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## The politics and economics of “retraditionalization” in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

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This paper analyzes attitudes of women enrolled in secular and religious universities in the capital cities of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan toward family life and the role of Islam in the private and public sphere. Survey data indicate that women from *both* types of universities in *both* countries sympathize with retraditionalization, or “a return to traditional values, family life, and religion, which entails, in part, women being moved out of the work force.” Thus far, there is no statistical evidence of this phenomenon in the literature. Sympathy for retraditionalization is unfolding in the context of ongoing economic uncertainty that has plagued Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan since the Soviet Union’s collapse, and its manifestations produce political responses. I argue that Kyrgyz and Tajik elites push a particular gender norm implying female secularization to counter expressions of retraditionalization among young women. In conclusion, I highlight counterintuitive findings of the survey regarding Islam’s role in Central Asian society and discuss collective versus individual acts of resistance to female secularization policies in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

**Keywords:** Kyrgyzstan; Tajikistan; women; Islam; secularization; retraditionalization

### Where the neck turns, the head turns

In 2007, Tajikistan’s Minister of Education banned the hijab from public schools by requiring students to wear a standard uniform lacking religious markers.<sup>1</sup> Six years later, as the Pedagogical University’s rector, he ordered female students to attend lectures in high-heel shoes.<sup>2</sup> The Kyrgyz government, which struggles with similar questions regarding the role of Islam in the public sphere, continues to debate the introduction of a similar school uniform. These political acts, which promote female secularization, aim to counter manifestations of retraditionalization or “a return to traditional values, family life, and religion, which entails, in part, women being moved out of the work force” (Kligman 1991, 142). Although they govern secular states, Kyrgyz and Tajik elites have reason to worry about such manifestations because, as I argue below, retraditionalization resonates with young, urban, educated women. Moreover, retraditionalization speaks to members

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of the *least* likely population to embrace traditional values – female students attending secular universities in each country’s capital.

Women have always played and continue to play a prominent role in Central Asian society. A Kyrgyz nongovernmental organization (NGO) dedicated to the spread of Islam highlights the power of women in the family: “We pay attention to women because they raise children and influence husbands. Men claim they are the head of the family, but where the neck turns the head turns.”<sup>3</sup> Women’s authority is so pronounced in Kyrgyzstan that the International Crisis Group published a report on “the increasingly important role” of women in the rise of extremist groups, which argues that Kyrgyz women consider “a return to traditionalism” an attractive, viable path (ICG 2009). The ICG’s principal recommendation to the government – inspire women to work outside the home – is based on the assumption that women are vital to healthy societies. One scholar notes that informal Islamic groups in Kyrgyzstan providing moral guidance for women impacted by economic insecurity “affirm an enduring truth Central Asian women hold to be self-evident: a society’s well-being depends on the well-being of its women” (Borbieva 2012, 307). Although observers noticed a trend among such women to reject Soviet and Western models of female emancipation long ago, there is limited research on retraditionalization in the region.

That research considers retraditionalization a top-down process initiated by elites to address or justify problems associated with marketization (Kligman 1994; Kay 1997; Baban 2000; Zielinska 2000). For example, Tokhtakhodjaeva (1995, 230, 245) notes, “vociferous and didactic calls ... from the pages of the mass media for a return to the ‘natural’ role of women,” which served to justify rising numbers of unemployed Central Asian women. Arguing that Uzbekistan’s President Islam Karimov has abandoned socialism’s emphasis on gender equality, Constantine (2007, 115) paints a stark picture comparing the ideal Soviet woman who drove a tractor or had a doctorate, to the ideal Uzbek woman who “is a young bride surrounded by relatives running the household.” Similarly, Khalid (2003, 586) argues that one aspect of the Islamic revival in post-Soviet Central Asia is

a new emphasis on traditional roles for women ... [and] it is the disappearance of large numbers of jobs from the economy in the economic dislocation of the Soviet collapse that feeds the rhetoric of redefining women’s place in society.

The survey that forms the core of my analysis, however, suggests that retraditionalization is a bottom-up process initiated by women approaching adulthood in an environment characterized by long-term economic uncertainty.

A small survey of female students at religious and secular universities in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which was conducted in 2008, reveals sympathy for retraditionalization among young women from both types of institutions in both countries. Although we expect “traditional values, family life, and religion” to resonate with women who attend religious universities, the data show that these societal building blocks, which contribute to Islamic revival in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, resonate with women who attend secular universities as well. Their sympathy, however, must be viewed in the context of ongoing economic

uncertainty. Here I build on previous findings, such as Collins (2007, 72) argument that Islamism will emerge as a powerful source of opposition in Central Asian states characterized by political and economic uncertainty and inhabited by Islamist leaders with a counterideology to failed nationalism and democracy. Likewise, McGlinchey (2009, 22) argues that Islamic revival in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan is due to a failing state that cannot provide rudimentary public goods: “To compensate for the state’s failure, a diverse group of Islamic organizations and institutions ... are stepping in and providing the food, shelter, and education that the central government cannot.” Finally, in a study of the rise of private religious lessons in Dushanbe, Stephan (2010, 478 and 479) argues that for the many young women in Tajikistan’s capital who lack economic prospects, Islam is a coping mechanism:

Faced with the instability of the present and uncertainty of the future, it [Islam] is perceived as a tradition that appears secure ... in the context of market transition, impoverishment and limited career prospects, Islam offers an ‘honourable’ option for urban youth to increase their social status.

I begin with a discussion of the context in which retraditionalization is unfolding: dire economic circumstances that have plagued Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The crux of the paper is a presentation of the survey data mentioned above, which provides evidence of retraditionalization among young Kyrgyz and Tajik women. Thus far, there is no statistical evidence of this phenomenon in the literature. Finally, the paper discusses the political response of the Kyrgyz and Tajik governments to manifestations of retraditionalization within their respective societies. I argue that Kyrgyz and Tajik elites push a particular gender norm implying female secularization in order to counter expressions of retraditionalization among young women. The conclusion: (1) highlights counterintuitive findings of the survey that should cause researchers and policymakers to question conventional wisdom regarding Islam’s role in Central Asian society; and (2) discusses collective versus individual acts of resistance to female secularization policies in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

### **Long-term economic uncertainty: the context of retraditionalization**

I assess the level of economic uncertainty in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan with data from the World Development Indicators database, including annual GDP growth, GDP per capita, and unemployment, as well as perceptions of economic conditions gleaned from AsiaBarometer surveys conducted in these countries in 2005, three years before the survey discussed below was administered. In terms of GDP annual growth, [Figure 1](#) shows Kyrgyz and Tajik growth fluctuating wildly for the 20-year period under consideration. During the 1990s, both countries experienced negative growth rates, the low points being  $-20\%$  for Kyrgyzstan and  $-21\%$  for Tajikistan. Although both economies entered a phase of positive growth by the late 1990s, [Figure 1](#) reveals a pattern of high peaks ( $9.9\%$  in Kyrgyzstan and  $11\%$  in Tajikistan) and low valleys ( $2.1\%$  in Kyrgyzstan and  $3.7\%$  in Tajikistan) of growth ( $>0\%$ )

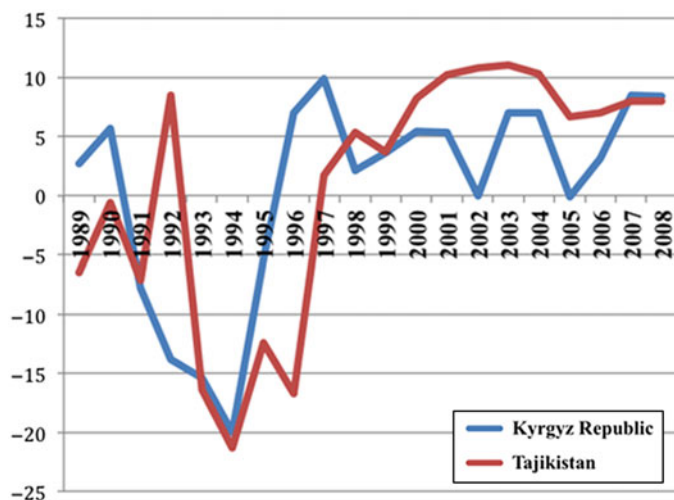


Figure 1. GDP growth (annual %) 1989–2008.

Source: The World Bank, World Development Indicators database (<http://www.databank.worldbank.org/data/views/variableSelection/selectvariables.aspx?source=world-development-indicators>).

since then. Such fluctuation is likely to leave the respective populace at least uncertain, if not pessimistic, about future economic trends.

Figure 2 depicts trends in Kyrgyz and Tajik GDP per capita from 1989 to 2008. Kyrgyz and Tajik GDP per capita dropped sharply in reaction to the collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent discontinuation of subsidies and production orders from Moscow: The former decreased by almost 50% (from \$2523 in 1990 to \$1316 in 1994), whereas the latter decreased by more than 50% (from \$3008 in 1990 to \$1213 in 1994). Each country's GDP per capita had plummeted by the mid-1990s, when the former was \$12,320 in 1995 and the latter was \$861 in 1996. An economically devastating five-year civil war (1992–1997) contributed to the more precipitous decline in Tajik GDP per capita. While each country's GDP per capita has risen steadily since the late 1990s, neither had reached its 1989 Soviet-era level by 2008, almost 20 years later.

The fact that the level of unemployment in each country around the time of the 2008 survey was high is significant. World Bank unemployment statistics are limited for the cases discussed here to the following: 8.1% of the total labor force was unemployed in Kyrgyzstan in 2008 and 11.5% in Tajikistan in 2009. The situation has not improved: in 2011, the level of unemployment among women in Kyrgyzstan was higher (9.9%) than among men (7.6%).<sup>4</sup>

AsiaBarometer data from surveys conducted in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in 2005 suggest that a few years before the 2008 survey discussed below, women were worried about various aspects of the economy and, by and large, thought their respective government was not solving critical economic issues.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the overwhelming majority of female respondents in both countries worried about poverty and unemployment, while almost a quarter of the respondents were

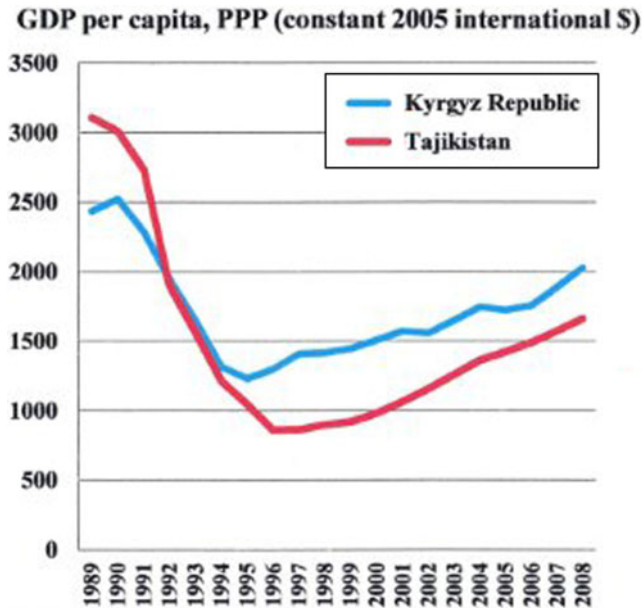


Figure 2. GDP per capita, purchasing power parity (constant 2005 international \$) 1989–2008.

Source: The World Bank, World Development Indicators database (<http://www.databank.worldbank.org/data/views/variableSelection/selectvariables.aspx?source=world-development-indicators>).

concerned about general economic conditions.<sup>6</sup> In terms of perceptions regarding state capacity to solve economic problems, the overwhelming majority of female respondents in both countries thought their respective government dealt inadequately with the economy and quality of public services, while almost all respondents thought the same for unemployment.<sup>7</sup>

There is consensus among scholars that in this climate of long-term economic uncertainty, women in Central Asia have suffered disproportionately from the shrinking labor market as a result of state impulses to eliminate structural support for female employment established during the Soviet era (Tokhtakhodjaeva 1995, 245; Akiner 1997, 288; Fayzullaeva 2009, 248; Gunes-Ayata and Ergun 2009, 217; Usmanova 2009, 271). As Figure 3 shows, there has been a continuous decline in the female percentage of the total Kyrgyz and Tajik labor force since the Soviet Union collapsed.

The female share of the Kyrgyz labor force fell from 46% in 1990 to 42% in 2008; the female share of the Tajik labor force fell from 44% in 1990 to 43% in 2008. While both countries experienced increasing levels of poverty and unemployment, combined with decreasing levels of female political representation, women in Tajikistan were also affected by adverse consequences of civil war including violence, rape, and high male mortality and outmigration rates (Tadjbakhsh 1998, 180). Yet some of these consequences, particularly the high male mortality and outmigration rates, explain why the decline in the female



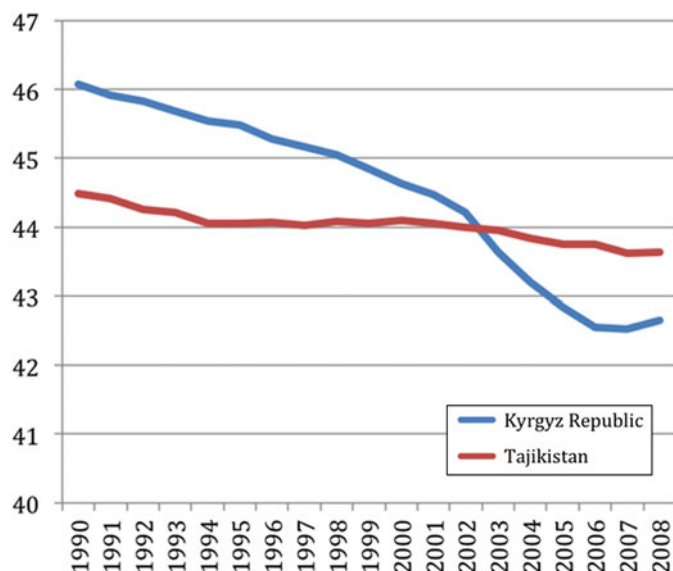


Figure 3. Labor force, female (% of total labor force) 1990–2008.

Source: The World Bank, World Development Indicators database (<http://www.databank.worldbank.org/data/views/variableSelection/selectvariables.aspx?source=world-development-indicators>).

percentage of the total Tajik labor force has not been as precipitous as the decline in the female share of the total Kyrgyz labor force. Many women in Tajikistan simply cannot afford to drop out of the labor force. According to one of the three female members of Tajikistan's Islamic Renaissance Party's (IRP) 49-seat Politburo:

The war is the most sad, tragic, horrible event in the history of the lives of our women. In every family a husband, son, brother, or uncle died, so in a sense the war had a stronger influence on women than men. Women began to work hard, they did everything to feed their family. They were left without their husbands, sons – and so the war had more influence on women.<sup>8</sup>

Given the alternatives, in this context of economic uncertainty retraditionalization is not an irrational choice. Young Kyrgyz and Tajik women adopt various combinations of coping strategies that include embracing retraditionalization, participating in a fledgling private sector and/or male-dominated public sector, studying/working abroad, and/or joining Islamist groups. Success in the fledgling private sector and male-dominated public sector of each country requires means that are not necessarily available to the average young Kyrgyz or Tajik woman, including higher education, resources, and a wide, influential social network. Studying and/or working abroad in countries with more opportunity than the origination country tends to be reserved for the privileged elite. And while an increasing number of Central Asian women are joining Islamist organizations, this path presents risks that are not acceptable to everyone.

Women who join Islamist organizations do so, in part, because they benefit economically, which is “extremely relevant” in countries plagued by unemploy-



ment, poverty, and corruption (Kim 2004, 47 and 48). Islamist groups in the region recruit women by offering spiritual fulfillment as well as better living conditions, and their method is paying off. The Director of a Kyrgyz think tank “Religion, Laws, and Politics,” argues that Salafist and Hizb ut-Tahrir activists radicalize women because they: (1) are the most vulnerable and unprotected group in society; (2) have trouble getting married and feeding their families; and (3) are often victims of domestic violence.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, a prominent female activist dedicated to protecting the rights of Muslim women in Kyrgyzstan argues that the notable tendency for female radicalization, which the Interior Ministry acknowledges, is due to the fact that resource-rich extremist groups provide the religious knowledge local women crave.<sup>10</sup> This activist echoes a point Tabyshalieva (1993, 124) raised in the early 1990s regarding the lack of attention paid by religious authorities to women and Russified Central Asians in the region. In response to this grievance, the Muftiate has established a department for women and youth, which according to the Mufti “is one of the instruments to counteract religious extremism” (Miroshnik 2013). In addition, an educational center for Muslim women that disseminates religious knowledge is now open for business in Osh, Kyrgyzstan; this is one of the first such centers in Central Asia.<sup>11</sup> The financial incentive to join Hizb ut-Tahrir’s Tajik affiliate may be even stronger because labor migration to Russia leaves Tajik women alone to care for their families in tough economic conditions. Although his analysis is not gendered, Karagiannis (2006, 6) claims “poverty and unemployment have created both the seeds and the fertile soil for the rise of Hizb ut-Tahrir in Tajikistan.” Indeed, in 2006 Tajik authorities detained 42 Hizb ut-Tahrir and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan members, half of whom were women who, according to the Minister of Interior, “were joining those organizations for promises of financial benefits” (Hamroboyeva 2006). Nevertheless, joining an Islamist organization is risky because the Kyrgyz and Tajik governments ban the most prevalent groups in the region and closely monitor the activities of legal religious organizations.

Retraditionalization, which includes opting “to follow an orthodox Islamic way of life” (Akiner 1997, 293), represents a low-risk and low-cost coping mechanism in the context of long-term economic uncertainty. Consider the following comment, made by the Director of Kyrgyzstan’s “Religion, Laws, and Politics” think tank regarding the need for girls to pursue higher education:

Many want to study further but this is a wish, a dream, and then there is reality – what a young girl needs: to marry well, to be a good wife. And to marry well, she doesn’t need education. She needs to be pretty, religious; she needs to cook well and have basic education so that she can raise her children . . . if a man’s wealthy, he can marry any girl, even if he’s 20 years older, because he can provide food, housing, and stability.<sup>12</sup>

Food, housing, and stability are highly valued commodities in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, where economic uncertainty influences individual calculations regarding the path to financial security. “Successful” marriage in this context may be defined in terms of union with a man (who may already be married) possessing or on the verge of acquiring resources. As Simpson (2010, 278) notes,

many young Central Asian women “feel their chances of finding a suitable husband – and thus their life prospects – will improve if their community (and most importantly their potential mother-in-law) regards them as pious.”

### **Retraditionalization from below: survey evidence**

Tajik and Kyrgyz women resemble Russian women in the sense that they say they are Muslim, as their counterparts say they are orthodox, but do not necessarily observe all of their respective religion’s core tenets. In other words, religion remains a question of cultural identity rather than deep spirituality for many Tajik, Kyrgyz, and Russian women (Kizenko 2013, 605 and 606). However, there is a swath of the young Kyrgyz and Tajik female populations that embraces “traditional family roles and religious values that were suppressed under communism” (Kligman 1994, 258). Evidence to support this claim is based on a survey ( $N = 203$ ) conducted in 2008 by the El-Pikir Center for Public Opinion Study, an independent firm headquartered in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Respondents were female because as I suggested above women play a conspicuous role in Central Asian society as guardians of the family, faith, and nation. The survey was designed to: (1) target the least likely population to embrace retraditionalization – young women studying at secular universities in capital cities; and (2) compare the targeted population to its logical counterpart – young women studying at religious universities in capital cities. Female respondents (100 from Kyrgyzstan; 103 from Tajikistan) were enrolled at secular and religious universities in Bishkek and Dushanbe. In Kyrgyzstan, 50 students were enrolled at the Islamic University (IU), 25 were enrolled at Kyrgyz National University, and 25 were enrolled at Kyrgyz State University of Transportation, Construction, and Architecture. In Dushanbe, 52 students were enrolled at the Islamic Institute (II), and 51 were enrolled at Tajik National University.<sup>13</sup> Respondents from secular institutions were pursuing specialties in departments with a tangential connection to Islam, including (1) Religious Studies at KNU; (2) Kyrgyz-Arabic Languages at KSUTCA; and (3) Philosophy, Eastern Studies, and Eastern-Arabic Philology at TNU. The data presented below speak to an intriguing lack of variance in the attitudes of young women attending religious and secular universities in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Table 1 indicates that Kyrgyz IU and Tajik II students are typically *not* members of the poorest stratum of society, daughters of minimally educated mothers, or from rural areas. In fact, more than half of the Tajik II and Kyrgyz IU students come from middle- or upper-class families. The overwhelming majority of Tajik II and Kyrgyz IU students have mothers with higher or secondary education; less than 20% of the Tajik and Kyrgyz women attending these religious institutions have mothers with elementary education. In terms of demography, a strong majority of Tajik II students and more than half of the Kyrgyz IU students are from urban (city/town) areas. Contrary to general expectations, women enrolled in these institutions are not there because they could not afford or get into a mainstream university, or because their parents insisted they attend a religious

Table 1. Demography: percentage of respondents from various backgrounds.

	Kyrgyz respondents		Tajik respondents	
	Secular university	Religious university	Secular university	Religious university
Come from middle- or upper-class background	83	68	71	69
Have mothers with higher or secondary education	100	85	92	83
Come from urban rather than rural background	48	68	49	81

institution: They are driven instead by an interest in religion. When asked why they study at a religious institution, the most frequently cited reason given by Kyrgyz respondents (64%) and Tajik respondents (61.5%) was to study Islam deeply.<sup>14</sup>

Regardless of which type of university they attend, Kyrgyz and Tajik respondents (who for the most part were born in or after 1985, when the Soviet government's adherence to scientific atheism began to wane) have a religious background.<sup>15</sup> This finding reinforces the argument that Islam survived the regime's assault on religion in rural areas, where the *bibiotun* or *otyncha*, who oversaw female rituals and were required to know the norms of Muslim behavior and read the Arabic script, were highly respected women among the local Muslim population (Poliakov 1992, 110). Table 2 presents data on a respondent's self-reporting of her religious upbringing and current religious identification.

Not surprisingly, all Tajik respondents were brought up in religious families. Kyrgyz respondents were brought up in religious families as well, but while a strong majority of those attending the IU claimed they were raised in such a setting, just over half of those attending a secular university asserted the same. Before their pursuit of higher education, many respondents received some form of religious education, either through a free course offered by a local NGO or at home

Table 2. Religious upbringing and identification: percentage of respondents making the following claims.

	Kyrgyz respondents		Tajik respondents	
	Secular university	Religious university	Secular university	Religious university
I was raised in a religious family	57	79	100	100
I studied Islam before attending university	46	66	39	92
I consider Allah critical in my life	74	96	71	83
Islam is the most important element of Kyrgyz/Tajik traditions	62	62	61	60

in the Kyrgyz case, or in a madrassa or at home in the Tajik case. This applies to almost all of the Tajik II women and more than a third of the Tajik secular university women, as well as more than half of the Kyrgyz IU women and almost half of the Kyrgyz secular university women. Table 2 also shows that Kyrgyz and Tajik women – the overwhelming majority attending both types of university – consider Allah important in their lives, and that regardless of university type, more than half – approximately 60% – of each subset of respondents considers Islam the most important element of Kyrgyz/Tajik tradition. When asked how proud they are to be Muslim, respondents overwhelmingly chose “very proud” from the following answers: very proud, proud, not very proud, ashamed, it makes no difference, don’t know, no answer. In the Kyrgyz case, 74% of secular university students and 96% of IU students selected very proud; in the Tajik case, 71% of secular university students and 83% of II students selected this response. Finally, when asked to rank the identity attribute(s) most important to them, 50% of Kyrgyz IU students, 36% of Kyrgyz secular university students, and 96% of all Tajik respondents ranked Muslim first.<sup>16</sup> All of this indicates that Islam is an important identity attribute for young Kyrgyz and Tajik women.

The survey data counter conventional wisdom regarding the notion that Islam is stronger in the villages than in the cities of Central Asia. In fact, the data show that the percentage of respondents with urban backgrounds who claim a religious family background is *higher* than the percentage of respondents with rural backgrounds who assert the same claim: while 88% of respondents from urban areas claim they come from a religious family, 12% claim they come from a nonreligious family; and while 79% of those from rural areas claim they come from a religious family, 21% claim they come from a nonreligious family. This suggests that the “Islamic revival” is *not* confined to rural areas. It is spreading through the region.

On the whole, respondents would like to raise their children in a religious environment and thus seek Muslim husbands. When asked what faith they prefer their future husband to observe, almost all respondents (99%) said Muslim rather than “It makes no difference.” In terms of child rearing, Table 3 suggests that although the predisposition is more prevalent among Tajik respondents, Tajik *and* Kyrgyz women are inclined to raise children in a religious environment. The data presented in Tables 3 and 4, which concern Islam’s role in child-rearing endeavors and the public sphere, respectively, reveal statistically significant differences between the attitudes of women who study at secular universities and the attitudes of women who study at religious universities: Students at religious universities in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are more serious about Islam’s role in these fields than those at secular universities. Although this is what we would expect, *the prevalence of conservative values among students studying at secular universities is surprising.*

For example, more than half of the secular university respondents (68.3%) agree with the statement “I intend to have my children study the Koran as early as possible,” whereas one-third of the secular university respondents (32.7%) agree with the statement “I would like my child to study in a religious university.” An interesting observation is the fairly high percentage of “don’t know” answers to

Table 3. Islam and child rearing: percentage of respondents who agree/disagree with the following statements.

Statement	Agree	Disagree	Don't know	$\chi^2$ ( <i>p</i> -value)
<i>My children will study the Koran early</i>				
University type				
Secular	68.3	9.9	21.8	20.348 (0.000)
Religious	93.1	2.9	3.9	
Country				
Kyrgyzstan	77.0	8.0	15.0	1.874 (0.392)
Tajikistan	84.5	4.9	10.7	
<i>My children will go to a religious university</i>				
University type				
Secular	32.7	37.6	29.7	63.764 (0.000)
Religious	87.3	4.9	7.8	
Country				
Kyrgyzstan	51.0	26.0	23.0	6.804 (0.033)
Tajikistan	68.9	16.5	14.6	

Note:  $N = 203$ , two degrees of freedom.

these questions, which indicates some ambivalence regarding Islam's role in child-rearing endeavors, particularly among secular university students in both countries. Table 4, which addresses Islam's role in the public sphere, reveals ambivalence as well.

These data suggest that women who study at religious universities more strongly support a role for Islam in the public sphere than their counterparts at secular universities. Again, the statistically significant difference in the attitudes of the two groups for each question posed is what we would expect. Perhaps most surprising in light of the secular status of the Kyrgyz and Tajik states is the fact that students attending secular universities also envision a role for Islam in the public sphere. For example, more than half (66.3%) of the students studying at secular universities agree with the statement "Islam is a potential solution for societal ills like crime, alcohol and drug use, prostitution, divorce, and AIDS." Less than 20% (16.8%) disagree. Moreover, half (49.5%) of the secular university students think the cure should be administered early, as they support the inclusion of the study of Islam in state schools. Most unexpected, given the lack of interest in Kyrgyz society for an Islamic party and the fairly weak status of the IRP in Tajikistan, is the fact that half (50.5%) of the students studying at secular universities agree with the statement "It would be better for my country if more people with deep religious convictions occupied government positions."

Although there are statistically significant differences between the attitudes of women who study at secular and religious universities concerning Islam's role in child-rearing endeavors and the public sphere, the same cannot be said for those concerning familial roles. What is most surprising about the data presented in Table 5 is the intriguing lack of

Table 4. Islam in the public sphere: percentage of respondents who agree/disagree with the following statements.

Statement	Agree	Disagree	Don't know	$\chi^2$ ( <i>p</i> -value)
<i>Islam is a solution for societal ills</i>				
University type				
Secular	66.3	16.8	16.8	7.362 (0.025)
Religious	82.4	6.9	10.8	
Country				
Kyrgyzstan	69.0	16.0	15.0	3.885 (0.143)
Tajikistan	79.6	7.8	12.6	
<i>Study of Islam belongs in state schools</i>				
University type				
Secular	49.5	22.8	27.7	44.204 (0.000)
Religious	91.2	1.0	7.8	
Country				
Kyrgyzstan	64.0	15.0	21.0	4.030 (0.133)
Tajikistan	76.7	8.7	14.6	
<i>More people with religious convictions should occupy government positions</i>				
University type				
Secular	50.5	27.7	21.8	21.914 (0.000)
Religious	70.6	3.9	25.5	
Country				
Kyrgyzstan	69.0	12.0	19.0	5.870 (0.053)
Tajikistan	52.4	19.4	28.2	

Note: *N* = 203, two degrees of freedom.

*variance in conservative familial values held by women who study at both types of universities.*

For example, more than half (61.4%) of the students studying at secular universities agree with the statement “You would prefer to manage the home and raise children rather than work outside the home.” Similarly, more than half (55.4%) of the students studying at secular universities agree with the statement “It’s better if women focus their energy on caring for the home and men focus their energy on earning money.” And in response to a question regarding a respondent’s interpretation of Islam’s stance on the role of women in the family, more than half (59.4%) of the students studying at secular universities agree with the statement “Islam justifies the need for women to stay home and raise children rather than work outside home.” And while there is no statistical significance between the attitudes of women from each type of university regarding the question pertaining to the need for a husband to understand this particular interpretation of Islam, more than half (54.5%) of the students studying at secular universities agree with the statement “It’s important that my husband understand that, as Islam says, women are obliged to raise children well and therefore I must stay home rather than work outside the home.” The prevalence of values associated with retraditionalization among young people – particularly urban, educated women studying at secular universities – has prompted Kyrgyz and Tajik elites to encourage female secularization.



Table 5. Familial roles: percentage of respondents who agree/disagree with the following statements.

Statement	Agree	Disagree	Don't know	$\chi^2$ ( $p$ -value)
<i>I prefer to manage the home/raise children</i>				
University type				
Secular	61.4	17.8	20.8	1.880 (0.391)
Religious	68.6	17.6	13.7	
Country				
Kyrgyzstan	68.0	14.0	18.0	1.884 (0.390)
Tajikistan	62.1	21.4	16.5	
<i>Women should care for the home, men should earn money</i>				
University type				
Secular	55.4	26.7	17.8	3.953 (0.139)
Religious	67.6	22.5	9.8	
Country				
Kyrgyzstan	70.0	20.0	10.0	6.043 (0.049)
Tajikistan	53.4	29.1	17.5	
<i>Husband must understand that, as Islam says, women should stay home/raise children</i>				
University type				
Secular	54.5	27.7	17.8	7.515 (0.023)
Religious	69.6	12.7	17.6	
Country				
Kyrgyzstan	65.0	21.0	14.0	1.885 (0.390)
Tajikistan	59.2	19.4	21.4	
<i>Islam justifies the need for women to stay home/raise children</i>				
University type				
Secular	59.4	19.8	20.8	4.831 (0.089)
Religious	57.8	30.4	11.8	
Country				
Kyrgyzstan	59.0	31.0	10.0	7.459 (0.024)
Tajikistan	58.3	19.4	22.3	

Note: *N* = 203, two degrees of freedom.

### Elite-inspired female secularization: a political response to retraditionalization

Tajik and Kyrgyz presidents have used formal and informal institutions to discourage retraditionalization and encourage female secularization. The notion of patronage permits a comparison of the Tajik and Kyrgyz cases in two ways. First, unlike Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan can be classified as electoral patronal systems that are legitimized in part by the maintenance of a democratic façade consisting of elections, referendums, and public opinion (Laruelle 2012, 318). Second, although they differ in degree of intensity, the Kyrgyz regime under Askar Akayev and Kurmanbek Bakiyev and the Tajik regime under Emomali Rakhmon represent patronal presidential systems founded on a directly elected presidency with institutionalized formal power, as well as informal power based on pervasive patron–client relations embedded in the state and economy (Hale 2005, 137). Hale (2006, 307) argues that in addition to institutionalized mechanisms for exercising authority, the patronal president



selectively transfers resources to reward, co-opt, or punish clients at all levels of society. The informal aspect of this system represents a continuation of Soviet politics, but its particulars differ from country to country. The Tajik patronal presidential system is stronger than the Kyrgyz patronal presidential system in the sense that it has avoided the lame duck syndrome, which Hale identifies as the main cause of colored revolutions in post-Soviet Eurasia (Hale 2006, 307).<sup>17</sup> Managing a system marked by tight political closure since he took office in 1994, Rakhmon is able to rely on informality more than his Kyrgyz counterparts in his push for female secularization. This is why statements made by the Tajik president or a close associate regarding this objective are more effective than written law. A supporting *fatwa* issued by the Council of Ulama renders such statements even *more* effective. Similar statements made by Kyrgyz presidents do not carry as much weight. For example, current President Almazbek Atambayev's statement that the Kyrgyz people must understand that the hijab "is not our clothing, it is not our culture," in order "to avoid an extreme situation," fell on deaf ears.<sup>18</sup> Less than one year later, a member of parliament expressed outrage when some first-grade girls went to school wearing the hijab: "What can a young girl understand about Islam? Why would we allow the hijab in schools among first graders?" (Osmongaziyeva 2013).

Tajik and Kyrgyz elites rely on various political tools to fight Islamic extremism, which they define as a threat to the secular state but interpret as a threat to their own political survival. Female secularization is a critical pillar supporting a broad state strategy to fight Islamic extremism, which attempts to draw a distinction between "good" and "bad" Islam and to craft a "secularized national ideology" (Markowitz 2012, 112). Thus far, the literature has not addressed the female secularization element of the multifaceted strategies adopted by Central Asian elites to combat religious fundamentalism. This elite focus on women is, in some ways, a continuation of the 1927 *hujum*, or assault "against the 'moldy old ways' of female seclusion and inequality" (Northrop 2004, 12). Although the unveiling campaign was concentrated in the Uzbek and Tajik republics where most urban women wore the *paranji*, it was a crucial element of the gender equality program launched throughout the rest of Central Asia, where nomadic women were often partially veiled (Kamp 2006, 134 and 135). Today, questions regarding the hijab are just as salient in Kyrgyzstan as in Tajikistan, where elites continue to struggle with Islam's presence in the public sphere following seven decades of official atheism that failed to extinguish "parallel Islam" and the prominent role women played in maintaining this informal institution. The Kyrgyz and Tajik states are cognizant of the fact that religious beliefs and practices survived 70 years of atheism: Even the Kyrgyz State Agency for Religious Affairs acknowledges that the Kyrgyz preserved Muslim traditions and celebrated religious holidays despite prolonged atheist pressure and repressive measures (Mamayusupov, Murzakhalilov, and Mamataliyev 2006, 15). Kyrgyz and Tajik elites also know that *perestroika* strengthened the impact of religion on family and social life, and led to a consensus among the respective populace that Muslim values are truly national and distinct (Nuryev 1991, 66). But they – and the

women they govern – continue to grapple with different interpretations of Islam’s role in society.

### Informal means to encourage female secularization

The situation is more complex in Tajikistan, where civil war tore the country’s social fabric apart. The result – a power-sharing agreement with the region’s only legal religious party – led Rakhmon to employ stricter female secularization practices than his counterparts in Kyrgyzstan. Female secularization is also more intense in Tajikistan because of the *bibi-khalife* (or *otin-oyi* in Uzbek), who during the Soviet era quietly performed life-cycle rituals, dispensed advice concerning religious education, and provided limited home school-style religious education for mahalla girls (Fathi 2006, 305).<sup>19</sup> According to Peshkova (2009, 11), informal religious activities performed by these women in the Fergana Valley “could not be effectively persecuted or controlled by the state and became respected conduits of religious knowledge and practice for the local population.” Although some female religious figures have been co-opted by the respective post-Soviet state,<sup>20</sup> the past and present activities of such women, including the *otunbucha* of Khujand, Tajikistan, who are more popular than official mullahs “because traditional, cultural expectations and demands are often not similar to those advocated by official Islam” (Usmanova 2009, 282), are a reminder of the potential power of the pious woman.

To rein in that potential influence, Tajik and Kyrgyz elites use a variety of informal political mechanisms to encourage female secularization. For example, Rakhmon has banned private religious education (home-schooling) and religious NGOs; there is no law against either, but there is consensus that both are forbidden. According to one of the IRP’s three female presidium members:

There were women who taught Islam in their homes, but in the last few years the government has forbidden religious home schools. Now they seldom teach, and if they do they are very careful . . . Very few women teach at home because they are afraid – the government does not allow this. It’s not a law, but the authorities do not allow it.<sup>21</sup>

To skirt the informal ban on religious NGOs, this presidium member manages an NGO dedicated to women’s issues that occasionally debates religious topics, and edits a woman’s journal called *Naison* that: (1) publishes excerpts from the Koran; (2) discusses the role of women in Islam; and (3) explores Koranic subjects with which many women are unfamiliar, including divorce, weddings, and how to practice piety in the absence of a husband.<sup>22</sup>

More controversial is the ban on the hijab in educational institutions, which is supported by religious *and* secular Tajik authorities. In 2004, the Council of Ulama issued a *fatwa* stating that girls and women have the right to wear national – as opposed to European, which is indecent or Arab, which is radical – clothing to school and university:

The fatwa says that in Tajikistan women have the right to wear national clothing. There's no need to wear black and cover up. The fatwa says that in schools and universities women can wear national clothing – a traditional scarf and skirt – because now our women wear European clothing or the hijab and we don't accept either. So the hijab is forbidden – only national clothing is allowed.<sup>23</sup>

Three years later, the Ministry of Education issued a decree requiring students to wear a standard uniform devoid of religious markers. Though not stated in the decree, a former Minister of Education claims the hijab is not a Tajik tradition and is thus forbidden.<sup>24</sup> But the hijab prohibition is not limited to educational institutions: Informal personnel practices permeating state agencies favor women who do not wear the hijab. As the IRP Chairman explained:

The main problem for religious women is a restriction of their rights – they cannot attend school or university. They must choose between the hijab and education . . . . And no one hires them if they wear the hijab. Today two women came to see me – they graduated from university, majored in Arabic, and wear the hijab. They wanted to work for the Committee for Religious Affairs but were told that the Committee needed such cadres *only without the hijab*. The Committee for Religious Affairs does not hire women who wear the hijab!<sup>25</sup>

President Rakhmon dealt a strong blow to female mosque attendance in a similar fashion. Though unaccompanied by official legislation, there is an understanding among Tajiks that women are not permitted in the mosque. As the same IRP representative explained, the strong blow began with a statement made by Rakhmon that was supported by a *fatwa*, and ended with law enforcement actions taken against women who defied the new norm:

According to Shariat, women can pray at the mosque but the president of Tajikistan does not permit this. He did not pass a law or decree; he simply said it is forbidden. We have many unwritten laws, which I call telephone rights, that work better than official laws . . . . The Council of Ulama then issued a *fatwa* stating that it's better for women to pray at home. They said better, they didn't ban going to the mosque, but the police seized this and now forbid women to go to mosque.<sup>26</sup>

The Council of Ulama confirmed that although Islam does not prohibit women from praying at the mosque, a 2004 *fatwa* states that it is preferable for women to pray at home so that there are no “misunderstandings.”<sup>27</sup>

Kyrgyz elites also use informal political mechanisms to encourage female secularization. Keen to emphasize the secular nature of the state and its constitutional inability to interfere with religious affairs, neither Akayev nor Bakyev formally weighed in on the hijab dispute that until recently broke out every fall when a school director or university rector refused to admit a student wearing the hijab. But by not weighing in, the state condoned the director/rector's decision. Because the state could not pass legislation against the hijab, there was a “verbal ban” on the hijab in schools and universities until President Atambayev was elected in 2011. Mutakalim, a local NGO dedicated to protecting the rights of Muslim women in Kyrgyzstan, worked on this issue for years and after a series of pickets in 2011 succeeded in securing a verbal agreement from the Minister of Education permitting girls to wear the hijab to school.<sup>28</sup> For the first time since the

conflict emerged, not a single girl wearing the hijab was sent home from school in 2013.

However, this verbal agreement does not necessarily render the issue resolved. One can imagine a scenario in which a low-ranking Ministry of Education bureaucrat visits a village school to convey the message that Kyrgyzstan is a secular state that, by implication, does not permit religious markers in school.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the Director of the State Commission for Religious Affairs has indicated that certain types of religious markers are absolutely not permitted: “the kerchief cannot embody Arab or Pakistani culture, when the face is covered. With these words, girls cannot wear the *paranji* to school. The face must be visible” (Nichiporova 2013). And while according to the Constitution the state cannot interfere with religious affairs, President Atambayev does express concern regarding the Arabization of the Kyrgyz people, including young women, which he defines as a process initiated by religious figures in the country who endeavor to superimpose a foreign Arab culture onto Kyrgyz culture:

They ignore our indigenous national culture and impose another culture. On our streets now there are many who grow beards and wear robes ... [In the midst of bright, colorful apparel], they force our girls to dress in black, which is usually worn by widowed women. Without a doubt we are Muslim, this is the religion of our ancestors, but at the same time first and foremost we are all Kyrgyz. Do not forget this!<sup>30</sup>

### Formal means to encourage female secularization

Kyrgyz and Tajik elites use formal political mechanisms to discourage retraditionalization in the sphere of religious higher education. While the former restrict career choices available to IU graduates, the latter finance the II and thus influence its curriculum. The rising interest in religious education among Central Asians is partially a reaction to decades of official atheism, which aimed to prevent the penetration of religion into the consciousness of a new generation and began with first grade pupils, including those brought up in families devoid of religious influence (Rogovoy 1979, 54).<sup>31</sup> But despite its efforts, the Communist Party realized that “vestiges of the feudal past” remained. In fact, the subject of Islam and women often appeared in scientific literature published in the 1950s and 1960s, when authors evaluated Islam negatively, argued that female piety explained the unequal status of women in everyday life, and urgently proclaimed the need for atheist education (Alimova 1991, 100 and 101). One Soviet scholar writing in 1986 remarked on the importance of the work collective in educating Tajik girls, whose previous societal role was “domestic slave” (Dzhabarova 1986, 89). The female piety discussed in scientific literature was not, however, a figment of the authorities’ imagination; its very existence permitted the *bibi-khalife* and *otin-oyi* to survive the atheist onslaught and come “out of hiding” with Gorbachev’s ascent to power (Fathi 1997, 32). Shortly before the implementation of *glasnost*, Lubin (1981, 194) found “much evidence that Islam is still strong, particularly among Central Asian women.” In 1990, Gorbachev signed a Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations

that eradicated state funds for atheist propaganda and religious associations, and allowed registered religious associations to offer education programs.<sup>32</sup> This opening generated interest in religious education throughout the Soviet Union. To accommodate that curiosity yet simultaneously encourage secularization, Kyrgyz and Tajik elites exert varying degrees of control over religious institutes of higher education.

Kyrgyz and Tajik elites work arduously at the university level to secularize society because, as Gellner argued, institutes of higher education harvest transmitters – who are of critical importance to the state – of the *same* culture in which individuals “breathe and speak and produce” (Gellner 1983, 38). The Kyrgyz IU and Tajik II are central to religious education because their graduates teach throughout the respective country in madrassas, mosques, and institutes. The political histories of these institutions were similar until 2007, when the Tajik state began to finance the II. Born as madrassas shortly before the Soviet Union’s demise, each improved the quality of its education in order to earn “institute” status in the 1990s. The Muftiate granted the Kyrgyz II “university” status in 2003. Before 2007, the Kyrgyz IU and Tajik II offered tuition-free education<sup>33</sup> and a religious curriculum with courses on the Koran, *hadith*, *fiqh*, *shariat*, and the history of Islam. The Kyrgyz IU’s curriculum still consists primarily of religious courses (about 90%), although a few general courses cover Kyrgyz, Russian, computer science, and Kyrgyz history.<sup>34</sup> The Tajik II’s curriculum used to consist mainly of religious courses (about 80%), and some general courses covering Tajik, English, philosophy, geography, and Tajik history.<sup>35</sup> IU and II representatives indicate that approximately 15% of the 500–550 students attending each institution are women.<sup>36</sup>

A predominantly religious curriculum used to restrict career choices in Tajikistan and continues to do so in Kyrgyzstan. Before 2007, neither the Kyrgyz IU nor Tajik II was a state institution, which meant that the IU/II – rather than the respective state – issued diplomas. Lacking a state diploma, Kyrgyz IU graduates cannot work for government agencies and have trouble enrolling in institutes of higher education abroad because their IU diploma is not recognized.<sup>37</sup> Barred from the public sector, male graduates were in the Tajik case and are in the Kyrgyz case limited to becoming an Imam, teaching in mosques, madrassas or religious institutes, and/or pursuing business or agriculture. But most Kyrgyz IU male graduates work at the bazaar,<sup>38</sup> enroll in secular universities for a second degree, or join the ranks of the unemployed.<sup>39</sup> According to one estimate, 80–90% of the Kyrgyz IU’s male *and* female graduates “sit at home.”<sup>40</sup> Before structural changes implemented in 2007, Tajik II male graduates became Imams, enrolled in secular universities, or worked in the private sector: “But for the most part, II graduates [were] prepared specialists for mosques.”<sup>41</sup>

Female graduates have fewer options because they cannot become Imams. In Kyrgyzstan, they can teach at madrassas for girls,<sup>42</sup> establish religious NGOs like Mutakalim, work as advisors on women’s issues for the Muftiate, or pursue a second degree.<sup>43</sup> But most get married and have children. According to an advisor to the Mufti:

Most female graduates stay home ... [at the IU] they receive only knowledge of Islam, so they can't work anywhere ... we [the IU] prepare good, Islamic wives. It turns out that the IU is like an institute of noble maidens.<sup>44</sup>

Mutakalim's founder agrees:

They don't recognize the IU diploma – the IU is simply for students to study for themselves .... This is a problem because male graduates can work as Imams, but girls can't work anywhere. They study for five years and lack a profession. They're forced to take on the profession of marriage.<sup>45</sup>

Before 2007, Tajik II female graduates were even more restricted because the option of founding a religious NGO does not exist in Tajikistan; as a result, most got married and had children.<sup>46</sup>

It is in this context that the Kyrgyz and Tajik states attempt to influence students deciding where to pursue higher education by either restricting career choices of Islamic institute graduates or expanding the curriculum offered by such establishments. Each state penetrates this devout layer of society via the Ministry of Education. In the early 1990s, the Kyrgyz and Tajik Ministry of Education declared that at least 30% of all courses offered by an Islamic institute of higher learning had to be general (*non-religious*) for the Ministry to issue diplomas. According to a former Kyrgyz Minister of Education:

We issue diplomas based on the state model, and the IU has its own curriculum so students receive an IU diploma ... this stems from our Constitution, which declares us a secular state. In order for the Ministry to issue the diploma, the IU needs to develop a curriculum based on values that are assumed in state standards – philosophy, politics, economics, pedagogy, English and so on ... for the Ministry to issue their diploma, they must offer more secular courses – not less than 30% of the total.<sup>47</sup>

The Kyrgyz State Agency for Religious Affairs concurs:

The state is ready to assist the IU with certification and license processes. They don't need to change their subjects, just introduce general subjects like computer skills, management, marketing, English, information sciences. If they want a license they cannot withdraw into the limits of religious subjects like Hadith. They must offer 30% secular, 70% Islamic.<sup>48</sup>

In contrast to the Tajik II, the Kyrgyz IU has not complied with the state's demands.

The relationship of the Kyrgyz IU and the Tajik II to the respective state differs. Despite some internal calls for reform,<sup>49</sup> the former remains entrenched in the spiritual realm of society operating under the auspices of the Muftiate rather than the Ministry of Education.<sup>50</sup> The Muftiate approves the curriculum, issues diplomas, and supervises rectors.<sup>51</sup> In contrast, the most influential venue for religious education in Tajikistan is now entrenched in the political realm of society because the Tajik II introduced a sufficient number of general courses to render it a state institution. A decree on traditions stipulates the state's commitment to finance the II: In President Rakhmon's view, despite the constitutional separation of mosque and state, the government cannot maintain a neutral relationship with



“thousands” of young people studying at religious institutions. State funding came with a mandate to expand the II’s academic program, which implied conforming the curriculum “to modern criteria,” and introducing Tajik language, literature, and history, as well as technology, philosophy, logic, and foreign languages.<sup>52</sup>

A 2007 “Decision of the Government of the Tajik Republic #547” designates the Tajik II a state institution. Though subordinate to the Ministry of Education as opposed to the Council of Ulama,<sup>53</sup> the latter supports the change in status because it is no longer compelled to cover all II expenses.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the II continues to work with the Council of Ulama to ensure proper teaching of the Hanafi school of jurisprudence. According to an II rector, “The charters of the II and Council of Ulama state that the II will educate within the limits of the interpretation of Hanafi. This connects us. We work together to ensure that our citizens don’t misunderstand.”<sup>55</sup> The “misunderstanding” refers to the radicalization of Tajik citizens via exposure to other schools of jurisprudence.

Although the state purchased curriculum reform, it did not seize the II. The Tajik II had long sought to expand its curriculum in order to render graduates competitive in the labor market but lacked the required resources.<sup>56</sup> Several years ago, the II rector requested a state license, and, in his words, eventually the Ministry of Education

made the right decision, which was to give us state status and recognize our diploma. Now graduates provide for themselves according to their specialty. This was a necessary and modern decision. Almost 98% of the population is Muslim, and they have the right to an education. The state is obliged to provide satisfactory conditions to those who want religious education. So the state now finances the II.<sup>57</sup>

According to the Central Administrative Board on Religious Affairs, rectors enacted reform because “no one needed the narrow specialties the II offered.”<sup>58</sup> Indeed, before 1997, the best II students simultaneously studied at a secular institute of higher education in order to resolve this problem (Olimova 2004, 343).

The Tajik II’s goals include

raising the level of religious knowledge among citizens, coordinating the educational/training processes of religion with modern scientific norms and with progressive global and local practices, but also ensuring respect for national and world values as well as tolerance and respect between different nationalities of Tajikistan.<sup>59</sup>

These objectives reflect the agreement struck between the state and the II, which centered on the introduction of subjects “related to the field of modernization.”<sup>60</sup> Approximately 35–40% of the courses offered each semester (including Tajik, Russian, English, Arabic, Philosophy, Logic, Tajik History and Geography, Economics, Sociology, and Psychology) are general; the inclusion of such courses permits the state to issue a diploma that enables graduates to pursue further education or compete with other university graduates for private and public sector jobs.<sup>61</sup> Tajik II students can now reach the same academic level as other university students, and upon program completion work anywhere their specialty is demanded.

The reforms have enhanced career opportunities for male and female graduates. The II’s rector highlights the fact that female graduates are now able to



work in schools, madrassas, and state agencies. They can work anywhere now that they have given our Institute state status; they can do everything according to their specialty. Female graduates can teach classes already offered in schools like the history of religion and lessons on our first (pre-revolution) alphabet and language.<sup>62</sup>

The question is whether young Tajik women *want* to work outside the home. In the following quotation, one of the IRP's three female presidium members suggests that while state funding ensures that women receive a "proper" (meaning Hanafi) religious education, the reform's real merit lies in the fact that female II graduates, who "first and foremost will be mothers raising and educating the core of the family," will have a well-rounded education.<sup>63</sup>

## Conclusion

The survey results discussed above suggest that female respondents from religious and secular institutions of higher education in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan embrace the traditional religious and family values that the Soviet government brutally attempted to suppress. The results also highlight surprisingly few instances of statistically significant differences in attitudes held by respondents in Kyrgyzstan and respondents in Tajikistan. There were no such instances in responses to questions concerning Islam's role in the public sphere; one of the two questions concerning Islam's role in child-rearing endeavors generated a statistically significant difference in attitudes; and two of the four questions concerning familial roles generated a statistically significant difference in attitudes. These findings should cause researchers and policymakers to question the notions that students at religious universities are far more observant than their counterparts at secular universities, and Tajiks are far more conservative than Kyrgyz.

During the Soviet era, Central Asian women bequeathed Islamic rituals and values to future generations. These rituals and values – to varying degrees – continue to have meaning for Central Asian women. Writing in the late 1990s, Akiner (1997, 284) argued that while the share of Central Asian women who live according to Islamic rituals and values remains small, "the fact that they have so categorically rejected the Soviet model of female emancipation (and likewise the more recently proffered Western versions) has a significance that goes far beyond mere numbers." Adverse consequences of the "double burden" created by Soviet gender equality policies may partially explain these rejections and the accompanying retraditionalization response among young Central Asian women. Although the Soviet government rendered its population literate and established education and professional opportunities for women, it simultaneously created the double burden, or tension between women as economic producers and women as household executives. As one Soviet scholar put it, "our Achilles' heel" was implemented but unrealized legislation promoting a combined professional and maternal role for women (Nuryev 1991, 26).

Opportunities to resist elite-inspired female secularization differ in the cases discussed here. President Rakhmon's authoritarian system renders collective action in Tajikistan highly problematic. Rather than sustained, organized political

opposition, on occasion instances of individual opposition emerge. The classic example is Davlatmo Ismoilova (or Fatima, which is her chosen name), who in 2007 sued the Shokhmansur district because it houses the Institute of Foreign Languages, which forbade Fatima from attending classes in hijab for almost a month.<sup>64</sup> The suit put forth two demands: first, repeal the Ministry of Education decree instituting a school uniform devoid of religious markers; second, pronounce the acts of the Institute's leadership illegal (Khamrabayeva, Mirzobekova, and Rakhmatullaev 2007). After the Shokhmansur court ruled in favor of the Ministry, Ismoilova initiated a city suit that was ultimately settled in favor of Dushanbe. Because Kyrgyzstan is less authoritarian than Tajikistan (Freedom House characterizes Kyrgyzstan as "partly free" and Tajikistan as "not free"), there is sustained, organized political opposition to elite-inspired female secularization. For example, Mutakalim persuaded the government to permit passport photographs of women wearing the hijab (something the Tajik government forbids), and secured an oral agreement from the Ministry of Education allowing girls to wear the hijab to school.

Yet a note of caution should be made regarding my emphasis on this particular swath of the Kyrgyz and Tajik female populations, for it is erroneous to conceptualize Kyrgyz women or Tajik women as one coherent, uniform group. Indeed, there is a range of views among Central Asian women regarding their familial and societal roles and how Islam fits into those images. There is even division among female religious leaders: Fathi (2006, 305) found that while "traditional" *otin-oyis* or *bib-khalifes* and "new practitioners" seek to revive Islam, they have different conceptions of what constitutes correct Muslim behavior. Rather than eliminate religiosity, 70 years of official atheism produced competing interpretations of religious belief and practice. The struggle to determine women's rights in Islam – which in this region began at the First Congress of Muslim-Turkic Women in Kazan in 1917, where delegates argued that according to the Koran men and women are equal, women have the right to participate in politics and society, women are free to leave the house without a hijab, and polygamy is a non-issue because it is impossible to treat four wives equally – continues (Kocaoglu 2009, 196 and 197).

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## Notes

1. "Order (No. 394) on Certain Measures for Bringing Order to Educational Processes in Institutions of Primary, Middle, and Higher Professional Education, Article 2: March 31, 2007. *Omuzgor—uchitel'naya gazeta*, no. 15, April 13, 2007," 4.
2. "Abdudzhabbor Rakhmonov vnov' v tsentre skandala [Abdudzhabbor Rakhmonov is Again in the Center of a Scandal]." *Asia-Plus*, April 4, 2013. <http://www.news.tj.ru/print/140730>. He also ordered students to wear monotone fabric without patterns and a kerchief (vs. a hijab) in any color other than black or white. The official explanation for these requirements is twofold: First, compared with traditional moccasins, high-heel shoes do not ruin a girl's appearance as they create a graceful look that provides confidence; second, the uniform prevents an obvious distinction between rich and poor students.
3. Author's interview with the Chair of Sunna, 7 July 2008.
4. *Statisticheskii yezhegodnik Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki 2012* [Statistical Yearbook of the Kyrgyz Republic 2012]. Bishkek: National Statistics Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 63.
5. AsiaBarometer data can be accessed via <http://www.asianbarometer.org>. I filtered out male responses because they do not differ significantly from female responses, and because the point of using these data is to shed light on female responses to questions posed in the 2008 survey.
6. The question was "Which, if any, of the following issues cause you great worry? Please choose all issues that cause you serious worry." The survey presented 29 different issues. Response choices were "Worry" and "Not Mentioned."
7. The question was "How well do you think the [your country's] government is dealing with the following issues?" The survey presented 10 different issues. I combine "Not so well" and "Not well at all" responses.
8. Author's interview, 25 July 2008.
9. Author's interview, 16 October 2013.
10. "Religiya: Zhenshchiny bol'she radikaliziruyutsya [Religion: Women are More Radicalized]." *Vechernyy Bishkek*, 21 May, 2013.
11. "V Oshе otkrylsya religioznyy tsentr dlya zhenshchin [Religious Center for Women Opens in Osh]." *Vechernyy Bishkek*, 24 March, 2014.
12. Author's interview, 16 October 2013.
13. This is an SPSS-generated simple random sample without replacement that emerged from lists of all female students within each department provided by a rector or assistant rector of each university.
14. In response to this open-ended question, no respondent claimed she was unable to gain admittance to a secular university. In terms of the Kyrgyz respondents, 12% said that it was Allah's will, 10% said they simply like the IU, 6% said it was their calling, 4% said they wanted segregated classes, 2% said the choice was paternal, and 2% said they didn't know. In the Tajik case, 13.5% of the respondents said that it was their calling, 11.5% said they didn't know, 4% said it was Allah's will, 4% said the II offers religious and general subjects, 2% said the choice was paternal, 2% said they could not wear the hijab at a secular university, and 2% said the II would illuminate their day of judgment.
15. A small percentage (7.5%) of the respondents was born before 1985.
16. Respondents chose from the following categories: Muslim, nationality, Russian-speaker, secular woman, and other.
17. However, Markowitz (2012, 111) argues that the Tajik patronal presidential system is weaker than that of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan because of its post-war power-sharing agreement, small resource base, and fragmented coercive capacity.
18. "Prezident Atambayev: Khidzhab – ne nasha odezhda [President Atambayev: The Hijab is Not Our Clothing]." 4 June, 2012. <http://www.kyrgyztoday.kg/ru>

19. Fathi (1997) analyzes the role of *otines* in Uzbek society. Tolmacheva (1993) notes that in addition to *bibi-khalifes* and *otin-oyis*, Tatar women promoted Islamic education among Central Asian women before the 1917 revolution.
20. Corcoran-Nantes (2005, 141) found that in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse, Muslim authorities in Central Asia gave "official recognition" to some *otines*, who were then allowed to teach in certain mosques.
21. Author's interview, 25 July 2008.
22. Author's interview, 29 June 2007.
23. Author's interview with Sheikh Amonullokh Negmatzoda, 23 July 2008.
24. Author's interview, 31 July 2008.
25. Author's interview, 22 July 2008.
26. Author's interview, 22 July 2008.
27. Author's interview with Sheikh Amonullokh Negmatzoda, 23 July 2008; author's interview, with a representative of the Council's *fatwa* department, 8 August 2008.
28. Founded in 1999, this is the largest Kyrgyz NGO dedicated to dispersing knowledge of Islam to women, including their rights based on Shariat law. Author's interviews with the Chair of Mutakalim on 5 July 2007 and 3 July 2008.
29. Author's interview with the Chair of Mutakalim, 11 October 2013.
30. "Pod predsedatel'stvom Prezidenta Almazbeka Atambayeva na zasedaniy Soveta oborony rassmatrivayetsya vopros o gosudarstvennoy politike v religioznoy sfere [Under the Chairmanship of President Almazbek Atambayev, the Question of State Policies in the Religious Sphere is Considered at a Meeting of the Council of Defenses]." President of the Kyrgyz republic website, 3 February, 2014. [http://www.president.kg/ru/news/3434\\_pod\\_predsedatelstvom\\_prezidenta\\_almazbeka\\_atambayeva\\_na\\_zasedanii\\_soveta\\_oboronyi\\_rassmatrivaetsya\\_vopros\\_o\\_gosudarstvennoy\\_politike\\_v\\_religioznoy\\_sfere/print/](http://www.president.kg/ru/news/3434_pod_predsedatelstvom_prezidenta_almazbeka_atambayeva_na_zasedanii_soveta_oboronyi_rassmatrivaetsya_vopros_o_gosudarstvennoy_politike_v_religioznoy_sfere/print/)
31. Adults were educated at work. Each factory had a council of propagandists that organized discussions of articles published in *Science and Religion*, a journal sent to all factory subunits (Istomin 1983, 13).
32. "Soyuz Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik Zakon o Svobode Sovesti i Religioznykh Organizatsiyakh," articles 5 and 11, 1 October 1990 (<http://www.base.consultant.ru>).
33. The source of the claim regarding the Kyrgyz IU is Abiturient ("Abiturient-2008 [University Entrant-2008]." *Islamskaya Kul'tura*, June 27, 2008, 1). The source of the claim regarding the Tajik II is an interview with an Agency for Religious Affairs representative, 29 June 2007.
34. Author's interview with a Kyrgyz IU representative, 18 June 2007.
35. Author's interview with an assistant to Tajik II rector, 28 June 2007.
36. Kyrgyz data: author's interviews with a representative of Muftiat's teaching department, 10 July 2007; an IU Arabic teacher, 7 June 2007; the Minister of Education, 9 July 2007; an advisor to the Mufti, 11 July 2008; an IU rector's assistant, 2007; an assistant to the Mufti, 18 June 2007. Tajik data: author's interview with an II rector, 24 July 2008.
37. Author's interview with a former director of the Kyrgyz State Agency for Religious Affairs, 9 July 2007.
38. Author's interview with a former director of the State Agency for Religious Affairs, 9 July 2007; an advisor to the Mufti, 19 June 2007.
39. Author's interview with a former Minister of Education, 4 July 2008.
40. Author's interview with the Chair of Mutakalim, 3 July 2008.
41. Author's interview with a representative of the Agency for Religious Affairs, 29 June 2007.
42. Author's interview with the Mufti's press secretary, 4 July 2008.

43. Author's interview with a representative of Mufti's teaching department, 10 July 2007.
44. Author's interview with an advisor to the Mufti, 11 July 2008.
45. Author's interview, 5 July 2007.
46. Author's interview with an assistant to Tajik II rector, 28 June 2007.
47. Author's interview with a former Minister of Education, 9 July 2007.
48. Author's interview with a representative of the State Agency for Religious Affairs, 12 June 2007.
49. The Muftiate's Education Department argues that the IU should offer general subjects so that it can be licensed and thus be equal to other universities (author's interview with a representative of the Muftiat's teaching department, 10 July 2007). Similarly, the Mufti's press secretary argues that students need state diplomas to widen their career choices and allow them, for example, to teach *Adep Sabagy*, which is a required class on morality taught in all state schools (author's interview, 4 July 2008).
50. Author's interview with a Kyrgyz IU representative, 18 June 2007.
51. Author's interview with a representative of Muftiate's teaching department, 10 July 2007.
52. Speech of President Rakhmon at the Public Gathering on Regulating National Customs and Religious Rituals, 24 May 2007 (<http://www.president.tj/rus/vistupleniy240507.htm>).
53. The equivalent to Kyrgyzstan's Mufti in Tajikistan is the Chairman of the Council of Ulama, who holds sway over other members of the Council. The Council of Ulama, a small group of learned, prominent exerts on Islam that resolves questions related to religion through the issuance of *fatwas*, appoints the Mufti, who serves for seven years. The Islamic Center of Tajikistan, which houses the Council of Ulama, has similar functions: It registers religious organizations and monitors the country's madrassas, Islamic institutes, and IU. I was unable to meet with anyone from the Islamic Center, but Khalid (2007, 186 and 187) argues that Tajikistan's Islamic education is deeply conservative, that the government seeks to control education and mosques, and that the Islamic Center is "completely subordinate" to the government.
54. Author's interview with Sheikh Amonullokh Negmatzoda, 23 July 2008.
55. Author's interview with a Tajik II rector, 24 July 2008.
56. Author's interview with the Director of Agha Khan Humanities Project, 26 June 2007.
57. Author's interview, 24 July 2008.
58. Author's interview with a representative of the Central Administrative Board on Religious Affairs, 29 June 2007.
59. Public information (brochure) about the Institute provided by a rector.
60. Author's interview with a representative of the Agency for Religious Affairs, 28 July 2008.
61. Author's interview with a Tajik II pro-rector, 22 July 2008.
62. Author's interview with a Tajik II pro-rector, 24 July 2008.
63. Author's interview, 25 July 2008.
64. Author's interview with Davlatmo Ismoilova, 30 July 2008.

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