lengthy imprisonment.

The governments also severely restrict or criminalize many ordinary, everyday religious practices, including religious education, even at home; possessing the Koran on one's

cellphone, or one's laptop, or even in hard copy; possessing other religious literature; certainly proselytization; and various forms of Islamic dress. Furthermore, security services control or monitor imams' sermons, and even videotape mosque attendees. Unregistered mosques are frequently raided and closed. States have threatened, arrested, and occasionally killed popular imams who either preach an unsanctioned version of Islam—such as Salafism, Shi'ism, Tablighi Jamaat—or who raise a voice on political issues, whether it's about corruption or about the right for women to wear a hijab. Family members of accused or imprisoned extremists are also regularly threatened. As in the Soviet era, it's not just radicals but ordinary believers who become the victims of state oppression.

Second, religious oppression has fostered a widespread sense of injustice. In addition to corruption and other political and economic abuses, people are angered by unjust attacks on their identity and beliefs. I've seen this interviewing people across the region with a team of Central Asian colleagues. For example, one of our respondents, Tahir, believed that a free Islamic practice was essential to justice. He said, "Justice is necessary. And for there to be justice, people must live in faith." Another man, Alisher, linked the lack of justice to state secularism. He said, "There are many atheists. And they treat us believers badly. There is no justice. The situation is very bad." Shukrat exclaimed, "Everywhere justice is a problem. We need justice. Where there is no justice, evil things happen, like here. Justice is every person's demand!"

A man from the Ferghana Valley explained: "Now the religious schools are gone. There is only one imam for 9,000 people. The mosque can't even teach people anymore." An older Uzbek woman, Nodira, observed that banning home religious teachers for women, *otinchas,* had been awful because now instead of them there are only a lot of extremists. Her colleague added that forbidding education caused youths to be drawn to radicals. "They use religion as a weapon and lure children to their movements," she said. Likewise, one man noted that in government those who work in government cannot participate in the mosque. This is also generally true of schoolteachers, and students, and university students. One young woman even complained that she was given a warning merely for carrying an Arabic language textbook in public. She had been trying to teach herself Arabic so that she could read the Koran.

Some link such forms of repression to politics. Abumalik from Dushanbe complained, "These officials who are preventing Friday prayer are also those who are opposing Muslim unity. If people would work according to the Sharia, then many problems in our country would be resolved, including corruption." He was not an Islamist, but his words suggested that he saw repression of Islam as a fundamental political problem. Islamist propaganda clearly appealed to some. One man, attracted to Hizb ut-Tahrir's ideas, said, "We want to live in a just and fair society. Nowadays there is no justice. But the caliphate was a just system." And Erkin proclaimed, "There is no justice, not in Kyrgyzstan and not in Uzbekistan! They only talk about democracy. They oppress Muslims more now in comparison with the Soviet times, even though they talk about freedom of religion. It's because of this that we should become an Islamic State!"

Third, repression of Islam has spawned opposition movements centered around politicized Islamic ideas and identity. Islamist movements target those angry at injustice. Their ideologies advocate Islam, whether an Islamic nation-state, the caliphate, or simply jihad, as the solution to injustice. We have seen this pattern take place across Central Asia for over three decades now. The latest wave of Islamist extremism involving Central Asians is the flow of foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq since about 2014. Overall, estimates of

foreign fighters from Central Asia number from about 3,000 to 5,000. The number on the whole seems low, but on the other hand, this is up to 20 percent of foreign fighters documented there. This is striking for a region far from Damascus, where transnational militant Islamism was almost unthinkable a decade or two ago.

On a per capita basis, from 2015 to 2017 Kyrgyzstanis and Tajikistanis were particularly high state contributors of jihadist fighters. In both countries, religious oppression has escalated significantly over the past 10 years as each state has reneged on its commitment to democratization and, with that, to religious freedom. The case of Kyrgyzstan is telling. There, religious policy was liberal from the late Soviet era through the early to mid–2000s. During that time, Kyrgyzstan did not have a serious problem with radicalism. Yet, since about 2006, there has been a steady increase in repression of Islam, both legally and extralegally. This is particularly so amongst ethnic Uzbeks in the south. The killing of Imam Rafiq Kamalov and the arrest of his son, Imam Rashod Kamalov, both Salafis, generated extreme discontent at religious and political injustice. Kyrgyzstan subsequently became a significant source of recruits to Syria.

As of 2017, over 1,300 Kyrgyzstanis had joined militant groups there and, according to Radio Free Europe, about 30 percent of these jihadists came from the southern region where the Kamalovs lived and preached. About 90 percent of those recruits are also ethnic Uzbeks. Over the past few years, ISIS and multiple Central Asian battalions, affiliates of al-Qaida, have all put forth radical anti-democratic ideologies which propose Islam as a solution to political and religious injustice, corruption, and the torture of Muslims. They specifically endorse violence. They deride Muslim democrats who have sought to work within the system, like the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan. Their propaganda videos call Central Asians with slogans such as, "Do not be afraid to fight in jihad," or "The path of honor is jihad." In one video, the leader of the Unity and Jihad Battalion, an ethnic Uzbek from southern Kyrgyzstan preaches, "Nowadays, Muslims face lots of hardships. Women are forced to remove their hijab. Having a beard is now a crime. Some Muslims say there is no need for jihad now, but who will defend Muslims in Palestine and Syria if there is no need for jihad?"

Hundreds of such messages on social media lure Central Asians to fight.

In short, oppressing religious freedom is a major contributor to radicalism. When the state indiscriminately represses many or most expressions of Islam, some will inevitably turn to Islamist messages and solutions for a just life.

Mr. PRICE. Thank you very much.

Dr. Nasrutdinov.

Dr. NASRUTDINOV. Thank you. Thank you, Everett and Kathleen.

I would like to continue the discussion that has been started by Kathleen. Notwithstanding the criticism, I would still suggest that Kyrgyzstan remains the best country in the region, with regard to the freedom of religion, with the most liberal religious policy in Central Asia. At the moment, we have nearly 4,000 mosques in the country, and more than 100 madrasas. This is double the size of the number of madrasas for all other Central Asian countries taken together.

Research shows that madrasas which are governed and regulated by the special board of Muslims in Kyrgyzstan have a positive influence on reducing vulnerability of people to radicalization, since the curricula is standard. It teaches moderate, traditional Islam, which is very critical of the radical movements, particularly of the Salafi influence

in the region. Perhaps the only area where madrasa education is lagging is in regard to Russian-speaking madrasas. For nearly 100 madrasas in the country, there is no single one that would teach subjects in Russian. Thus, we observe a large number of Russian-speaking Muslim population in the north of the country, including ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic minorities who are more vulnerable to influence of radical ideas because they often cannot simply understand the message given by imams on the mosques.

Yet, there are several influential religious groups, such as Turkish Khizmet, Nurjular, Sulaimanchiler, Southeast Asian Tablighi Jamaat, and several moderate Salafi groups, which are legal in Kyrgyzstan, while they have been banned in other Central Asian countries. This relative freedom of religion applies not only to Islamic groups, but also to other religious communities as well. There are nearly 400 Christian groups which are registered with the state committee on religious affairs. Once they are registered, they do not experience significant pressures. The only Christian organization that is banned in Kyrgyzstan is the Church of Mormon. There are 90 names in the list of banned organizations that are all Muslim.

Kathleen rightly pointed to the complications of relations and more pressure on the religious communities from 2006. Yet, approximately from 2013–2014, we see a bit of a reversal in the trend. This is caused mostly by the change of leadership on three levels. First of all, the president himself, the director of the state committee on religious affairs, and the sort of grand mufti of the country. In the past there were major conflicts between the latter two, the state committee and mufti. But since 2014, most of these conflicts have been resolved and we observe quite a lot of collaboration. A third actor in this collaboration are international organizations, which successfully engage with the state and the religious communities in various projects on CVE [countering violent extremism], gender, conflict resolution, et cetera.

I would also maybe have a debate with Kathleen in regard to the high representation of Kyrgyzstani fighters in Syria, particularly the engagement of ethnic Uzbeks. I—as well as our experts—believe that figures for Uzbeks might be exaggerated, particularly by the Kyrgyz security officials who are mostly homogeneous ethnic Kyrgyz. A lot depends on what we look for as a source of information; therefore, these kinds of numbers mostly represent the outcomes of a specific security project [inaudible] which targeted only Uzbek communities in the period of 2013 and 2016, the exact same period when the statistics on Uzbeks went up. I agree that Uzbek communities in the south are significantly persecuted until nowadays, since the conflict of 2010, but there are a number of reasons why you should perhaps take the official statistics with a grain of salt.

But, the big question of ethnic Uzbeks being very important, we still see the Kyrgyzstani model as the most progressive and the most productive. This peaceful model of groups can function freely. They do not see the state as an oppressor. They play an important role in drawing the practicing Muslim community away from the more radical influences. Yet, with all that, there are still many questions to consider, and issues. So last year we conducted research, a nationwide study of young people's vulnerability and their resilience to radicalization. We conducted this analysis across five major domains of young people's life—grievances, politics, religion, socialization, and psychology. Our research shows that the grievances are the most important factor of vulnerability. Young people who experience discrimination have the highest vulnerability score.

These scores are particularly high for young people who experience discrimination from the state officials and from the police. Such young people are much more likely to

have strong desires to avenge others and justify violence for various purposes, including religious ones. Young people in Kyrgyzstan grow up seeing a number of social and state injustices, and very high levels of corruption around them. They name corruption and amorality as the biggest problems of Kyrgyz society. They see the state institutions and actors as predatory agents who use their privileged positions to make money from the rest of society. The theme of corruption and state predation make the core of many young people's radical ideas. Members of radical organizations can exploit such perceptions to recruit young people, by promising them the just Islamic alternative.

Young people also report a high degree of injustice and discrimination, particularly from police, toward practicing Muslims. For young women, it is often related to their Islamic attire. Nonetheless, young people believe the situation with religion freedom and conditions for Muslim populations in Kyrgyzstan are better than they are in the neighboring Central Asian countries, Russia, Western countries, and China.

Mr. PRICE. Professor, can I ask you to summarize the other elements of the vulnerability that you're talking about, just in the interest of time?

Dr. NASRUTDINOV. Young people's political ideas become more and more connected to their religious views. Nearly one-third of the survey respondents would support a more religious candidate, and even introduction of a Sharia law instead of a constitution. So, we see that in regard to the geopolitics, there is a very positive evaluation of the influence of Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, but negative evaluation of the influence of United States, Europe, and Iran. China is somewhere in the middle, with one exception, in regard to the evaluation of the Muslim in their own country.

The important role of religion is that religious leaders, religious imams, and religious scholars have a positive influence. Young people who obtain knowledge through personal, face-to-face communication are less vulnerable than the young people who obtain information on the internet. Socialization is important, and I can talk about this later.

Mr. PRICE. Thank you.

Dr. Lemon.

Dr. LEMON. Thank you, once again, to Everett and Nathaniel for inviting me to speak on this panel. I'm going to focus particularly on Tajikistan, which reflects many of the dynamics that Dr. Collins introduced in her opening remarks. Three things may separate Tajikistan from the other countries within the region, maybe with the exception of Turkmenistan. First is the sort of severity of the state secular campaign against Islam. As Everett mentioned in his opening remarks, Tajikistan has been classified as a CPC for the past 3 years. And like the other countries in the region, counterextremism is not really about addressing security issues—although that is obviously part of it—but it is more sort of about the dynamics of authoritarian politics within the region. Effectively, it's a tool for the governments of the region to crack down on potential opposition to their role, and effectively secure their regimes. Obviously, some of these policies have the potential to counter extremism, but that's maybe a secondary objective.

So what have we seen in Tajikistan? We've seen particularly a focus on the visible signs of piety: the forced shaving of men with beards; campaigns against women wearing hijab; both official and unofficial campaigns. Women have been not allowed to wear hijabs in schools since 2007—both students and teachers. There have been a series of campaigns against men with beards. If there are 100 madrasas operating in Kyrgyzstan, every single

madrasa in Tajikistan—the 19 that to my knowledge operated around 5 or 6 years ago—was closed by 2016. Students have been banned from studying Islam abroad since 2010.

And according to the official statistics issued by the Committee on Religious Affairs, last year alone, in 2017, 1,938 mosques were closed in the country for not meeting with government regulations. In viewing this in some ways as being post-Soviet, the official statements said that these were turned into cultural centers, youth clubs—reflecting some of the policies that have been seen under the Soviet Union. So I think that the first difference is really the severity of this, which takes a higher level than in other countries, with the exception maybe of Turkmenistan.

Second, as Dr. Collins mentioned in her opening statement, Tajikistan, until 2015, was the only country in the region with a legal faith-based party—i.e., the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, that emerged in the south of the country in the 1970s, became an officially registered party right before the fall of the Soviet Union in 1990, and participated on the opposition side during the civil war. The party was legalized as part of the peace deal of 1997 and held a sort of symbolic two seats in the country's 63-seat assembly. But particularly since 2010, the party came under pressure and ended up being declared a terrorist organization. And I can address during the Q&A the effects of that, but obviously the closure of the party which had—or claimed to have—at its height 50,000 members, was viewed many observers, including myself, as potentially detrimental to countering violent extremism in the country.

Third, as Dr. Collins mentioned, Tajikistan within the region is the highest per capita exporter of foreign fighters. The latest figures from a few weeks ago from the security services—which, again, need to be taken with a pinch of salt as Dr. Nasrutdinov has said—are 1,900 fighters. That would be a significant portion from the 3,000–5,000 or 4,000–6,000 fighters that are coming from the region. So, I think if Kyrgyzstan is maybe the best example of sort of model of state secularism in the region, Tajikistan is potentially the worst, maybe with Turkmenistan.

So is counterextremism productive? I think my research, along with Dr. Nasrutdinov's research and Dr. Collins' research, has indicated that grievances do play a key role. And I think not only in the messaging that extremist groups have been portraying the governments of the region as an enemy of Islam by citing specific examples of their policies: closing mosques and preventing men from growing beards, policies against the hijab, et cetera. These have definitely been picked up by extremist organizations, and specific experiences of grievances does seem to be one of the only underlying conclusions for much of the research on extremist recruiting within the region; the other being the importance of social networks, both personal and online, in sort of drawing people into these extremist organizations.

But I think another aspect in which state secularism in the region can be counterproductive is its sort of logic. Given that it's highly authoritarian, it's creating this false binary in many ways between a good, state-sponsored Islam that's local, and a bad foreign extremist Islam, that should be repressed. Its very logic is authoritarian, and it really does stymie critical thinking amongst the citizenry. This is part of a broader politics of authoritarianism within the region. The main effect of this authoritarianism is to try and create docile citizens who are secular, apolitical, and as Dr. Nasrutdinov mentioned, not only apolitical, but also potentially even anti-political who view politics, particularly when mixed with religion, as being a particularly dangerous thing. The governments of the region point to the Arab Spring as an example of this.

And effectively, what's being created are citizens—young people in particular, who form huge segments of society within the region—who lack critical thinking skills and lack a critical and deep understanding of religion. Some of the examples from my research, particularly amongst Tajik labor migrants in Russia in 2014 and 2015, which was the height of the recruitment drive by Islamic State and other terrorist organizations in Syria, indicated that it's often these informal, community-based approaches that are much more effective in countering extremism than the heavy-handed approaches of the government.

One example from a number from my sort of fieldwork, particularly in 2015, is Sadriddin. He came to Russia, I think, in 2013. He was a young labor migrant, had few opportunities in his home village in the south of Tajikistan, had a very limited knowledge of religion. He didn't pray growing up; didn't particularly take an interest in religion. But eventually in Moscow, he came under the influence of Islamic State recruiters who began to draw him into the fold, talking about the need for the religious obligation to conduct jihad. Eventually Abdulrahmon, who was one of my interlocutors in my research, invited him to dinner.

Abdulrahmon was a Koran reader from the west of Tajikistan who studied in a madrasa in Pakistan and held an informal prayer group within the bazaar where he worked on the edge of Moscow. And he staged an intervention by pointing to specific examples within the Koran, the Hadith, that demonstrated that violence is only justified in very specific circumstances, and the contemporary circumstances we're seeing now perhaps do not justify violence. And eventually, through this process of communal intervention, he was brought away from that path, and decided not to join an extremist group.

So speaking to Nathaniel's original question of pointing to policies and different ways things could be done differently, this focus on the community level and using communities as a tool not of authoritarian consolidation, as the presidents tend to use them, but as a tool in genuinely countering extremism, is something that would be very productive, along with trying to create citizens who can actually think critically about the simplistic messaging that they're getting from these extremist organizations.

Mr. HURD. Thank you. We'll now move into a period of discussion. It'll be a mixture of our panelists having the opportunity to respond to each other, to some of the points that have been made, some of the questions that have been raised. Everett and I will also have some questions for the panelists. And then we'll open it up to the audience. We'll start with those of you that are here in the room, and then we'll move to our Facebook viewers. So those of you that are watching online can type your questions there.

I'll start with Dr. Collins, whether or not you have any sort of initial responses to some of the points that were raised by Dr. Nasrutdinov.

Dr. COLLINS. Thank you. Thank you for your remarks, Dr. Nasrutdinov. I don't think I fundamentally disagree with anything you said. As I mentioned at the beginning, I was speaking broadly about major trends and problems in the region. Kyrgyzstan is a tough case to characterize, I think because there's a lot of regional variation within the country. So, the situation in the south of the country—in Osh, in Kara-Suu, in Jalal-Abad, Batken—is significantly worse than the situation in the north of the country. As you agree, the situation for ethnic Uzbeks is significantly worse along a number of dimensions, including ethnic repression and exclusion, and problems with the largely Kyrgyz police force and the ethnic Kyrgyz-dominated government in the south of the country, which the north of the country has problems controlling.

The labor migrant phenomenon is largest in the south of the country. Remittances are highest for Osh and Jalal-Abad in the southern regions of the country, making that particular population the most vulnerable, whether they're in Moscow, or St. Petersburg, or Kazakhstan, or Turkey, to the recruiting and calls and networks of ISIS and other radical groups. So, there are many reasons for the ethnic Uzbek population, including religious repression as well as economic and ethnic repression, that lead them, I think, to be more a more vulnerable population at the call of ISIS.

I particularly highlight the religious phenomenon, the religious repression here in large part because the ethnic Uzbek population in the south, particularly followers of Rafiq Qori and Rashod Qori, are seen as Salafis. Salafis, while not banned and mistreated in the same way in Kyrgyzstan, are still not given the same sort of equal rights in Kyrgyzstan as mainstream Hanafi Islam. So, I think they face greater levels of persecution. And certainly, both the killing of Rafiq Qori and then the arrest and 10-year sentence of Rashod Qori have exacerbated the problem in the south of the country—ironically because Rashod Qori had actually openly spoken and has multiple videos out available on social media condemning ISIS. So he's a Salafist on the one hand, but on the other hand he has very specifically called on this following not to join ISIS.

Just a couple of other points—I think we all agree that the numbers, in terms of those who have actually gone to Syria as foreign fighters, are difficult to pin down. Certainly 1,300 is not a hard number—it's the number that I draw from the Soufan Group. I think to some extent it's corroborated by media reports by Radio Free Europe's data. And they've found similar disparities in terms of ethnic Uzbeks versus ethnic Kyrgyz who have joined, also primarily from the south of the country, facing these broader issues of religious and political and economic injustice, like corruption.

The one other element that I would mention that I think gives some credence to the numbers is that the largely ethnic Uzbek battalions that have been fighting, and continue to be located in Syria today, the Imam Bukhari Battalion and Tawhid wal Jihad Battalion, are led by ethnic Uzbeks, one from southern Kyrgyzstan originally. They put out prolific media-social media propaganda on various social media channels—whether it's Telegram, or YouTube, or Turkish social media platforms. They use those platforms to disseminate their message, largely in the Uzbek language, and to some extent as well in Russian. This gives some credence to the fact that they're drawing on those networks in particular, but I agree that the numbers are problematic, and we should not take the regime's numbers without questioning them.

Mr. HURD. Dr. Nasrutdinov, do you want to add anything?

Dr. NASRUTDINOV. Well, I agree with Dr. Collins. And, again, I was not critical of the points that you were making. I was suggesting that we should take a bit more nuanced approach to this. The situation with the Uzbeks in the south of the country, as I said, right until now remains very, very problematic, and it is a major issue. But there are issues that the grievances of the Uzbeks might have developed due to this very difficult situation, which might be one of the major factors contributing to their vulnerability to radicalization.

There is no equal sign, between the two. This still needs further and deeper exploration, because what we are doing right here, pointing a finger at the very specific ethnic group without really strong evidence and without deep discussion, can have consequences for the group itself. This is the only thing that I've been pointing out—that we have to take a little bit more care and consideration. That's all.

Thank you.

Mr. HURD. Before I initiate our moderator questions, were there any other points that were raised by fellow panelists that any of you want to respond to?

All right. I'll start our line of questioning by focusing on the topic of secularism. And it's something that several of you have already alluded to. In particular, government campaigns against or forcible removal of visible signs of piety—the hijab and beards—would be two evident examples of that. Debates about secularism, what it is, how it should be manifested in government policy, law, regulation, practice, is not something that's unique to Central Asia, of course. We're having debates and discussions about that in North America and in Western Europe. I immediately thought of the French amendment to its code of education back in 2004. The key line there was in public primary schools, middle schools, and high schools, the wearing of symbols or clothing by which students ostensibly manifest a religious affiliation is forbidden, which sounds more akin to what we've seen in some of the Central Asian countries.

Two initial questions for all of you: Is there a kind of secularism that would be compliant with the international obligations that the Central Asian countries have made on religious freedom that might also match the Central Asian context? And second, as you look more globally, more broadly, are there models of secularism that you would commend to the consideration to the governments of Central Asia?

Dr. LEMON. I guess I can take that one. No. I think the form of secularism we see in Central Asia is a more extreme version of *laïcité,* as you say, the French form of secularism. It's been called by Ahmet Kuru a sort of assertive secularism whereby the state sits above religion and the state has the right to intervene in religious affairs, including personal and private settings, as well as public settings. So that's maybe a more extreme version than the sort of French model that talks about religious symbols in public places. So, it's a more extreme version of that.

I'm not an expert on different models of secularism outside of Central Asia, but I think some sort of model by which religion is afforded or religious freedom is tolerated—the actual words of the constitution come before the more restrictive religious laws that have been adopted within the countries, and that that takes precedent and people are able to practice religion freely in their own homes and in public places, would be a model that would be preferable.

Mr. HURD. Dr. Collins? Dr. Nasrutdinov?

Dr. COLLINS. I actually think that the model that Kyrgyzstan had more or less adopted prior to the 2008 religion law was actually working pretty well. There was an enormous amount of pluralism within the country. Salafis, Tablighi Jamaat, Shia, multiple different Christian groups participated publicly, and were able to freely worship. They were not facing the type of fear and restrictions and repression that they have subsequently, which was initiated by the Bakiyev regime, but has been continued despite the change in government after 2010, and arguably has actually worsened, particularly in the south of the country, as we were talking about.

This has been, of course, in the context of the growth of ISIS, talk about counterterrorism measures, et cetera. But, as I suggested before, I think the adoption of a much harsher version of secularism modeled on *laïcité,* but also modeled on Soviet ideas of atheism, in fact has exacerbated the problem with religious extremism within Kyrgyzstan.

If Kyrgyzstan were to go back 10 years, I think they actually had a relatively good model not just for Kyrgyzstan, but for the region more generally.

Mr. PRICE. Dr. Nasrutdinov, I'd like to hear your thoughts on this as well. But if I can just add one other question that I'd appreciate your help clarifying is, what exactly—and you alluded to it a little bit, but I was wondering if you could delve into it a little bit more—what prompted that change in the policy from I think it was 2006–2008 and then afterwards? And then you also said that it flipped back and headed, again, in a little bit more of a positive direction after 2010. What accounts for those changes back and forwards in terms of the trajectory?

Dr. NASRUTDINOV. Okay. I think when we talk about Central Asia and we talk about the states, we cannot talk about the states in isolation from the discussion of specific leaders of the countries. This is all about personalities, including what is happening in Uzbekistan. This slightly positive change that is developing, again, is a reflection of a change in the personality of the leadership.

And, what has been happening in Kyrgyzstan in regard to religious freedom is exactly that in many ways. Askar Akayev, the first president, was very open-minded, democratic, and really didn't care about religion at all, so this was not on his agenda. That's why so many religious communities, both Muslim and Christian and other communities, were able to develop and flourish in such large numbers.

Then Bakiyev's regime really was the first regime that actually started repression by the government of religion. And the first law that Bakiyev introduced was the law on religious freedom, which in fact was actually in many ways limiting the freedoms of citizens. But again, we see that when Atambayev came to power, Roza Otunbayeva didn't do much. When Atambayev came to power, in the first couple of years he was still trying to figure out what to do. One kind of positive thing that can be said about Atambayev was that he was open to the discussion with the expert community. He had the Security Council, and he created a number of groups of experts who had been working on these issues and have been advising him on these specific issues.

Particularly as a result of this collaboration, there was this positive change that began evolving in 2013 and 2014. As I said, the formal State Committee on Religious Affairs director was removed and replaced, and the mufti was replaced, and the two started collaborating much better. And then what we see, while this positive change was still evolving, Atambayev was quite critical of the hijabs and Muslim attire, and he produced quite a lot of negative remarks in regard to religion.

Now the new president, Sooronbay Jeenbekov, is believed to be himself a practicing Muslim who prays five times a day and generally supports Islamic communities in many ways. He has organized a number of interesting conferences and invited a number of interesting international experts and speakers to talk about these issues. At the moment we really are seeing very little pressure, and he's also a distant relative of our present mufti, which is a big thing in Central Asia. So, at the moment, we see this positive change.

One last thing I would like to mention besides these personality styles at the top level, is the important role played by civil society. For example, one of the main groups that lobbied and very actively promoted the right of girls to wear hijab in school is the group called Mutakalim. This is a female organization that fights for the right of Muslim women. I can suggest that whatever has been achieved in regard to this freedom—and

Kyrgyzstan today is the only country in Central Asia which allows girls to wear hijab to schools, right; no other country allows that—is not the product of the specific politicians or the president, or even the muftiate. It is the outcome of the many years of struggle that this feminist organization put into this. They took the minister of education to court a number of times. They have protested in front of the Ministry of Education. The civil society has contributed quite a lot to that kind of form of secularism, which is a bit distant from French *laïcité* but closer to a more American version of secularism.

Mr. HURD. Underpinning a lot of what we've discussed already today is the fundamental question of meaning. So people, whether they're in Central Asia or Western Europe or elsewhere, have big existential questions once they hit the age of reason.

This intersects, I think, with two things. One, state control or branded Islam, where the imams are state funded, state trained, state approved, where the content of their sermons are in some cases literally provided by the governments. So what people are receiving when they go to the mosque is, as some of you already noted, effectively government propaganda. It doesn't have a particularly strong religious character and doesn't necessarily address these big existential questions that people have about themselves and about life.

This also brings us to education, and all of you have touched on the lack of healthy, vibrant religious education in the countries of Central Asia. Broadly, what would healthy religious education look like in the Central Asian context? What would it look like at the private level? What should the government's relationship be to it?

And then a version of the question that I asked earlier: Are there models, including outside of Central Asia, where you think there are large Muslim communities and the religious education looks like the kind of thing that you would hope to be replicated, or at least considered, in Central Asia?

And a third question is: Can you perhaps say a bit more about the lack of substance that people are receiving at school, that what they're receiving at mosque in response to these big existential questions they have, which in turn makes them perhaps more vulnerable, more susceptible to the allure of what they might encounter from more extremist individuals or groups, particularly when they travel abroad for work to places like Russia?

This is a question for all the panelists.

Dr. LEMON. Three questions for each. I guess I'll go with the first and the third.

So, as I mentioned, before 2010 I think there were almost 3,000 Tajiks studying Islam abroad, and there are a number of madrasas operating in the country, and there still is an Islamic university I think with 2,000 places. There's certainly much more demand for Islamic education than there is supply. There are still, from my understanding and from some reports, some sort of unofficial underground—although that's a misleading term that dates back to the Soviet Union—there are still unofficial lessons, and, certainly in some villages within the country, the government views that as a potential security threat within Tajikistan.

I think a model would be, obviously, providing more Islamic education, providing some—I know that in the past they introduced in high school, I guess middle school—some sort of theology and Islamic morality classes. That may be a good opportunity. But as I said, speaking to the third question, education within Central Asia in general, Tajikistan in particular, is about producing citizens who are not critical and will not resist or question authority and power. I think there's a genuine view that Islam and Islamic

morality poses a threat to regime security, so I think it's trying to persuade the government that Islam isn't necessarily anti-state and it's not necessarily anti-status quo; and that they can loosen the reins on religion and promote religious education, and it doesn't ipso facto mean that their power will be threatened. In fact, if they opened up to a more pluralist system like Kyrgyzstan has, it would reduce the pressure and reduce some of the injustice that's existing within society, and maybe even allow Islamic civil society to develop and take on some of the roles that the state's incapable of doing as we've seen sort of through processes like kashar in Kyrgyzstan and is already existing in Tajikistan.

Dr. NASRUTDINOV. Yes, and in Kyrgyzstan the major problem faced by students of madrasas is the lack of certification and licensing. Because Kyrgyzstan is a secular country, the Ministry of Education refuses to give licenses to religious institutions. What we have as a result is that students usually go to madrasas after completing the ninth grade of school. Then, having completed the degree at the madrasa, they are not able to obtain a certificate of secondary education, and thus they cannot continue their education into the higher education institutions. This has been a problem for all madrasa graduates. And the madrasas themselves are open to collaboration: They want to introduce secular subjects into their curriculum just to get that secondary education certificate for their own graduates.

Yet, the state is still kind of lagging behind on these issues and not really working properly. So far only one institution has been granted a license: the Islamic University of Kyrgyzstan, one of the eight higher education madrasas. There is one more pilot project that was introduced by the State Committee on Religious Affairs, and that is kind of a theology college on the basis of one of the universities, where students who obtain a degree in religion also obtain a certificate in secondary education. I think resolving this issue would help a lot the graduates of Islamic educational institutions to integrate better into life, and to have both professional careers and religious careers developed together, where they would not be isolated only to religious life.

In regard to introducing religious subjects into secular schools, this also has been on agenda. This is already the second year that the Ministry of Education is piloting a project on introducing a subject called the history of world religion into the curriculum of regular secular schools. The results are yet to be evaluated and seen, but there is this initiative, and hopefully it will take proper ground.

Dr. COLLINS. Thank you for pointing to that issue—religious education, as well as education more broadly, I think is an enormous challenge for the Central Asian states to deal with. In approximately a hundred focus groups that my Central Asian colleagues and I did across the region over the course of several years, the vast, vast majority of participants pointed to a desire for any religious education, better religious education, and religious education within the framework of an otherwise-secular school system. So, they're not talking about a desire to send their children just to madrasas, something along the lines of what we've seen in Pakistan or Afghanistan emerge over the past several decades. They want their children to get basic theological instruction within the context of the school system.

Given that there are no religious schools that also teach secular subjects for the most part across the region—again, Kyrgyzstan has a few minor exceptions, but across the region it's something that's broadly banned and seen as threatening to the governments of the region—I think that is a key area in which we can think about looking at models elsewhere. And I actually would propose the U.S. as a relatively good model in this

respect. Religious education, religious schools, religious institutions that run, own, and teach religion as a theology together with the whole range of secular subjects have been something that have been part of the religious and civil system in the United States since our founding.

The Catholic school system, of which I'm a product, is actually a quite healthy example in this regard. And I think it would be very interesting to see Central Asians and directors of Central Asian schools come and have a dialog with teachers and administrators in the Catholic school system here to see how it works. Ninety percent of the school day goes toward secular subjects, but religion is also taught as a theology.

And on that point, I just want to emphasize that what people are not looking for is for their kids to go to study Islam in the secular state-run, state-controlled school system as a science, as the study of atheism in the way that it was during the Soviet period, in the way that quite frankly still is across much of the region. To the extent that religion has been introduced in the school system, it's been introduced in this very Soviet-style fashion. People want their kids to learn morality and they want them to learn their beliefs, but they want them to learn those beliefs within a sort of healthy, otherwise secular context. That's what the vast majority of the population I think wants.

Mr. HURD. I think just another example from the U.S. system—you mentioned the Catholic school system, but in addition there are families here in the United States that send their children to public schools, but then their own religious community has something set up to sort of supplement that. So, they're certainly getting religious education at home, but they're also getting it from a community entity that supplements whatever it is that they're receiving in the public school system.

Dr. COLLINS. And it's not encumbered by all these restrictions that have been put in place across Central Asia in terms of how you have to get permission on who can teach, and whether or not teaching religion through the churches or through the mosques or in the home is actually legal or illegal. So, at the current moment across much of the region for one to teach—to send one to a grandparent or a neighbor or an atinga is actually extraordinarily risky when most of us would agree that that's just sort of a normal, healthy part of the moral upbringing of a child.

Mr. PRICE. I think all of you have talked about the post-Soviet legacy that heavily influences the state's approach to religion. I was wondering what you make of the generational shift that seems to be impacting all post-Soviet republics these days of a generation of kids who are now adults who have grown up without any living memory of the Soviet Union. Is that impacting attitudes toward religion at the popular level? And will that have an impact on the way that government and administration relates to those issues?

Dr. LEMON. As an anecdote, I was at a wedding in 2013 in the Vanj mountainous district in Tajikistan, and there were separate tables between the young guys, many of whom were labor migrants. They were back from the summer, and they would not touch alcohol, and they were on one table. Then there were the sort of bad young guys, as they labeled them, who sat next to them, and they were all drinking. And then there was the sort of old Soviet generation sitting on the third table, and they were, again, drinking.

And I think that certainly that's an anecdote, but we are seeing especially among the younger generation an increasing interest in religion. I think that's, in the case of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in particular, mediated through these processes of going to

Russia, where ironically, religion is more free and they are able to meet practicing Muslims from a broader community, and they're able to with fewer risks either register for official religious training in Russia or convene informal prayer groups, a number of which I attended in Moscow in 2014 and 2015.

I think there is this societal Islamization. From the view of the governments this is inherently political, and it's linked to a political radicalization and seen as a threat. But I think there is a genuine demand amongst the population, as shown through Dr. Collins' surveys in religious education, in morality. And that is in part mediated by this move from a Soviet to a post-Soviet system.

Dr. NASRUTDINOV. I totally agree with Dr. Lemon. For many purposes of convenience, I tend to oversimplify matters by categorizing this sort of debate into difference between several generations. And again, I think this is like oversimplification, but still it's easier to perceive a larger picture this way.

I distinguish the older Soviet generation—this would be the generation of my grandfathers who were born before the Soviet Union or in the early Soviet years when religion was still free, right—they were the ones who, like my grandfather, went to madrasa, learned to read and write in Arabic, memorized a portion of Koran, before the things going bad in 1920s and 1930s and religion became prohibited. So the elderly community were among the first ones who in the 1990s, as soon as religious freedom returned, went back to their religious practices. For example, my grandfather became a mullah, imam for the Tatar community in the south in Kyrgyzstan.

And then the second generation, I call them the Soviet generation. This is the generation of my parents. These are the ones who were born, brought up, raised, and matured into this Soviet atheist, anti-religious propaganda. They were already in their 40s and 50s when the Soviet Union broke up, and having spent their entire life believing that religion is a prejudice and a fairy tale—something which is but a negative—they were among the ones who had the most difficult time returning to religion, or going to religion. This is the generation that is really missing in churches and in the mosque nowadays.

And then the third generation—this is what I refer to myself—is a transitional generation. We went to school in the Soviet time, but then we're still young enough and still open to ideas when the Soviet Union broke up—I was 17. And many in my generation came to religion via a detour of the bad 1990s with the drugs and alcohol addiction, criminal engagement, et cetera. So for many of representative of my generation, those who survived 1990s, right, they—for them religion was a salvation from all these difficult and bad habits.

And then you have the independent generation. These are the kids who grew up in the 1990s or late 1980s, so the ones who were not brainwashed with the Soviet propaganda at all. So for them religion was really their choice. The parents did not impose it on them, but it was one of many choices in regard to this new kind of forms of identities that suddenly became available after the breakup of the Soviet Union. For them, they see religion as a choice and they respect it as a choice of others.

And then you have the new Millennials—my children. For my children I try to teach them and I try to raise them with the sort of religious perspective on life.

It's kind of a cycle that goes back in some ways is the observations. That's my perspective.

Mr. PRICE. Dr. Collins, maybe you could also address from the bureaucratic standpoint how entrenched these practices are from the Soviet Union's legacy and whether they're subject to change with kind of generational evolution.

Dr. COLLINS. Yes, thank you.

Well, it's an interesting question. Nathaniel and I were having a conversation earlier about some comments that are still made by the older generation who tend to still dominate amongst government elites and within the bureaucracy. This mentality of Soviet atheism and fear and suspicion of religion, I think, still pervades those who are in positions of power. And that, I think, continues to influence policies such as Tajikistan's sort of public campaign against the hijab. You see a milder version of this taking place in Kyrgyzstan, where government elites seem to feel the need to speak out against the Arab version of the hijab invading our country versus the sort of traditional Islam and the traditional way that Kyrgyz women are supposed to dress. These statements coming from government elites, I think, reflect that very Soviet sort of bureaucratic atheist understanding and suspicion of what religion is actually all about.

As both the previous speakers have said, there is this growing gap between the elites and the youth, particularly those who were born in the post-Soviet era. Something that's not always taken into account in much of what is written about Islam in the region, is that we now have an entire generation who was born after the Soviet Union collapsed. So we've seen significant generational turnover in terms of youth's views about Islam, about politics, and about corruption. It's the younger generation who've grown up entirely in a system where the educational system is pervaded by corruption, and I think that's across the region—one of the issues where there isn't a whole lot of variation. That pervades how they view the world. I think, not for everybody, certainly, but for quite a number of people, it causes them to see Islam in some way as a solution to a lot of their problems, as a solution to injustice, and as a solution to political/economic corruption and repression of many sorts.

Another point which I would emphasize that Dr. Nasrutdinov mentioned earlier is the access to social media. This is, again, more so the case in Kyrgyzstan than in some of the other republics, where access to social media is higher. But youth, since they can't receive religious education or there's not enough access to sort of normal religious education, they're going online. This is happening across the region. It's happening in Russia. It's happening in Azerbaijan. So, to get their questions about Islam answered, they get online and they listen to various forms from the moderate to the extreme that are posted online in their languages—in Russian and Kyrgyz and predominantly in Uzbek. And this is affecting how they're viewing the world, how they're viewing their social and political problems, and how they're coming to view—at least a certain percentage of them—religion as a solution to that.

Again, I don't think the youth perspective that religion should be part of the public space and civil society is not something that should be seen necessarily as threatening. It can evolve in a healthy and pluralist way, as it had in Kyrgyzstan prior to the Bakiyev administration and their adoption of a new law on religion. But unfortunately, by government elites it is still seen as something that's very threatening that needs to be controlled and repressed.

Mr. HURD. Thank you.

Everett and I have many more questions and I sure could be here all day with a fruitful conversation with our panelists, but we want to make sure that we give our audience members an opportunity to ask questions. I have a colleague here with a mic. If you could tell us your name and affiliation, if you have one, and then please ask your question. Thank you.

QUESTIONER. Thanks. I'm Alex Tiersky, also of the U.S. Helsinki Commission.

As the policy advisor with responsibility for counterterrorism, I want to tell you how instructive I found this discussion. I've really learned a tremendous amount from your presentations and the discussion. Thank you very much.

I have two questions. The first actually derives from the set of questions that my colleague Everett just asked you about the Soviet legacy that we've talked about for a while. What we haven't talked about is any kind of active Russian engagement with the elites in Central Asia. Obviously, the Soviet legacy is one thing, but the Kremlin seeks to take a mantle on counterterrorism internationally, and I imagine that's the case in Central Asia as well. I'd love to hear from you a few thoughts on the Kremlin's perspective on sharing what we might call worst practices in the regards of this conversation.

The second question I would like to ask is, you've made it quite clear that from the expert perspective that the governmental view or the governmental repression of the free practice of Islam and the free practice of religion in Central Asia is counterproductive from a counterextremism perspective. But what none of you have said is whether the governments believe that they are doing something that is being effective or not; in other words, if they think they're winning and pushing extremism beyond their borders, it makes it much more difficult for us to convince them to take a different approach.

Thank you.

Dr. LEMON. Well, on Russia, obviously, there's a shared understanding of this problem, I think we can say, between the security services in particular. And they're the ones, really, who are often driving the more interventionist policies, certainly within the Tajik case, along with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and, obviously, Committee on Religious Affairs and other institutions. I think there's a shared understanding of this problem: there's a good and a bad Islam, and Islam is something that needs to be regulated because it, like other parts of civil society, poses a threat to regime security.

But I think there's also a practical dimension to this, and this operates both multilaterally and bilaterally, formally and informally. Through things like the RATS—the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure—or through the SCO [Shanghai Cooperation Organisation], which is based in Tashkent. There's a CIS [commonwealth of independent states] counterterrorism center, and they share lists. They're like a sort of Interpol-lite in that they have lists of wanted extremists and extremist groups, and they participate in extraditions both formally and informally of accused extremists, many of whom are opposition members residing within different republics within the region. I think there's certainly cooperation there.

And the second question was on counterextremism as being counterproductive?

QUESTIONER. Whether the regimes believe that it is.

Dr. LEMON. Oh, whether the regimes believe it. Well, in my research I find it very difficult to have meetings, and I had some very early on in 2010 with some people from certain structures within the Tajik Government on this issue. I think it's difficult to glean intentions here. We all want to say that there's nefarious intent. It's difficult to say and

disprove whether these people genuinely believe what they're doing or not. I think, from my conversations with various Tajik officials through the years, there is a genuine belief that Islam does pose a threat and that the steps they're taking—whilst they may not be ideal—are the best way to sort of keep a lid on the problem.

Dr. NASRUTDINOV. Perhaps I could answer the two questions together on the example of Kyrgyzstan.

All the repressive politics, particularly in regard to banning specific religious groups, have started with Russia. Russia has been thoroughly open until the late 2000s, and it was in 2008 when they started banning basically all groups. There are only four versions of religion that remain: Orthodox Christianity, traditional Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism. Everything else was to be banned.

Besides banning, one illustrative example is the banning of Tablighi Jamaat, the Southeast Asian group. Russia was the first one to ban it. Then it made the recommendations to the CSTO—Collective Security Treaty Organization—to ban them as well.

And the first one to follow was Tajikistan. It banned them in 2009. Immediately on that year 60 members of the movement were arrested, and since then the persecution has started.

Kazakhstan kept thinking until 2013. And after the events in Atyrau in 2011 they decided to ban it as well.

Kyrgyzstan today remains the only country where Tablighi Jamaat is still legal. It's still withstanding the pressures from the other members of the CSTO, including Russia. Particularly illustrative are the remarks of our former President Almazbek Atambayev suggesting that we are keeping everything under control and at the moment, we see a more of a positive influence of the group rather than the negative; that's why we keep it legal.

Same can be said about the Turkish groups, such as Nurcular and Hizmet. There is quite a lot of pressure from the Turkish Government to ban them after the coup attempt in Turkey. And yet, Almazbek Atambayev also said that we are keeping everything under control, and to the degree we believe that these group has more positive influence for us.

So it's hard for me to tell for the governments of neighboring countries, but at least in Kyrgyzstan the government is kind of listening. For example, on the questions of Tablighi Jamaat, they have taken serious consultations with international experts including Alexey Malashenko, for example, and many local community experts—whereas in neighboring countries it's more authoritative decisionmaking as to just banning everything.

One more influence that comes from Russia is through propaganda and media. Again, there is a specific age group, like the Soviet generation, like my parents—like my father, who retired 2 years ago. And since then he's been hooked on Russian TV and Russian propaganda completely. So this is the group that is brainwashed by this continuous Russian media and Russian propaganda, and a lot of that anti-religious sentiment also comes via that channel.

Dr. COLLINS. I would certainly agree with all that's been said so far, so I won't add too much to that.

I would note that I've had conversations with members of the State Committee on Religious Affairs in Kyrgyzstan for about 10 years about Tablighi Jamaat, and they constantly feel as though they should ban it. They haven't quite done it yet. They've resisted

the pressure from Russia and across the region to brand this religious community as a terrorist and extremist organization, thankfully, so far.

Jehovah's Witnesses are another example. The repression started in Russia, and you subsequently see the adoption of similar policies toward the Jehovah's Witnesses across the region. So Russia, I think, is a particularly nefarious influence within the sphere of religious affairs across the region.

Do the governments believe they're winning? It's difficult to say. I strongly suspect, though, that given the changes that we are starting to see within the Uzbek regime, that there are at least some significant players as well as many of the younger generation who are starting to come up through the ranks within the Uzbek Government who were in graduate school with me in the 1990s. And they increasingly, I think, believe that the repressive policies of President Karimov's regime were, in fact, counterproductive. And it will be interesting to see whether or not the changes in Uzbekistan have any sort of ripple effect across the region.

Mr. PRICE. I think that's very interesting because anecdotally I've certainly heard from some Uzbek interlocutors that they feel that these examples that people point to of Uzbek nationals who have committed acts of terror abroad have been radicalized while abroad in Russia and think that they were not radicalized within Uzbekistan, and they take that talking point to kind of underscore the efficacy of their domestic policies. But I don't know how to square that with what we've discussed today.

Mr. HURD. Yes, please.

QUESTIONER. Catherine Cosman, formerly Helsinki Commission a hundred years ago and more recently U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

My questions also have to do with Russia. I would not say that the policies of Russia toward freedom of religion are all that much better than that of the Central Asian countries, sadly, especially after 2014 and that series of laws that they passed, and the types of Russian Orthodox radicals—I think is a fair way of characterizing them—who are, many of them women, in important positions of power, including, unfortunately, the Ministry of Education. But that's another question. I think Russia has a very important influence on many levels in what's going on in Central Asia.

Also, vis-à-vis migrants, of course, the overall picture of their treatment is pretty bad, but I have heard that in some cities in some areas in Siberia, and oddly enough in Chechnya, there are some Uzbek migrants who are imam khatibs, so in other words in influential positions. One of Kadyrov's chief advisors on religion apparently is an Uzbek. Whether that's something to be proud of is another question.

Also, because I think it's important to ask, which religious figure or Muslim-related religious figure in Russia is admired by the millions of Central Asian migrants? And I've heard, unfortunately, that it is Kadyrov who is the most-admired figure. I hope I'm wrong and I hope you can contradict me on that.

So, in short, the picture about freedom of religion in Russia is very complicated. I would end my little disquisition with saying that we should also look at the international instruments for a good definition of freedom of religion; i.e., the U.N. and the OSCE. I think that should be mentioned, especially at a setting like this.

Thank you.

Mr. HURD. Do any of the panelists want to respond?

Dr. LEMON. No, when I said that Russia is better, I didn't mean in terms of the legal framework, which I agree is just as bad. I think for certain Central Asian migrant communities that I spent time with, perhaps because they were away from home communities where surveillance networks are very extensive—mostly informal through local mahallas and informants and family members even—that they felt that the state wasn't quite as interested, perhaps, in them, and sort of as pervasive in its sort of surveillance networks. But I certainly wouldn't say that Russia should be upheld as a beacon of religious freedom. That would not be the case.

In terms of who the Tajik migrants who I spent time with admire, he's not an Islamic leader, but Putin himself is obviously revered amongst many of the migrant community as the archetypal strongman. I think Kadyrov—there's a lot of sympathy amongst the migrants who I know toward him as being, again, an effective leader who's brought stability to Chechnya.

I think within my experience within Moscow there's certainly a tension between the mosques and the muftiate, which is Tatar-led, although there are some North Caucasians in the administration, and the Central Asian migrant communities. I know a lot of people were turned away or no longer enjoyed attending or wanted to attend the very few mosques in Moscow because often parts of the service were in Tatar and they didn't understand. Some of it was in Russian. But they preferred often to have their own informal prayer groups, as opposed to going to the official institutions that they viewed as being less welcoming to them.

Dr. NASRUTDINOV. In regard to Kyrgyz practicing Muslim population, I think the religious authority is constructed along ethnic lines, significantly. So the most popular and famous religious scholars are all ethnic Kyrgyz. The most well-known scholar is Chubak Ajy Jalilov, who is a former mufti, and he is followed by Abduskhonar Matev, who is a former rector of the Kyrgyz Islamic University. The two are very active inside Kyrgyzstan. They are very active with lectures in their own mosques and in other mosques, and produce a lot of visual materials on CDs and online. They are also very popular among Kyrgyz migrants in Russia, and they regularly travel. The muftiate organizes trips for them, and you have gatherings in City Crocus Hall in Moscow where it brings together up to 6,000 Kyrgyz labor migrants just to listen to the two.

Surprisingly, another interesting figure who is popular in Kyrgyzstan is Shamil Alyautdinov, who is a Tatar modern Islamic scholar from Russia. He's been coming to Kyrgyzstan with lectures almost every year, he and his wife. She is also quite popular among the female community particularly. They gather large crowds, and have a fairly strong fellowship in the country.

Dr. COLLINS. Yes, I certainly agree. The situation with Russia is very complicated, and we're talking about millions of migrants who are living there. They're broken into different ethnic communities. They live in different cities of Russia. Some of them have greater access to internet than others. And even within Central Asia itself, it's interesting that so many people express both popular views of Russia, in large part based on the Russian media that they have access to, and correspondingly very negative views of the United States, increasingly so, over the past 10 to 20 years.

At the same time, they also have expressed in both focus groups as well as my survey research, a desire to introduce various elements of Sharia into the legal system, or to have some sort of Muslim democracy, or to model their system on Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, which they see as pure and less corrupt and a good Islamic form of life.

So those views often seem very contradictory: how can one admire Putin and at the same time want a government based on what they see as the Arab model, which, of course, many people have not had any particular experience with? So it is certainly something very sort of difficult to pin down.

I agree with the comments that the other panelists have made. I just want to address your question as well, Everett, about the Uzbek Government's talking points. I think those are the talking points across the region as well, that to date we've kept the lid on extremism within our country by the policies that we've had in place over the past decade to two to three decades.

I'm not sure that these governments are quite as naïve as all that. Certainly there're some people who firmly believe in repression. But I do think that there are others—and again, it's probably the younger generation—who are attuned to what's being disseminated in social media, whether it's Gulmurod Khalimov's video where he defects from the OMON [Special Purpose Police Unit] in Tajikistan and says that one of the reasons of his defection is because of the abuse and torture of Muslims and religious repression in Tajikistan. That's central to the reason that he left Tajikistan and joined ISIS.

Following his departure, you start to see the numbers of Tajiks peaking as fighters in Syria. Certainly, dozens and dozens and dozens of videos that are put out by other primarily ethnic Uzbek, or mixed ethnically, but led by ethnic Uzbeks in Syria also continually harp on that same message. It's not all about Syria. It's about both Syria as well as the religious repression and the situation for Muslims at home.

So, it's hard for me to believe that the Central Asian elites are completely naïve to the problems that have been created by religious repression at home. I would hope that that is underlying some of the changes and push for reform within Uzbekistan today. Tajikistan might be another matter. I'm not sure that they're convinced yet.

Mr. HURD. Do we have any more questions from the audience?

QUESTIONER. Jeff Bell, National Endowment for Democracy.

I was very interested to hear Professor Nasrutdinov talk about the role civil society has played in encouraging better attitudes toward religious freedom in Kyrgyzstan. And I would just be curious to hear if the panel could talk about perhaps what both religious and secular civil society could be doing better or is doing well in all the countries.

I understand, of course in Tajikistan there's very little leeway to do much. But it would still be interesting to hear.

Thank you.

Dr. NASRUTDINOV. Well, I think the question was addressed mostly to my colleagues, like whether this is happening also in other countries.

Dr. LEMON. It was also to you about what civil society has done.

Dr. NASRUTDINOV. Oh, civil society. I'll give you specific examples.

For example, one of the leaders of this group, Mutakalim, the leader is Jamal Frontbek-Kyzy. What she did is that she, at the beginning, she established her organization specifically with the agenda of hijabs in schools and workplaces in mind. It took her 2 years to get it registered, through a lot of hurdles particularly even from the muftiate, which were making obstacles for her. Yet they succeeded.

Since they've registered, they've been taking school directors, ministers of education, to court regularly, and they've provided legal assistance and continuously supported these

cases. Over a number of years, this has accumulated. Eventually, there's this big story where a minister of education did ban hijabs completely in school. They took him to court. They won the case. His ban was removed. He himself was fired. It was 2 days ago that the law was introduced that allows girls to wear not a hijab, but kind of a veil.

Another interesting case was when Jamal was invited to attend a U.N. meeting in Turkey. And when she was passing by customs at the Manas Airport in Bishkek, the customs officers asked her to remove hijab because on the ID, she was without hijab, and said you can remove it, pass it, and then put it back. And she said, no, I'm not removing it. So they wouldn't let her pass the customs until when she said okay, you're free not to let me pass, but I will make it such an international scandal, so you will be sorry about it.

Eventually they did let her in. What she did, as soon as she came back, was she started collecting signatures, because in order to change the law you need to have 300,000 signatures. She collected 300,000 signatures in the country. She initiated the law. Everybody signed except for one. This was a minister of international affairs—he categorically refused to do that.

So she waited. And it was 2008, I think, when we had SCO meeting—Shanghai Cooperation Organization meeting—in Bishkek, where the leaders of all these SCO countries were supposed to come. She made a call for all Muslim women to come out and block the main road from the airport to the city. This would be such a big scandal that everyone became really, really concerned. The Ministry of International Affairs wrote to her, saying, Okay, I will sign the paper; just call the meeting off. And she said, no, until I see the paper with the signature, I don't call it off. She receives the permission with his signature in the last moment, and she calls the protest off.

This is how they've struggled—it didn't come nicely. It didn't come easily. These are just a couple of examples.

Dr. LEMON. As you say, in Tajikistan the space for civil-society engagement in religious policy debating secularism is limited. In the mid–2000s, the OSCE actually sponsored this sort of religious-secular dialog at the time when the opposition was still legal. This was an ongoing series of conferences organized in Dushanbe, but also in Germany, between religious authorities, members of the government, members of the opposition, and scholars, and those sort of debates around policy actually took place then. That was a different time.

Sort of moving back toward that would be certainly something that would be welcomed. But I think, under the current circumstances, the government would be reluctant. And, the only sort of civil-society events and programs was obviously focused on CVE and violent extremism. Even though, as we've mentioned, in terms of the radicalization process, perhaps secularism is more to blame than religion in terms of many of the recruits not being particularly religious before being recruited. That seems to be one of civil society's only in to this issue, but it's obviously from a negative perspective.

Dr. COLLINS. I'll just add that two countries where Christian-based groups were actually quite active in civil society until more recent restrictions have gone into effect are Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. And there you saw, over the course of the 1990s and 2000s, the proliferation, especially in Kazakhstan, of groups with a Christian basis to them, affiliated with churches or sometimes independent of churches, that did a whole range of basic civic activities, including set-up centers for individuals with drug addictions or

alcohol addictions, for homeless women. These dealt with that whole range of what we would consider faith-based organizations and those sorts of activities until many of them started to fear new government restrictions on proselytism and on children participating in religious organizations or activities.

There's now, I think, quite a bit of fear, particularly on the part of minority Christian groups, particularly Protestants—Baptists, evangelicals and others—in Kazakhstan, and to some extent in Kyrgyzstan as well, that by engaging in those sorts of activities, by having children present, for example, at youth camps or summer camps, that they will be banned by the state or sort of come under really quite crippling fines from the state.

In one case in Kazakhstan, I believe it was a year or two ago, there were Christian women who were simply providing sort of hospice services. But they had Bibles present at the scene, and they were charged with proselytism and then were given crippling fines.

So I think there's a failure on the part of the governments to realize that religious organizations, whether Christian or Muslim, can engage in a healthy range of civic activity that society as well as the state would actually benefit from.

Dr. NASRUTDINOV. Let me just quickly add the clarification that the law that she initiated, Jamal Frontbek-Kyzy, was on allowing women to take photos for passport with a hijab. That was now supported.

Mr. HURD. Thank you for the questions and thank you for the interesting responses. Everett and I will ask one question apiece and then we'll wrap things up.

My question is particularly for Dr. Collins and Dr. Nasrutdinov. We've talked about some of the differences between Kyrgyzstan and the rest of the region. But I'm wondering if, in the areas of law, policy and regulation, whether one of the primary differences is that of a lack of full implementation, as opposed to the actual substance of the law and the policy and regulation. For example, in the area of registration, all religious groups and religious schools are required to register with the State Committee on Religious Affairs.

There are a number of groups that continue to have problems gaining registration—the Ahmadiyyas, Jehovah's Witnesses, et cetera. I'm wondering whether or not you think, at least at the level of sort of law in particular, it's more a matter of the government just making a decision to not as fully and comprehensively apply the law as in some other countries, as opposed to the law itself.

Dr. NASRUTDINOV. Well, in case of Kyrgyzstan, the latest amendment to the law on religious freedom was in regard to proselytization in public spaces, which is, I think, now almost supported and passed through the parliament, which bans proselytization or any kind of religious propaganda outside in the street, at houses, and in public places. What is interesting is that in the informal discussions that we had with the State Committee on Religious Affairs, we as an expert community always were against this kind of amendment, and we battled. We have discussed this with the state committee on a number of forums.

One of the informal kind of justifications that the members of the committee gave is that this is really a law that's supposed to work against conversion. They see conversion from Islam to Christianity as one of the major issues, and they see these leading to kind of social conflicts evolving at the level of the village, community, and even families. This is how they perceive the conversion from Islam to Christianity.

Therefore, they suggested this law is mostly targeting specifically groups like Jehovah's Witnesses, who knock the doors and proselytize actively on staircases. But while

suggesting that this is against Christian groups, it is also affecting Muslim groups such as Tablighi Jamaat, who also knocks the doors. Therefore I said, well, if they simply invite people to the mosque, then this is okay? If they do not proselytize and if they do not preach at the door, this is fine?

So, it's a policy that is targeting everyone, but specifically addressing the Christian community. In some ways there is this bias: it is not open, and it is not specifically explicitly stated. Yet it is there, right? And as it has been mentioned, particularly in regard to registration, there are now nearly 400 organizations which are registered—Christian organizations—with the state committee. Yet Mormons, for example, struggle. They still did not register themselves.

Numbers are important. The law works in such a way that to register an organization, you have to have a certain number of followers in a particular settlement. That is very difficult to have somewhere in the village in Kyrgyzstan, in the remote area. This way, the government creates these artificial obstacles for the communities to register and be legal and function properly.

Dr. COLLINS. Thank you.

I would add to that that in some cases, Kyrgyzstan's law on religion, which is actually quite harsh including the more recent amendments and restrictions on proselytism, don't necessarily distinguish it from the rest of the region.

On the other hand, Kyrgyzstan historically is sort of laissez faire in actually implementing the law. Often this works to the benefit of believers. So, for example, you pointed to another issue, which is registration. Registration of religious communities is not easy in Kyrgyzstan, and the law seems to be designed to prevent particularly new religious groups, whether Christians or sort of non-mainstream Muslims, from actually registering their churches or their mosques.

On the other hand, implementation is often quite weak. So you see house churches existing across the country where people gather and worship in private within sort of small churches that exist behind the walls of particular houses on small streets. It's incredibly hard to find them, which speaks to the fact that they're doing so in fear, even though they can exist. There are really sort of two sides to the coin. The legal framework is not very good. The implementation is generally quite bad. But people still exist and believe in practice in a certain amount of fear, because they know that the situation could become harsher.

I think the same is true with the case of the Hizb ut-Tahrir Party, which was banned as extremist. The legislation is not terribly different from the legislation on extremist organizations elsewhere in the region, and yet the implementation is typically much softer in Kyrgyzstan. It's gotten worse, I think, under President Bakiyev and since, but Hizb ut-Tahrir members are typically arrested. Perhaps they're fined, briefly detained, and then released, as opposed to thousands of them being arrested and given 15- to 18- to 20-year prison sentences, the way they are in other countries in the region.

Mr. HURD. Dr. Nasrutdinov, I especially appreciated your comment about the government sort of seeing itself as an arbiter of harmony and that part of its responsibility was to prevent discord. It was very striking in the meetings that we had with government officials in Uzbekistan—there was a very similar theme. There didn't seem to be, or at least we didn't hear, a recognition and acknowledgement that in a multi-religious country, where people have strong views about theology, the nature of reality, morality, et cetera,

there are going to be disagreements and disputes. This is just a normal thing that comes with a multi-religious country, but that there isn't this sort of inevitability that it will result in violent conflict, and that nonviolent conflict is actually not something to be afraid of; but anyway, appreciated those comments.

Mr. PRICE. I wanted to ask about another caution that we heard during our trip and that many of you have alluded to, and that is about the specter of political Islam. I was wondering to what extent you all see this as a present or a prospective threat that the regimes of the region perceive. Are there currently political Islamic movements that are popular and salient within societies? Or is this just a concern about if there were an opening, that there would be an easy coalescing around Islamic themes in terms of political opposition?

Dr. LEMON. I guess you need to understand sort of what they mean by political Islam. Do they mean sort of officially registered Islamic parties, or do they mean sort of the influence of Islam within politics? I think they take quite a broad definition of political Islam that sort of any ways in which religion can have an effect on politics, be it sort of formal or informal, is potentially a threat to their security.

Obviously, within the Tajik case, they had an Islamic party till 2015, and gradually conflated the Islamic Renaissance Party with groups like ISIS, said they were a conveyor belt to extremism, merged the two categories together, and eventually blamed the organization for a coup and banned it.

Now, constitutional amendments 2 years ago, in fact, now prohibit the re-establishment of religious party in Tajikistan. So, at least under the current administration, it's difficult to envisage the re-emergence of the faith-based party. I think that would be probably the case across the whole region, maybe with the possible exception of Kyrgyzstan, and that's maybe again viewed through the lens of regime security. And if there were to be an Islamic party, then it would be a potential threat, although you could maybe envisage the setting up of a pseudo-party, as we've seen in other parts of the region where each parliament is filled with parties, but they're all effectively sort of constructed by the regime. So, we may see in the future the construction of an Islamic party, but it may be sort of in non-oppositional terms.

Dr. NASRUTDINOV. I think it's important to look at the specific influences and groups that's popular in the country. In Kyrgyzstan, the most popular group is the Tablighi Jamaat, and it's by nature apolitical. It's one of the reasons why it is legal and popular in many other parts of the world, including the United States. Non-engagement with politics is one of the core principles—a kind of a pacifist attitude where you just accept the government. It is the belief that through your own religious practice that you change the world, not through direct engagement with the politics.

The Turkish groups see engagement in politics also in a slightly kind of long-term perspective. A number of representatives of Fethullah Gülen movement who work in Turkish [inaudible] schools in Kyrgyzstan stated in their interviews that they see their graduates as the future elite of the country because it is not cheap to study in such schools. Therefore, it's mostly higher/middle-class-income communities who can afford them. Thus, these are the ones who will be the future bureaucrats, the future state officials, the future kind of businessmen of the country, and they will have this kind of more pro-Turkey, pan-Turkic vision.

The Salafi groups that we have are also predominantly moderate, classical, and also apolitical Salafis. Yet there are a number of more active political groups, but few of them are banned, but also in numbers they're not as popular as just kind of moderate Salafis. Here they also claim not to be engaged in politics.

The way they see the religion interfering into the politics is through the practices of people who are already politicians. And we have a number of parliament deputies, such as Tersimbai Bekirulou [ph], for example, who regularly made kind of pro-religious public statements in parliament and lobbied certain laws, such as allowing two wives and legalizing second marriages, et cetera.

Finally, we see kind of the engagement with the politics is through just generally wider appreciation of a more religious approach to politics. As I've mentioned, one-third of our respondents stated that they would support a candidate with stronger religious views. Another third suggested that they would support the introduction of Sharia law. One of them might not even understand what Sharia law means, but this whole sentiment is there. More and more young people believe that religion should be a part of politics. But again, this is not a part of any specific group or ideology that is being presented.

Dr. COLLINS. I'll just add that, yes, I agree in general that governments do exaggerate the threat of political Islam, which they tend to equate with radicalism, violent extremism, across the region. It's a convenient way of labeling all potential political opposition and maintaining very strict control over the country.

Political Islam of any stripe is extremely weak in all of the countries. Certainly in Tajikistan, where it was most vibrant with the Islamic Renaissance Party, since that party was banned, it's virtually nonexistent, at least openly, there as well.

I would also add that I think, again, the repression has led to the growth of extremism. And it's this conjunction of repression, otherwise extremely difficult political economic conditions, pervaded by corruption, and the exposure, whether it's in Russia, as being a labor migrant, or through the internet to these social-media videos that are spreading, disseminating the message that political Islam of some stripe is the solution to your problems.

So, I think there is a growth in sympathy for—or attraction to—these ideas of radicalism, whether as ISIS or some other variant of that. The numbers certainly are small. I don't think they're in any way a threat to the Central Asian regimes themselves. But small numbers, even several thousands, going to Syria or to Afghanistan or a handful of individuals coming back and waging attacks like we saw in Tajikistan in July, or in Moscow or in Istanbul or New York, are still a problem that I think that we should be concerned about. At the moment, I think they're primarily likely to stay within Afghanistan or Syria and not return home, in large part because the security services at home are so restrictive.

The third point I would add is that I do think that there has been, with this generational change, a growing sympathy for ideas of sort of soft political Islam, or sort of the normal public presence of religion, Islam in particular, in public political life, whether that's through support for having some form of a religious party, as we saw was just banned in Tajikistan. I think that sentiment is broader. It exists in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan as well for adopting some ideas of Sharia, again, with not necessarily knowing what Sharia means, but equating Sharia with justice and with a lack of corruption and cleaning up the corruption in the country.

I did surveys in Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan, as well as the focus groups across the region, and that was sort of a persistent theme. And mine were probably a few years before yours, Dr. Nasrutdinov, but I think at the time we found close to 20, 25 percent, depending on the question, of support for certain ideas of Sharia being implemented within the political system; not necessarily calling for an Islamic state, certainly not calling for a caliphate, but calling for the most part, for a sort of broader, healthier role for religion, Islam in particular, within society.

Mr. HURD. Thank you.

Thanks to our panelists for a very rich and educative discussion.

Thanks to our audience members, those of you here in person and those of you watching online; as well as thanks to some of our colleagues behind the scenes who make events like this possible, in particular our hearing and other events coordinator, Jordan; Stacy, our communications director; and Alexa, our intern.

Thanks very much, and have a good evening. [Applause.]

[Whereupon, at 5:01 p.m., the briefing ended.]

APPENDIX



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Central Asia: Freedom of religion or belief violations affect all, but particularly Muslims

Four of the five states of Central Asia (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan), as well as Azerbaijan, impose severe restrictions to prevent people of all religious affiliation or none from exercising their rights to freedom of religion or belief. All religious communities are under state control. Exercise of freedom of religion or belief without state permission is banned. Who can meet for worship and where require state permission. The government imposes prior compulsory censorship of all printed or imported religious literature.

But while non-Islamic communities face control from outside (including possible surveillance, threats, raids, fines, confiscations and jailings), Islamic communities additionally face control from inside. This appears to have two related motivations: Islam has by far the most adherents in these countries, and regimes are afraid of Islam as a faith with the potential to mobilise the population.

These states have effectively subsumed the only permitted Islamic bodies into the apparatus of the state. The regimes control all clergy appointments, especially at senior levels, and remove clerics as they see fit. Some of them even dictate the sermons that imams are allowed to preach in the mosques they do permit to exist.

The existence of state religions does not in itself necessarily represent a violation of individuals' rights to freedom of religion or belief (some European states have them). However, it is a violation of the Central Asian states' constitutional claims of separation of religion from the state. Moreover, the

Muslim Boards were given no choice as to whether they wanted to be subsumed into the state structures.

Indeed, the enforced dragooning of all Muslims into one state-backed and state-controlled Muslim Board and the ban on any exercise of freedom of religion by those who choose to act outside this narrow framework and punishments on them represent a clear violation of these regimes' international human rights obligations as members of the United Nations and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (and, in the case of Azerbaijan, the Council of Europe).

The dragooning of Muslims into one state-backed and state-controlled structure – and the state-imposed monopoly such structures have – are not enshrined in any published laws.

Kazakhstan, for example, has just one registered Islamic organisation in the whole country: the Muslim Board (which represents only Hanafi Sunni Islam). All mosques have to belong to it and have no autonomous legal existence. Other faiths are allowed more than one organisation. Although it is not written in any published law, no other Islamic organisation is allowed to exist. Given the ban on religious communities without state registration, this has effectively banned all exercise of freedom of religion or belief by people of other Islamic communities or groups, including Sunni Muslims of other schools, Ahmadi Muslims, Shia Muslims, Ismaili Muslims, Muslims who like to study the works of the Turkish 20th century theologian Said Nursi, followers of the Tabligh Jamaat Muslim missionary group, or those who want to have a mosque linked to their ethnicity and language (Chechen, Tatar, Uighur, Dungan, Azerbaijani, Russian). The government also interferes theologically, openly declaring that those who follow non-Muslim Board Islam must be brought back into adherence to Hanafi Sunni Islam loyal to the Board.

While many of the Central Asian regimes and Azerbaijan have jailed members of other religious communities for exercising freedom of religion or belief (mainly Protestant Christians or Jehovah's Witnesses), the vast majority of such prisoners of conscience are Muslims, who generally get far longer jail terms. This makes many Muslims highly fearful of speaking out about the violations of freedom of religion or belief they suffer.

For more information, see Forum 18's reports on freedom of religion or belief – including religious freedom surveys of individual countries – on the website: http://www.forum18.org

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Counter-extremism, power and authoritarian governance in Tajikistan

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ABSTRACT

Counter-extremism has become an important tool for the authoritarian government of Tajikistan to consolidate its position. In this article, we argue that counter-extremism is not purely about destructive acts, such as banning groups or arresting individuals: it is productive, too. Using a Foucauldian understanding of disciplinary power and biopower, we argue that counter-extremism in Tajikistan is an attempt to produce secular, docile citizen subjects who are resistant to extremist ideas. Using ethnography and discourse analysis, we focus on the way in which these practices are gendered, targeting the bodies of those deemed 'dangerous'. Counter-extremism, we argue, is exercised not only by the state but also by citizens, who monitor themselves and others for signs of radicalization. Although some support state secularism, most merely accept it. A smaller group resist practices that target certain forms of religious belief and practice. We explore these everyday forms of resistance against disciplinary power and biopower.

KEYWORDS

Tajikistan; counter-extremism; gender; Islam; resistance; security; Foucault; secularism

In the summer of 2011, one of the authors was hosting two of her interviewees for dinner at her apartment in the city of Khujand when a policeman knocked at the door. He had visited the building before and knew the author. Normally, the author wore 'Western' clothes. But, to accommodate her guests' strict religious views, she was wearing a more conservative dress and a 'traditional' headscarf, or *rumol*. The policeman was astounded by the scene. After entering, he proceeded to argue with one of the guests over something the guest had written in Arabic in his passport. Even though the tone was slightly aggressive, the dispute was resolved quickly and the policeman left. Later that night, the policeman came back unexpectedly to talk with the researcher and question her about her guests. Who were they? Why was she dressed like that? Had they tried to convert her? He was very suspicious of 'such fanatics': 'I was surprised to see you with them, because we have terrorists here, you know. We don't like these people. Our girls dress in modern clothes, you know.'

Clearly, the change in her clothing and 'suspicious' guests were alarming to him. Concerned about the influence of these 'radicals,' he felt compelled to intervene. The policeman's actions and thinking correspond to the hegemonic Tajik state rhetoric on the

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dangers of radical Islam, where visual signs are used as an indicator of extremist beliefs. Whether acting on orders or based on his personal concern, the policeman's comments reflect the government's division between 'bad', foreign, extremist Islam, represented by the guests, and 'good', secularized, moderate Islam, represented by 'Western' fashion. But crude as such a method of labelling 'extremists' may be, it has a real impact on the lives of strict believers.[1]

Since Tajikistan became independent in 1991, the authorities have become increasingly concerned with the intensification of religious practices among the population. State involvement in religious affairs has grown since the introduction of a restrictive new Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations in 2009, with the government restricting access to religious education, controlling the number of operational mosques, co-opting the clergy and censoring religious literature (Epkenhans 2009, 2011). The government has conflated societal Islamization with political radicalization. The spectre of 'extremism' has aided the regime in legitimating its rule and provided the discursive environment for state consolidation through the removal of opponents.[2] For example, the government used accusations of 'extremism' to outlaw Central Asia's only legal faith-based political party, the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), in September 2015 (Epkenhans 2015).[3] Paradoxically, while the government staunchly defends the secular state against Islamic practices that it deems 'extremist' it also promotes Islam as an essential part of Tajik heritage and national identity (Laruelle 2007; Blakkisrud and Nozimova 2010).

In this article, through discourse analysis and insights from four years of ethnographic fieldwork in the country, we argue that state religious policies have come to focus not only on bureaucratic control of religious communities and individuals but also on how Tajiks *should* lead their lives. Countering extremism is not merely destructive, it is productive, too. The Tajik government is trying to create political subjects who are loyal, and practise secularized forms of religion, and are therefore unlikely to join radical Islamic groups in the first place. In other words, counter-extremism has become biopolitical, focused on the regulation and promotion of certain forms of secular, apolitical life. Applying the thinking of Michel Foucault, we examine the interplay between two forms of power that are deployed as part of this productive aspect of counter-extremism: biopower and disciplinary power. Where disciplinary power regulates the potentially 'bad' practices of strict believers, biopower promotes certain 'good' ways of living to replace these practices. Biopower and disciplinary power are therefore interdependent, forming 'two poles around which the organisation of power over life was deployed' (Foucault 1981, 139).

We examine the underlying discourses and practices that take life as their object, and how political subjects react to these. We emphasize the gendered aspects of the management of life, in terms of expected behaviour and clothing style. We suggest that discourses place emphasis on how 'good' Tajik men would not join extremist groups and not be overly pious. Women, according to the state, should be secular and virtuous and play an affirmative role in the upbringing of secular future citizens (Roche 2016). Although some have accepted the government management of life, attempts to shape political subjects have provoked resistance to forms of power that seek to regulate and control religious life. In this article, we use ethnography to uncover the dynamics of everyday support, acquiescence and resistance.

Rather than looking at whether state responses are effective or not, we focus on how counter-extremism *operates* in Tajikistan and how this affects believers. In doing so, we build on the work of anthropologists who have examined the practice of Islam in Central Asia (McBrien 2006; Louw 2011; Rasanayagam 2011; Montgomery 2016), how state control over religion affects the choice to wear a hijab (Miles 2015; Nozimova 2016) and seek religious education (Stephan 2010), and how 'strict believers' have continued to practice their faith in spite of state secularism (Thibault forthcoming).

Security, if it is mentioned at all, remains peripheral to the above-mentioned analyses. By examining the securitization of certain forms of religion, and the impact this has on believers, we are building on an emergent 'everyday' turn in security studies (Bubandt 2005; Aas, Gundhaus, and Lomell 2009; Gillespie and O'Loughlin 2009; Goldstein 2010; Huysmans and Guillaume 2013; Jarvis and Lister 2013; Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2016).[4] This approach explores 'the lived realities of practical security measures, including the diverse ways in which programmes, strategies and techniques for governing security are experienced, taken up, resisted, and even augmented by different individuals and groups within society' (Crawford and Hutchinson 2015, 2). Moving beyond development organizations who have argued that women can, and should, be harnessed in the fight against terrorism, we critically engaged with the ways authoritarian Tajikistan has appropriated notions of gender in its counter-extremist efforts (CHRGJ 2011; Aldritch 2012; CGCC 2012).[5]

This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted by the authors over four years, between 2010 and 2013, in Sughd, Dushanbe, Vanj and the Rasht Valley in Tajikistan, and in 2014 and 2015 in Moscow.[6] While maintaining that state discourses and policies have resolute political intentions that have noticeable impact on the life of the citizens of Tajikistan, the state in Tajikistan is not omnipresent and omnipotent. We recognize that religious policies are implemented unevenly. On the one hand, state officials do not always have the means, or the will, to implement policies. Many publicly dissuade overt shows of piety, while encouraging their own family members to adopt Islamic lifestyles. Rather than treating the state as a unitary actor with clearly identified boundaries separating it from the population, we examine how the state is performed, imagined and invoked in everyday encounters. As such, 'post-communist states are a "bricolage," built on existing formal structures inherited from the Soviet past, but also informal ones' (Beyer, Rasanayagam, and Reeves 2013, 6).

We also remain cognizant of the limitations of our study. Our position as white, agnostic, male and female researchers had an impact on our access to informants and therefore the data generated. While we conducted research in four different regions in Tajikistan, we cannot generalize about the situation in the whole country; it differs from region to region, village to village. Finally, for various reasons we have been unable to return to Tajikistan since 2013. Although we have maintained contact with some of our informants, we are aware that the situation has changed since the banning of the Islamic Renaissance Party in 2015.

The article is organized as follows. We begin by exploring Foucault's conception of disciplinary power and biopower. After this, we analyse state discourse and policies that regulate religious life. We then outline the agencies and actors who implement state religious policies. In the final section, we highlight three types of popular response to securitization: support, acquiescence and resistance.

Foucault's analytics of power

Power lies at the centre of counter-extremism in Tajikistan. In theorizing counter-extremism, we draw on the thinking of Michel Foucault. Countering extremism involves repressing 'bad' forms of life, and promoting 'good', loyal forms of life that support the regime. For Foucault, 'power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix' (Foucault 1981, 94). In other words, power is not something that rulers possess and wield over their subjects; power is exercised at every level of society. Power is decentralized and dispersed. Most importantly, for Foucault, power is not always destructive. It is not only about exercising the right to take life; it can be productive, too. Foucault was concerned with uncovering how practices of power produce political subjects. Power, for Foucault, 'makes individuals', creating political subjects and using their bodies with the maximum efficiency to serve society (Foucault 1991, 170).

Foucault theorized three different, but overlapping, forms of power: sovereign power, disciplinary power and biopower (Foucault 1981; Dean 2010). Sovereign power concerns the 'safety of the Prince and his territory', which is secured through the right to take life (Foucault 2003, 65). Sovereign power limits, bans and prevents certain behaviours, claiming a monopoly on violence. It is a destructive form of power. But Foucault did not limit his analysis to this more traditionally conceived notion of power. He also developed the idea of disciplinary power. Disciplinary power is based on the socially constructed division between 'normal' and 'abnormal'. Those who are abnormal – the homosexual, the vagrant, the extremist – are subject to disciplinary measures to help them to conform.

Where disciplinary power is about forcing deviants to conform, biopower promotes the life of the population, making life live (Foucault 1981). Biopower is 'part of a new type of governing for which life is a reservoir that must be tapped into rather than subjected to legal or disciplinary strictures' (Wallenstein 2013, 17). It is a form of power which focuses on administering, developing, fostering and securing life.[7] Biopower is not purely enforced from the top down. Instead, it is a 'pastoral' form of power. Elites promote certain forms of life, but it is up to subjects themselves to adopt practices which conform with this vision.

Disciplinary power and biopower remain interlinked with the notion of security. In the final lecture of his 1975–76 lecture series at the Collège de France, Society Must be Defended, Foucault highlighted how securing life involves purging it of undesirables. As Michael Dillon and Andrew Neal (2008, 8) argue in the introduction to *Foucault on Politics, Security and War*, 'sorting life requires waging war on behalf of life against life forces that are inimical to life'. This is the central paradox of security: in attempting to achieve security, actors must use violence and thus make others insecure. But this process does not go unchallenged; there is always the possibility of resisting attempts to secure life.

Power is not totalizing. Foucault (1995, 12) himself stated, 'if there were no possibility of resistance – of violent resistance, of escape, of ruse, of strategies that reverse the situation, there would be no relations of power'. Foucault, then, does offer space for resistance in his analysis of power. Resistance to disciplinary power and biopower takes a number of forms. It involves continuing deviant lifestyles and turning life 'back against the system that was bent on controlling it' (Foucault 1981, 144). Rather than being transformative and counter-hegemonic, resistance is often localized and anti-hegemonic.

Regulating religion in Tajikistan: from the Soviet to the post-Soviet

In keeping with our Foucauldian approach, we argue that religious policy did not emerge from nowhere; to understand state policies towards religion in Tajikistan it is important to acknowledge their Soviet genealogy (Khalid 2003). In particular, the state's conception of religion as something detrimental to the unity of the society and an anti-modern phenomenon that threatens the nation's progress has its origins in Soviet thinking. Seventy years of Soviet social engineering also had a profound impact on the way citizens and officials practice and think about religion in Tajikistan. During the Soviet Union, religion was not entirely forbidden but it was constantly denigrated and ridiculed, and possibilities for the expression of religiousness remained extremely limited. For the Communist Party, religion had to be fought on both philosophical and political grounds. Marxist-Leninist theory clearly stated that religion was an instrument for the capitalist ruling class to enslave subordinates (Pospielovsky 1987). With the advent of socialist modernity, scientific knowledge would eventually provide answers and replace religious dogma. To counter the influence of religion, the Soviet authorities banned private religious education, closed mosques and churches, and arrested or harassed members of the clergy (Keller 2001; Khalid 2007). Interestingly, one of the ways to undermine religion itself as well as the clergy was through the emancipation of women, who were considered victims of two forms of oppression: from the family and from society. In Central Asia, their 'emancipation' was notably achieved through brutal interventions such as the forced unveiling of women in the 1920s and 1930s (Northrop 2004; Kamp 2006; Kassymbekova 2016). At times, propaganda also accused women, especially old ones, of perpetuating religious superstitions (Gaidurova 1969). Women could be both innocent and guilty but remained central to the fight against religion.

Unable to eliminate religion entirely, the Communist Party created a state-sanctioned religious infrastructure through which it could closely monitor and control religious believers. In 1944, the Soviet government established the Central Asian Muslim Spiritual Directorate, known by the acronym SADUM (Rus.: *Dukhovnoye Upravleniye Musul'man Sredney Azii I Kazakhstana*), to oversee religious affairs in the region. SADUM appointed imams, censored religious texts and engaged in public diplomacy with other Muslim-majority states (Mullojanov 2001; Dudoignon 2011). Soviet religious policy was not purely destructive; it was productive, too. To an extent unseen in any other empire, the Soviet Union aimed to transform the lives of its citizens, to create a New Soviet Person. It aimed 'to make socialism no longer a matter of doctrine but rather a form of life' (Prozorov 2016, 4). Drawing on Foucault, a number of scholars have argued that this attempt to create a positive form of socialist life was biopolitical (Kotkin 1995; Kharkhordin 1999; Collier 2011; Prozorov 2016). Soviet rule transformed religion into a cultural identity marker. Being 'Muslim' in Soviet Central Asia became a way to differentiate Slavs from non-Slavs rather than denoting whether someone actually practiced Islam (Khalid 2003).

Despite abandoning communist ideology in 1991, Tajik political circles remain influenced by Soviet understandings of the place of religion in society. As Adeeb Khalid (2003) remarks: 'Central Asia remains post-Soviet in so far as the way life is managed and regulated by elites remains informed by Soviet ways of thinking and doing' (see also Adams 2010). This notion of path-dependency is clearly palpable in state rhetoric,

institutions and practices. Even though Islam is celebrated as one important element of Tajik culture, the sentiment of distrust towards certain forms of religion persists. Like the Soviet authorities, the Tajik government labels strict religious believers 'Wahhabis' and 'Salafis', even if very few people can actually give informed opinions on the differences between those two Islamic movements (Atkin 1995; McBrien 2006; Rasanayagam 2011). Patronizing state discourses and assertive policies are used to define and impose proper behaviour in line with an idealized conception of a secular society. And just as in Soviet times, women's clothing remains a symbol of allegiance to the state. But rather than being a sign of emancipation, clothing has come to signify an individual's patriotism.

Policing piety in Tajikistan

The exercise of state power in Tajikistan rests on discourses that frame life in certain ways. As Foucault (1981, 143) argues, 'knowledge-power' becomes an 'agent of transformation of human life'. State-led counter-extremism in Tajikistan involves disciplining 'bad' Muslims and exercises of biopower which promote 'good', secularized forms of Islamic identity. Officials repeatedly call on citizens to beware of 'alien' (*begona*) cultures and refrain from 'foreigner-worshipping' (*begonaparasti*). Speaking in Kulob in 2015, Emomali Rahmon (2015a) stated:

> Women should set an example by fighting against the negative impact of alien phenomena and foreigner-worshipping [*begonaparasti*]. … I would like to warn you that vanity, foreigner-worshipping and superstition [*zohirparasti, begonaparasti va khurofot*] have terrible consequences for society and the state of the ancient Tajik nation, as these threaten security and stability [*amniyatu subotī*], hinder development [*peshi rohi rushdi*] and cause trouble [*boisi badvahti*].

Publicly, officials frame 'foreign' forms of Islam, imported from the Middle East, as dangerous.

In this section, we draw attention to three aspects of state religious policy where biopower and disciplinary power intersect: health, naming, and visual appearance. Naming remains a political issue in Tajikistan. In 2007, for example, President Rahmon removed the Russian suffix *-ov* from his last name, encouraging citizens to do the same and register newborn babies' names without the Russian suffix (Najibullah 2007). Although the campaign started as an attempt to promote Tajik culture and emancipate the Tajik people from Russian influence, more lately it has become linked to security. The 2011 Law on Parental Responsibility called on parents to give their children names which fit 'national values'. In 2016, lawmakers went a step further, amending the country's Civil Registration law to forbid parents to give their children names that are considered too Arabic, such as Mullah, Khalifa, Shaikh, Amir, and Sufi.[8] The State Committee for Language and Terminology at the Academy of Sciences published a list of 4000 appropriate names (RFE/RL 2016). The speaker of the lower house, Shukurjon Zuhurov, stressed that the list is not mandatory, but called on parents to pick names that are 'compatible with Tajik culture'. The name list is simultaneously about disciplining alien Islamic practices, and about promoting the state's vision of the ideal Tajik national culture. It thus straddles the boundary between disciplinary power and the promotion of certain forms of life through biopower.

Clothing features prominently in state discourses on religion (Miles 2015; Ibanez-Tirado 2016; Nozimova 2016). Officials frame signs of piety, such as beards and hijabs, as potential indicators of radicalization. Not only are these clothes alien to the culture and seen as a sign of extremism; some officials continue to think, as the Soviet authorities did, that religion itself is backwards. Men have become the target of disciplinary sanctions for wearing beards that make them look too 'Islamic'. Reports of mass shaving have become more and more frequent over the years. In 2010, the police detained nearly 30 bearded Dushanbe residents on the basis that their official identification documents did not match their current appearance (Asia Plus 2011). In 2010, the Chairman of the Committee for Religious Affairs (CRA) denied that men with beards were being harassed by the authorities. Interestingly, he added that growing a beard represented an Islamic tradition and therefore they had no right to forbid it (Hasanova 2010). Although officials have repeatedly denied that a campaign against beards is underway, and no law banning beards exists, in early 2016 the police in Khatlon announced that they had shaved nearly 13,000 men in the last year in their efforts to counter radicalism (Al-Jazeera 2016). When qori Abdulrahmon, a 27-year-old migrant labourer and Quran reader working in Moscow, travelled back to Tajikistan in February 2015, he was detained by police. His beard formed the subject of a lengthy exchange with his interrogators: 'Are you a *vovchik* [slang for Islamic extremist]?[9] … Real Tajik men do not grow beards. They are alien [*begona*] to our culture and a sign that someone is on the path to extremism.'

The policemen who shaved Abdulrahmon's beard ascribed the hegemonic narrative, framing his visual appearance as simultaneously alien to Tajik culture and dangerous. Simplistic as the logic of equating beards with extremism may be, it nonetheless continues to pervade the thinking of some representatives of the Tajik state.

This campaign against the public expression of religiosity has not been limited to men. President Rahmon has associated the hijab with extremist ideas. In a speech delivered on Women's Day in 2016, he condemned women who wore foreign clothing, saying that they were propagating 'alien' (*begona*) extremist ideas in the country (Rahmon 2016). Several high-profile figures have publicly criticized women's clothing for being either too 'Islamic' or 'European'. For Hussein Shokirov, head of religious associations at the CRA, for example, the full-face veil, or *niqab*, is 'opposed by the entire civilised world'. Although he conceded that veils which show a woman's face do not pose any problems, he stated that 'all the studies conducted in the world today show that basically all women who wear the *niqab* are members of extremist organisations' (Tursunzoda 2016).

Women who display visual indicators of their religion have also been targeted. The first decree to prohibit women from wearing hijabs in educational institutions was adopted in 2007 by the minister of education, Abdujabbor Rakhmonov. While prohibiting the hijab, the decree encouraged young women to dress 'in accordance with their status and national traditions', and avoid clothes that are 'provocative', for instance tight jeans and miniskirts (Peck 2007). Later, in 2010, Rakhmonov publicly lashed out against women who wore hijabs and called them 'monkeys' (Asia Plus 2015). Eshoni Saidjon, the *imam-khatib* of a mosque in Khatlon and deputy at the *fatwa*-issuing Council of Ulemo, stated in 2014 that the hijab 'is not a Tajik item [*tojikon nest*] and is taken from the culture of other nations, especially Arab, so wearing it does not correspond to Tajik women's dignity' (Radio Ozodi 2014). In 2015, the mayors of Dushanbe and Khujand acted against the import of 'foreign clothing' (Yuldashev 2015).

Instead , officials promote 'national' dress (*kurtai tojiki*) such as a colourful long two-piece ensemble and the rumol, a headscarf worn above the ears by Tajik women, or the *toqi*, an embroided hat (Miles 2015). In his speech on Women's Day in 2016, President Rahmon claimed that ethnographic studies have proven that since ancient times, Tajik women have worn beautiful colourful clothes, not black ones. But the historical evidence refutes this claim. Before the advent of Soviet rule, women were more likely to wear a *paranja*, a full-body horse-hair veil (Northrop 2004). What the authorities refer to as traditional clothing is in fact a Soviet creation that was reified as 'traditionally' Tajik after the Soviet unveiling campaigns. This invention of tradition involves a distortion of history to fit the nationalist, secular programme that the government promotes (Thibault 2014, forthcoming). Not only is it suggested, it is required for state employees and students to wear 'national' dress or a Western-style suit (Ibanez-Tirado 2016, 25). The mayor of Khujand even organized a series of meetings with women to instruct them how to dress in accordance with national traditions (Fayzullayev 2015).

Policing piety, then, is simultaneously about suppressing alien, backwards and dangerous behaviour, and promoting 'appropriate' forms of life and 'national' values, such as stability (*suboti*), national reconciliation (*vahdati milli*) and peace (*sulh*). Rahmon repeatedly stresses the need to promote 'healthy [*solim*] and moral [*akhloqi*] lifestyles [tarsi hayoti]'. Government officials argue that the maintenance of a secular society constitutes a bulwark against extremism. Indeed, in 51 speeches between 2008 and 2015 Rahmon repeated the mantra 'democratic, secular, constitutional' (*davlati demokrativu huquqbunyod va dunyavi*) 55 times. Addressing the nation in 2015, Rahmon (2015b) argued that:

> Existing experience in the modern world today has proved once again that the choice of the secular state is the correct [*durust*] and far-sighted [*durbinona*] choice, and this idea has become one of the main prerequisites for a peaceful life [*hayoti osoishtai*].

According to this state narrative, secularism is a prerequisite for citizens' living long, happy lives and for society to progress. Rahmon frequently states that citizens should be 'patriotic' (*vatanparasti*) and 'secular.' But how does the state go about constructing these secular subjects who are resilient to extremist messages? Leading academic Khudoberdi Kholiqnazar argues that effective counter-terrorism rests on educational activities (Ruziyev 2015). Through the building of schools, libraries and youth clubs, the state should promote and build a secular (*dunyavi*) national culture. Addressing young people in Kulob, President Rahmon (2015a) told them to 'study science, culture and professional skills, so that you live a life worthy [*sazovori*] of this nation [*vatan*]'. Educational activities train young people in the 'spirit of patriotism' (*rirhiyai vatandirsti*) and commitment to national values, such as reconciliation, peace and stability.

State interventions to promote secular national values are not restricted to schools. Indeed, the state intervenes to manage the health, hygiene and life rituals of the population (Roche 2016). With the introduction of the Family Code of the Republic of Tajikistan (1998), the government outlawed forced marriage, payment of a bride price (*kalym*), polygamy, and under-aged marriage. These bans remain unevenly enforced. In 2016, it became mandatory for couples to undergo a medical examination before marrying. Justified as a way to reduce the risk of disabled children, the tests have been used to ascertain whether the bride is a virgin (BBC 2014). Through these practices the state comes to define, shape and police 'tradition' in Tajikistan, promoting secular

values over Islamic ones. Interestingly, the government transforms the virginity test from something that was based on religious tradition into something that is justified by a secular, medical logic.

Managing religious life in Tajikistan

As in Soviet times, state agencies continue to tightly regulate religious practices. Although a diverse range of agencies, such as the Ministry of Education and the State Committee on National Security, are involved in implementing state religious policies, the Council of Ulemo and Committee for Religious Affairs are the principal agencies responsible for devising religious policy. The CRA is an administrative body that approves the nomination of imams and the erection of mosques, prepares a list of approved topics for Friday sermons, and issues permits to citizens who wish to organize private religious classes. Where the CRA enforces religious policies, the Council of Ulemo issues decrees on legitimate religious practices. The council issued a religious ruling, or *fatwa*, in 2004 prohibiting women from praying in mosques. In 2009, the council issued a decree that beards should not exceed the length of a fist (NewsRu 2012). The council also recommended that women wear Islamic clothes that conform to 'national culture', rather than those of Iran, Turkey, or other Arabic countries (FerganaNews 2010). The authorities do not deny the control exerted by these institutions, and the president himself has repeatedly stressed the importance of regulation as a necessary measure to protect Islam against deviances: 'The state in the framework of existing legislation has the authority to oversee the activities of religious organizations to protect the peace, stability, noble birth and cultural values of the people in the country' (Rahmon 2007).

While the CRA and the Council of Ulemo manage religion through the official, state-sanctioned clergy, they are not the only agents through which state secular policies manage life. For Foucault, power is not just exercised by elites. While elites guide citizens as to how to behave, individuals reproduce power relations themselves through acts of self-regulation. The government hopes that its counter-extremism efforts will be enacted through local communities in Tajikistan. Speaking at the end of Ramadan in 2015, Emomali Rahmon stated:

> Indeed, it is important that our compatriots [*hamvatanoni*], and in particular teenagers and young people [*javonon*], especially in the context of the modern world's most sensitive dangers [*nooromu hassosi*], have the ability to separate truth [*haqro*] from falsehood. They must always be vigilant [*zirak boshand*], take the right path of life [*rohi durusti zindagiro*], study science to try to educate themselves, and refrain from any harmful [*ziyonovar*] acts.

Through education and indoctrination via the state media, the government aims to produce citizens who monitor others, and themselves, for the signs of radicalization. These 'model' citizens act as defenders of national culture.

As Sophie Roche (2016) has demonstrated, the notion of motherhood plays a central role in the state's attempt to define national culture. The government has also attempted to mobilize women's maternal qualities and patriotism in the fight against terrorism. In his speech on the occasion of Women's Day in March 2015, Rahmon talked at length about the sanctity of women, and how mothers foster the future builders of the Tajik state and society. On Mother's Day in 2016, Rahmon (2016) stated that as the world is becoming

more complicated and plagued with terrorism, parents play an important role in the prevention of extremism:

> Given these dangers [*khatarnok*], parents and women need to take greater responsibility [*mas'uliyati*], remaining shrewd [*ziraki*] and vigilant [*hushyori*], constantly monitoring and being involved in their upbringing. Especially, dear mothers, with love [*muhabatti*] and encouragement [*nasihat*] you can protect young people from terrorist and extremist groups, by giving them lessons in the proper [*sabaqi*] way to live [*hayoti*].

For Rahmon, women have a special role and responsibility in countering extremism. They must simultaneously discourage and monitor 'dangerous' behaviour, while promoting 'proper' ways to live. Women's bodies are simultaneously the site of counter-terrorism, and the agent through which counter-extremism can be realized. Indeed, as we argue in the next section, both communities and state agencies are responsible for countering extremism in Tajikistan.

As the discussion above indicates, state religious policy is not homogeneous. A range of actors claiming to act on behalf of the 'state' claim legitimacy from it, perform it in different ways, and pursue their own agendas through the 'state'. As a result, policies are unevenly enforced and highly personalized. A number of anthropologists have pointed to the way community members in Central Asia use accusations of extremism to defame members of their community with whom they have personal or business rivalries (McBrien 2006; Pelkmans and McBrien 2008; Mostowlansky 2017). In other cases, it is merely a fear of that which is unknown to them (McBrien 2006). In Uzbekistan, for example, Johann Rasanayagam (2006, 115) has examined how community members used the label 'Wahhabi' 'to direct the attention of law enforcement bodies to any religious activities that are unfamiliar'. A similar dynamic exists in Tajikistan. Abdulrahmon said that he knew one of the officers who shaved his beard. The man had tried to marry his daughter off to Abdulrahmon's cousin, but Abdulrahmon's family did not approve of the match. Abdulrahmon thinks he was singled out by the officer as a form of revenge. Others have been targeted by law enforcement officers who are attempting to extort money from them.

Where traders continued to sell religious literature in the bazaar in Vanj in 2013, bribing local police to maintain that opportunity, in other areas of the country this was not the case. The experience of Iskandar, a man in his early forties in Khujand with whom one of the researchers spent a lot of time, is revealing. Iskandar was a devout-looking Muslim who got into trouble with the authorities on more than one occasion because of his beliefs. In 2010, he was detained for almost a whole day after being accused of celebrating a religious marriage, or *nikoh*, for his acquaintances. Iskandar reported that he had not been physically hurt during his detention, but that police officers had 'beaten him with words.' In 2010, he and his wife were pressured to close the tiny religious literature store they were operating at Khujand's Panjshanbe bazaar. After many stalls were closed down by the authorities, new ones were reopened in a central location at the bazaar few weeks later. This reorganization was obviously meant to purge undesirable elements and allow the government to more closely monitor the sale of religious literature. Iskandar's case illustrates how assertively secular state policies have an impact on the everyday life of pious Muslims in Tajikistan. Counter-extremism in Tajikistan, then, is invoked, enacted and shapes the lives of almost every citizen of the country. In the next section, we explore how citizens have reacted to state religious policies.

Responses to Tajik counter-extremism

The way people support, acquiescence or resist state religious policies varies widely. For instance, support can entail active engagement or tacit support. Acquiescence implies that someone accepts the system without resisting it, although they may or may not support it. Resistance ranges from private criticism to acts of open defiance. Resisting involves a certain level of risk; dissent has become less and less tolerated over the last few years. None of these responses are mutually exclusive; subjects can simultaneously resist aspects of state policy while acquiescing to others.

Support

The idea that Tajik society should be secular finds resonance in a certain portion of the population who agree that conservative religious views are antithetical to Tajik culture. A number of citizens are genuinely wary of mounting religious belief, which they see as a threat to the natural, secular order. For them, the threat posed by radical Islam makes extraordinary measures by the government necessary. Dilshod, a foreign-educated white-collar worker from Dushanbe in his mid-thirties, expressed support for the government's restrictions on Islamic practices. Although he believed that it constituted a violation of human rights, he thought it was still justified. When comparing the situation in the US, where radical anti-systemic and anti-state discourses are tolerated, he argued that the situation is very different in Tajikistan, where the state is not strong enough to contain radical elements if they eventually, and most likely, gather more support.

Indeed, the valorization of order and stability seen in state discourses does seem to find support among members of the population. Marhabbo, an ethnic Pamiri from Dushanbe, runs a Moscow-based NGO supporting migrants' rights. She staunchly defends Tajikistan's 'national Islam' (Rus.: *natsionalnii Islam*), arguing that it prevents conflicts. For Marhabbo, religion is a potentially destabilizing force that requires disciplining. Marhabbo believes that autocracies, not democracies, are the best political system for guaranteeing stability:

> In some countries, like the UK, women go around with their faces covered [motions to her face, indicating a slit across her eyes]. But I am not democrat. If the result of democracy is the murder [Rus.: *ubistvo*] of people, I cannot agree with it. Religion needs to be controlled.

Marhabbo associates religious tolerance with instability, arguing that a 'strong [Rus.: *zhostkii*] secular system' is the best way for a government to provide security for its citizens. This reverence for authoritarian stability is based on perceptions of the alternative: anarchy and instability. Authoritarian secular policies are therefore seen as a *necessary* measure, justified by the vulnerability of the Tajik state to extremist forces. While some support the Tajik government's secular policies, others accept and negotiate them. Again, many people relate to state policies not through the impact they have had, but through ideas of what the situation would be like if they were absent.

As mentioned earlier, counter-terrorism in Tajikistan operates through communities, with teachers, bazaar directors and other citizens exercising disciplinary power and biopower. Some have taken action to openly support Tajikistan's counter-extremism policy. The state-sanctioned youth movement, Avangard, for example, has held a series of demonstrations in favour of the government.[10] Its leaders openly take responsibility for

implementing counter-extremism in their communities: 'Young people are trying to keep the peace, stability and independence [of our country], and mobilize people to work in this direction. We will not allow any foreign power [*nerui khoriji*] to undermine the independence of our state' (Khovar 2016).

Although the movement appears to be a manifestation of state efforts to counter extremism through communities, it remains relatively marginal. The most common local response to state religious policy is acquiescence.

Acquiescence

Not everyone takes an active stance in opposition to or in support of state religious policies. The vast majority of Tajiks take a more ambivalent position. As Husband (2000, 150) argues, 'far more citizens everywhere practice accommodation than ever take up activism'. A number of ethnographic studies have demonstrated how actors invoke and perform this acquiescence. In her ethnography of the state in Turkey, Yael Navaro-Yashin (2002, 171) describes the 'mundane cynicism' with which public employees sustain the state, acting as though it is a 'wholesome entity' despite knowing it is a manipulative series of social relations. Anderson (2013), in his study of businessmen in Aleppo, show how even those who have had their assets seized by the state do not take up opposition to it, instead placing themselves as objects of scorn within the 'tragedy' of Syrian politics. Our observations in Tajikistan support the notion that most citizens acquiesce to state religious policies. Memories of the Soviet campaign against religion and the trauma of the subsequent civil war continue to shape attitudes towards secularism. Abdujabbor, born in 1964 in Nurobod, fought with the opposition during the civil war and now drives a taxi in Gharm. Sipping tea in the *havli* (courtyard) of his home, he recounted his own experience of the war:

> We experimented with democracy in 1992. And look where that got us. Thousands died. The country was destroyed. My brother was killed in the war. He fought on the side of the mujahedeen [the United Tajik Opposition]. He was a respected fighter with Mullo Quyomuddin's group. I was in the same group. He was killed fighting the government in 1994 in Komsomolobod. I had my leg blown off.

For someone whose brother was killed by government forces to now support the government appears puzzling. But as Abdujabbor explains, his experiences fighting made him place greater value on leading a peaceful life: 'We [Tajiks] are tired of war [*az jang monda shudaand*]. I fought the government, yes. But I support Rahmon. He is a rock [*sangin*]. He provides peace [*sulh*]. We value that above all else.'

Turning to state religious policy, Abdujabbor also qualifies the government's repressive policy by comparing it to the Soviet Union: 'I am Muslim. I pray. I keep the fast. I grew up in the Soviet Union. *Namaz* [prayer] was banned. Times are better. Now I can pray. I am free to live my life in peace.'

Abdujabbor has experienced a great deal of trauma, and the memory of this makes him accept the status quo. While some people look to the past to justify the present, others look to other countries, concluding that the situation in Tajikistan is better.

An underlying paternalistic understanding of how politics works in Tajikistan continues to pervade society. The leader is often perceived as a wise father who makes the right

decisions. Abdujabbor's comments on the importance of a strong male figurehead are an example of this assumption. As Morgan Liu (2003, 232) writes, there is 'a tendency to believe that as ordinary people, they are not able to fully understand issues of government, much less voice consequential opinions or press for effective changes about them'. Rather than being an innate part of non-Western culture, this paternalism is socially constructed and promoted by the regime. For instance, a resident of the Gonchi region was supportive of the government and thought that the president was protecting freedom of religion. While he was aware of the restrictions, he did not think they were necessarily bad:

> If they would forbid our girls to wear hijab at school, then I would allow my daughter to go without her scarf, but only at school. We should follow the laws, because if they adopted this law, it means that it was needed. They know better.

By indicating that 'they' know better, he embodies the acceptance of the status quo as being 'natural' and 'appropriate'. He trusts the government by virtue of its position in power, believing that if a policy is adopted then there must be a utilitarian motive behind it.

Not everyone accepts the status quo due to ideological reasons; some follow the rules for practical reasons, to make their lives easier. Once again, the hijab issue provides a good example of a response between acceptance and support. The researchers witnessed many cases of young women who would wear a hijab on the way to school and swap it for a *rumol* at the gate. These girls were ready to make a compromise on their faith because they did not want to be deprived of their right to education. Indeed, many strict believers have avoided confrontation with the government by leaving the country for places where they can practise more freely, such as Russia, the Gulf states and Turkey. Many Tajiks, for example, have avoided the ban on studying Islam in foreign madrassas by registering at the Islamic universities in Moscow and Kazan, entering the country on the visa waiver programme.[11]

But not everyone appreciates the paternalistic tone of state discourses and practices. For instance, the 2011 Law on Parental Responsibility, which intervenes in the sphere of parenting, was sometimes met with criticism.[12] In an interview with a member of the IRPT in Khujand, one man in his early thirties joked that 'people in power are proud to say that we have 3000 years of tradition yet they think that we don't know how to properly raise our children'.

State discourses and policies promote the idea that the government knows best, dissuading people from critical thinking and promoting an apolitical culture. Nonetheless, the government has not been successful in creating docile citizens.

Resistance

Resistance to counter-extremism is expressed both publicly and privately. It is expressed by individuals and groups in a range of positions in society, from human rights activists and journalists to opposition politicians, pious Muslims and violent extremists. Yet it remains anti-hegemonic; there is no united vision of why the situation in unjust and what can be done to address it.[13]

A number of arguments have been made against the government's counter-extremist policies. First, human rights activists have forwarded *legal* arguments as to how shaving beards, restricting prayers and forcing women to de-veil violates individual religious freedoms as provided in the Constitution and other legislation. These arguments are based on a clear notion of what is right and what is wrong. Second, some have gone further and forwarded *philosophical* arguments that question the government's creation of a simplistic binary between 'good' and 'bad' Islam, arguing that the reality is much more incoherent and complex. Third, accommodational Islamists and confrontational Islamists have forwarded *theological* arguments, arguing that policing the signs of piety runs counter to the teachings of Islam. These arguments are not mutually exclusive. Many have combined elements of all three in their critiques of state secularism. One term frequently used to describe these repressive practices is 'secular extremism' (Rus.: *svetskii ekstremizm*) or 'radical secularism' (*rodikalhoi dunyavi*). In an interview with independent news agency *Asia Plus* in March 2014, religious leader Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda elaborated on his position:[14]

> Islam in our country is under pressure from the so-called 'secular' radicalism [Rus.: *svetskii radikalizm*]. And it's not just empty words [Rus.: *pustiye slova*]. Just remember all the policies and decisions by the authorities in recent years, aimed at harming believers. What kind of radicalisation can we talk about when only five percent of people go to the mosque?
>
> Yes, we are advocates of an Islamic society, where everyone can freely perform their religious needs, but we do not intend to forcibly impose its values and ideas of others. Let it be the free choice of each person.

Turajonzoda combines theological arguments related to the gradual spread of the Islamic faith with the liberal notion that individuals should be able to freely choose to worship or not. Similarly, the IRPT downplayed the Islamic character of the issue and framed it in terms of human rights. Muhiddin Kabiri stated: 'For us, the hijab issue is about human rights. It's about freedom of choice, which is guaranteed by our constitution. The Education Ministry or any other bodies have no right to ban the hijab anywhere' (Najibullah 2009).[15]

Farrukh, an IRPT deputy in Moscow, agrees that the issue is a spiritual rather than an issue of human rights:

> The management [*idora*] of religion in Tajikistan comes from the government. The government decides what you can and cannot do. But it is not the business of the government. That is a job for Allah. They [the government] are doing non-understandable [*ne fahmidan*] acts, forcing men to shave, filming prostitutes in hijabs. People see that those who pay prostitutes to wear hijabs are against us [*bar ziddi mo*].

Farrukh's comments raise a question that remains central to the politics of secularism and religion in Tajikistan. Who has the authority to regulate religion? Though the government argues that it has this right, accommodational and confrontational Islamists have argued that only God has this authority. Eshoni Nurridinjon, a popular preacher and the younger brother of Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda, made a sermon criticizing the Committee on Religious Affairs and the Council of Ulemo. He declared:

> A beard was worn by Mohammed, peace be upon him. … . And I say to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, only God [*khudo*] can decide who wears a beard. … They say that terrorists wear

> beards. But Mohammed was not a terrorist! I am not, praise be to God, a terrorist. The Committee on Religious Affairs has renounced [*bezor*] [Islam]. (YouTube 2015)

Nurridinjon argues that styling oneself as a Muslim is a matter of personal, spiritual preference. He contends that only God, not the government, has the authority to dictate the rules of morality. Religious texts are not just words on a page, they are examples of the constitutive power of discourse and how it shapes social practices.

Continuing Islamic bodily practices is an example of what Foucault terms 'techniques of the self', practices through which subjects constitute themselves within and through systems of power. Though these practices cannot be separated from power and often reproduce domination, they can also be used to resist domination. They can be used to achieve what Amy Allen (2011, 44) terms 'autonomy', or 'the twin capacities to reflect critically upon the power-knowledge relations that have constituted one's subjectivity and to engage in practices of self-transformation'. Individuals can modify their subjectivity as a means to resist the subjectifying forces of power through alternative modes of self-making. The continuance of securitized bodily practices, such as wearing a beard, fits into this category. Indeed, many pious Muslims continue 'bad' Islamic practices, arguing that they are merely expressing their faith. Abdulrahmon stated that he would regrow his beard after it was forcibly shaved by the police:

> I will grow my beard again. Am I displaying my opposition [*muqobil*] to the government? Maybe. But I am also following the teaching [*sunnah*] of the Prophet, peace be upon him. The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, his beard was thick. For me, it is a matter of living according to my faith [*din*].

For Abdulrahmon, wearing a beard is not just a way of expressing devotion, it is an obligation stated in the Quran. He does not consider his actions as a form of resistance, but as continuing to be Muslim despite state secularism. Similarly, one strict believer, who works as an administrator in a governmental agency, had a three-year-old daughter who wore a veil. This in itself is quite unusual in Tajikistan, as well as other Muslim countries, where girls start covering their head when they reach puberty. The father claimed that they would move to another country if his daughter could not go to school with her hijab on. For him, to obey this rule would be to betray his religion. One of his colleagues, who worked in his department at the agency, lost her job after she refused to take off the hijab at work. Her desire to stay true to her faith was stronger than her interest in conforming to the state's secular policies and remaining employed.

Referring to their lives, many informants used the Tajik word *toqat*. An adjective denoting 'patience,' 'endurance' or 'perseverance', the word roughly equates to the Russian *terpet*', to endure, put up with, or suffer, which Tajiks also use. *Toqat* denotes a life lived with honour and dignity in the face of adversity. For pious Muslims, their Islamic faith is a source of this endurance. Islam offers a spiritual and moral sanctuary for those who adhere to it. First, it places transcendence over immanence, allowing the believer to focus on the hereafter. Second, internally, it allows believers to focus on an inner struggle within themselves. Third, externally, it provides a moral guide for living in and coping with the secular world. Abdulrahmon expressed how religion gives him a sense of identity and forms a way to cope with the assertive secular policies of the government:

> No person is united [*muttahid*]. We all have a mixture of feelings and impulses. A struggle [*jihad*] takes place within us of good versus evil. I choose to live my life as a Muslim. A religious society is a healthy society. Islam guides us in our daily life. But the regime misrepresents religion as dangerous and backwards. Our fight against injustice in Tajikistan is also *jihad*.
>
> We have a saying: Little by little will become a lot, drop by drop [*qarta qarta*] will become a downpour. We must not become obsessed with the present, but think to the future. If we are patient [*toqat*], then over time things will change [*taghiir*] for the better. We cannot expect revolutionary [*inqilobi*] change. People do not change their ways of thinking [*fikr*] quickly. Change must be gradual [*ohista*].

As Abdulrahmon indicates, resisting exercises of biopower and disciplinary power in Tajikistan involves reclaiming the very notion of life against which the government actions are targeted. Countering extremism, and resisting counter-extremism, involve a struggle over how people *should* lead their lives. By being patient and focusing on living life morally, many strict believers come to terms with state secularism, while quietly resisting it at the same time.

But quiet resistance did not meet with universal approval among strict believers. One Khujandi man in his mid-thirties told one of the researchers how much he felt pressured to act and dress in a way that conforms to the secular ideals promoted by the authorities:

> Those who sit on the throne, those in ties, they don't care about Islam. I don't like the president, I hate him even. What have I done to this government? Nothing! And they still bother me, they deprive me from my rights to be Muslim. They want us to be a certain type of Muslim – half-Muslim. But I don't want to be the kind of Muslim they want me to be.

The man felt threatened because of his beliefs, but he did not see the point of trying to raise this concern through legal means. His exasperation reached the point that he made barely concealed threats in retaliation for policies that he perceived as an affront to Islam and believers: 'You know if a dog wants to die, it will walk by a mosque, piss on it, and leave. If people saw, and the dog comes back, they will kill it.'

This man was not part of any violent organizations nor particularly prone to violence. Like many of his countrymen, he ended up working in Russia as a migratory labourer. Yet, what this testimony reveals is a sense that one day, state oppression of devout Muslims will produce a backlash against the state (symbolized by the dog). Islamic militancy has gained almost no support in Tajikistan. Even with the crackdown on Islam, violence remains unlikely. But state secularism does create insecurity for many thousands of Tajik strict believers.

Conclusion

Countering extremism in Tajikistan is not just about banning groups, closing mosques and arresting alleged 'extremists'. While we have highlighted how the government disciplines 'bad' forms of religious expression, we have also demonstrated that there is a more productive side to counter-extremism in which the government promotes certain ways of living 'appropriately'. Ultimately, the government is seeking to shape self-regulating secular citizens who will not question the regime. While the regime publicly securitizes certain religious practices, on the ground state religious policy remains unevenly enforced and highly personalized.

Individuals who appear to be pious are viewed by many state officials as a threat to stability whose lives contradict the secular values promoted by the state. Their bodies and appearance are closely monitored and if necessary forcibly disciplined to conform to national secular ideals. Practices targeting women combine both disciplinary power and biopower; the state attempts to break down religious women, and then 'remake' them to fit the 'national culture'. For the government, women can be both a threat and a solution to the issue of Islamic radicalism. Women appear threatening if they wear Islamic clothes. Yet, their purportedly 'natural' maternal qualities are also promoted by the state as a means to counter terrorism by raising children and protecting them from extremist ideas.

Indeed the state's attempts to build docile secular subjects can never be fully realized. While most at least accept this exercise of power as being better than other potential scenarios, some resist state secularism. Some resist using the language of human rights. Others use religious belief and expression to resist biopower and disciplinary power. While constituting a potential threat to the government, religion also forms a way for Tajiks to cope with the harshness of their existence. By living a religious life, they resist government attempts to mould them into secular citizen-subjects. As Abdulrahmon concluded:

> The security services have threatened me. And they have tried to make life difficult for me. But I am still here! I live. I work. I have my opinions. And they [the government] will not be able to take those away from me. So long as I endure through it all, I will win.

Where secularism offers security to the state, the way it is enforced creates insecurity for many strict believers. Often, analysts set Islam, particularly forms of religion that operate in parallel, in opposition to the state in Central Asia (Heathershaw and Montgomery 2016). Such analysis is based on the assumption that by virtue of their faith strict believers are opposed to the secular state. But as our examples have shown, this is not the case. While a small minority do want to replace the state by a theocracy, many are simply trying to find ways to cope with state secularism and reclaim life from state exercises of disciplinary power and biopower.

Where a large number of studies now exist that examine the 'religious revival' in Central Asia from the perspective of those who are becoming more religious, less attention has been paid to the persistence of a 'secular imaginary' (Asad 2003; Mahmood 2005). Those who are not interested in religion and who maintain 'secular' lifestyles have remained under-examined. This article has examined how counter-extremism in Tajikistan attempts to construct secular apolitical subjects. Ibanez-Tirado (2016) has examined how people in Tajikistan fashion identities for themselves by wearing Chinese lycra and gold teeth. Pelkmans and McBrien (2008) have examined how those who do not claim to be religious have negotiated the 'religious marketplace' in Kyrgyzstan. A number of other academics have begun to explore these questions. Future research could go further. What we need is an anthropology of the secular, which examines how subjects embody, enact and perform secular lifestyles.

Notes

1. Hélène Thibault (2014, 7) defines 'strict believers' as those 'who embrace a rigorous Islamic lifestyle and live according to Sharia', or at least aspects of it.

2. Like other governments in the region, the government of Tajikistan has adopted an amorphous definition of terrorism (Horsman 2005). The Law on the Fight against Extremism, adopted in 2003, lists 11 activities that constitute 'extremism'. These include 'forcibly [*majburi*] changing the constitutional order', 'usurping [*ghasb*] power', 'insulting the national dignity [*sha'ni milli*]' and unsanctioned rallies. By adopting such a fluid definition, the government can label all manner of forms of resistance and oppositional politics 'extremism'.
3. In 2015 alone, the Tajik authorities imprisoned approximately 200 opposition activists (Edwards and Khudoydodova 2016).
4. Following Rita Felski (1999, 15), we define the everyday as 'the essential, taken-for-granted continuum of mundane activities that frames our forays into more esoteric or exotic worlds'.
5. The UN Secretary-General's Plan of Action on Preventing Violent Extremism (2016), for example, places importance on achieving gender equality in order to counter-extremism.
6. Our material was collected interactions with individuals offering a wide range of positions on Islam and security. We conducted fieldwork in both Tajikistan and Russia, but our questions pertained to the research subjects' experiences in Tajikistan. The names of all participants have been changed.
7. In defining biopower as the form of power that regulates life, we adopt the broader definition offered by Prozorov (2016).
8. In early 2016, officials suggested banning Russian names as well, replacing suffixes *-ov*, *-ev*, *-ova* and *-eva* with Tajik endings such as *-zoda*, *-zod*, *-on*, *-yon*, *-ien*, *-yor*, *-niyo* or *-far*. After the Russian government expressed its opposition to this, they quickly backed down.
9. *Vovchik* derives from the Russian word for Wahabbi (*vakhabist*) and the diminutive *chik*.
10. Formed in August 2015 by students interested in resisting 'extremism', Avangard has targeted foreign governments that are harbouring members of the opposition. Members have picketed the Germany embassy (November 2015), US embassy (December 2015), EU delegation (February 2016) and Turkish embassy (February 2016).
11. Author interview with the rector of the Russian Islamic University, New York, April 2017.
12. Many articles of the law intervene in the sphere of parenting. The law stipulates that parents should forbid children to use cellphones at school, wear jewellery, or go out to cafes at night (until they are 20) (Mushfig 2011).
13. Anti-hegemonic resistance involves actions that 'contest and deconstruct the status quo from diverse positionings without putting a single project in its place' (Cooper 1995, 137).
14. Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda comes from a prominent clerical family. He was appointed Qazi Kalon (Supreme Islamic Judge) of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic in 1988. He sided with the United Tajik Opposition during the civil war and became deputy prime minister in 1999 as part of the peace deal. Although he retired from the position in 2005, he remains an influential figure in the religious and political life in the country; see Gretsky (1994).
15. Muhiddin Kabiri became the leader of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan, the country's main opposition party, in 2006, after the death of the party's first leader, Said Abdullo Nuri. Accused of corruption, he has lived in exile since 2015.

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