Two Countries, Five Years: Islam in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan through the Lens of Public Opinion Surveys

Accepted version of an article published in *Central Asian Affairs*:
Junisbai, Barbara, Azamat Junisbai, and Baurzhan Zhussupov. "Two Countries, Five Years: Islam in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan through the Lens of Public Opinion Surveys", *Central Asian Affairs* 4, 1 (2017): 1-25.

Barbara Junisbai
Assistant Professor of Organizational Studies, Pitzer College
barbara_junisbai@pitzer.edu

Azamat Junisbai
Associate Professor of Sociology, Pitzer College
azamat_junisbai@pitzer.edu

Baurzhan Zhussupov
Chair of the Department of Biostatistics, Kazakh National Medical University
zhusupov.b@kaznmu.kz

Abstract

Drawing on two waves of public opinion surveys conducted in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyz- stan, we investigate the rise in religiosity and orthodoxy among Central Asian Muslims. We confirm that a religious revival is underway, with nearly 100 percent of Kazakhstani and Kyrgyzstani Muslims self-identifying as such in 2012—up from 80 percent in Kazakhstan in 2007. If we dig a bit deeper, however, we observe cross-national variations. Religious practice, as measured by daily prayer and weekly mosque attendance, is up in Kyrgyzstan, but has fallen in Kazakhstan. While the share of those who express preferences associated with religious orthodoxy has grown in both, this group has more than doubled in Kazakhstan. We attribute these differences to political context, both in terms of cross-national political variation and, within each country, variation basedon regional differences.

doi 10.1163/22142290-00401001

Keywords

Kazakhstan – Kyrgyzstan – Islam – religiosity

At least since the 1990s, policymakers and scholars have been tracking the growing salience and practice of Islam in Central Asia.[1] The region's governments and policymakers, as well as their Western counterparts, are primarily concerned about the implications of religious revival, particularly the political implications.[2] For example, how can (and is) Islam be(ing) used to undermine or promote political stability?[3] How does Islam challenge or bolster regime legitimacy and durability?[4] And what aspects of Islam should be excluded from or incorporated into the official nation-building project?[5] Scholars share these interests, with a prominent strand of research investigating the interplay between regime politics and religiosity.[6] Still other studies of Islam in Central

1 Shirin Akiner, "The Politicisation of Islam in Postsoviet Central Asia," *Religion, State, and Society* 3, no. 2 (2003): 97–122.

2 Mohammad Karim, "Globalization and Post-Soviet Revival of Islam in Central Asia and the Caucasus," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 25, no. 3 (2010): 439–448; International Crisis Group, "Is Radical Islam Inevitable in Central Asia?" (2003).

3 Eric McGlinchey, "Islamic Revivalism and State Failure in Kyrgyzstan," *Problems of Post-Communism*, 56, no. 3 (2009): 16–28.

4 Mariya Y. Omelicheva, "Islam in Kazakhstan: A Survey of Contemporary Trends and Sources of Securitization," *Central Asian Survey*, 30, no. 2 (2011): 243–256; Ghoncheh Tazmini, "The Islamic Revival in Central Asia: A Potent Force or a Misconception?" *Central Asian Survey,* 20, no. 1 (2001): 63–83.

5 T. Jeremy Gunn, "Shaping an Islamic Identity: Religion, Islamism, and the State in Central Asia," *Sociology of Religion*, 64, no. 3 (2003): 389–410; Chris Hann and Mathijs Pelkmans, "Realigning Religion and Power in Central Asia: Islam, Nation-State and (Post)Socialism," *Europe-Asia Studies*, 61, no. 9 (2009): 1517–41; Sebastien Peyrouse, "Islam in Central Asia: National Specificities and Post-Soviet Globalisation," *Religion, State and Society*, 35, no. 3 (2007): 245–260; Galina M. Yemelianova, "Islam, National Identity, and Politics in Contemporary Kazakhstan," *Asian Ethnicity*, 15, no. 3 (2016): 286–301.

6 Akiner, "The Politicisation of Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia"; Kathleen Collins and Erica Owen, "Islamic Religiosity and Regime Preferences: Explaining Support for Democracy and Political Islam in Central Asia and the Caucasus," *Political Research Quarterly*, 20, no. 10 (2012): 1–19; Emmanuel Karagiannis, "Political Islam and Social Movement Theory: The Case of Hizb ut-Tahrir in Kyrgyzstan," *Religion, State, and Society*, 33, no. 2 (2005): 137–150; Karim, "Globalization and Post-Soviet Revival of Islam"; Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley, ca: University of California Press, 2007); Hann and

Asia eschew a narrowly political lens or challenge assumptions that Islam is necessarily political in nature, examining instead how Central Asians make sense of and engage in everyday Islamic praxis on the spiritual, communal, social, and personal levels.7

Most of the research in both of these veins—the role of Islam in political and nonpolitical life—take a qualitative approach, draw on secondary sources, and/or are meta-projects that extrapolate from existing work. Commonly used methods include focus groups, participant observation, and in-depth case studies at the subnational level, with specific cities, neighborhoods, and places of worship as the sites of investigation. With the exception of Collins and Owens and McGlinchey, and the partial exception of Ro'i and Wainer, research on the topic that draws on large-*n* public opinion data from the region is rare.8

While localized studies are invaluable in revealing meanings and the making of meaning in a given setting, there are also limitations. In particular, we know little about how Central Asians *across society as a whole* practice religion in their everyday lives or understand Islam's implications for conducting and

---

Pelkmans, "Realigning Religion and Power in Central Asia"; McGlinchey, "Islamic Revivalism and State Failure in Kyrgyzstan"; Russell Zanca, "Believing in God at Your Own Risk: Religion and Terrorism in Uzbekistan," *Religion, State, and Society*, 33, no. 1 (2005): 71–82.

7 Sergei Abashin, "The Logic of Islamic Practice: a Religious Conflict in Central Asia," *Central Asian Survey*, 25, no. 3 (2006): 267–286; Pawel Jessa, "Aq Jol Soul Healers: Religious Pluralism and a Contemporary Muslim Movement in Kazakhstan," *Central Asian Survey*, 25, no. 3 (2006): 359–371; Farideh Heyat, "Re-Islamization in Kyrgyzstan: Gender, New Poverty and the Moral Dimension," *Central Asian Survey*, 23, nos. 3–4 (2004): 275–287; Adeeb Khalid, "A Secular Islam: Nation, State, and Religion in Uzbekistan," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 35, no. 4 (2003): 573–598; Maria Elisabeth Louw, *Everyday Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2007); David W. Montgomery, "Namaz, Wishing Trees, and Vodka: The Diversity of Everyday Religious Life in Central Asia," in Jeff Sahadeo and Russell Zanca (eds), *Everyday Life in Central Asia: Past and Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 355–370; Sean R. Roberts, "Everyday Negotiations of Islam in Central Asia: Practicing Religion in the Uyghur Neighborhood of Zarya Vostoka in Almaty, Kazakhstan," in Jeff Sahadeo and Russell Zanca (eds), *Everyday Life in Central Asia: Past and Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 339–354; Yaacov Ro'i and Alon Wainer, "Muslim Iden- tity and Islamic Practice in Post-Soviet Central Asia," *Central Asian Survey*, 28, no. 3 (2007): 303–322; Manja Stephan-Emmrich and Abdullah Mirzoev, "The Manufacturing of Islamic Lifestyles in Tajikistan through the Prism of Dushanbe's Bazaars," *Central Asian Survey,* 35, no. 2 (2016): 157–177; Tazmini, "The Islamic Revival in Central Asia."

8 See Collins and Owen ("Islamic Religiosity and Regime Preferences"), McGlinchey ("Islamic Revivalism and State Failure in Kyrgyzstan"), and the partial exception of Ro'i and Wainer, "Muslim Identity and Islamic Practice."

organizing politics. We also know little about how and to what extent societal groups differ from one another in their practice of Islam or what factors affect how individuals interpret Islam's political role. Finally, given that existing small-*n* and large(r)-*n* data are almost always taken at a single point, we lack a firm sense of how views and practices have evolved over time and in which direction(s).

To address these gaps in our knowledge, we present the results of two rounds of nationally representative surveys, spaced five years apart, in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Our study sheds light on patterns of religious identification, attendance of religious services, daily prayer, belief in the afterlife, and support for *shari'a* among members of Muslim ethnic groups9 in these two countries. Importantly, our data allow us to compare changes that have taken place between 2007, when the surveys were first launched, and 2012, when we conducted the second wave.

We see our work as complementing and building upon prior research, while also providing a useful bird's eye view that allows us to perceive broader trends, both within and between these two societies. Our data confirm that a religious revival is indeed taking place among the two countries' Muslim populations, with almost 100 percent self-identification with Islam. Another indicator of religion's growing salience—belief in life after death, heaven, and hell— increased sharply in Kazakhstan by 2012, but still remained much lower than in Kyrgyzstan, where levels were relatively unchanged over the five-year period. Finally, religious orthodoxy, as measured by support for shari'a-based law, increased significantly in both countries in the five-year period. Combined, these developments suggest a growing acceptance of religious values, as well as political preferences that reflect religious values.

At the same time, how individuals practice Islam differed markedly between the two countries. In Kyrgyzstan weekly attendance of religious services more than doubled (112 percent increase), and those engaging in daily prayer grew by 62 percent. We observe the opposite trend in Kazakhstan, where the share of people praying daily and attending mosque weekly declined. Given abiding interest in Central Asia's Islamic revival, we unpack the factors associated with greater religiosity. Who is more likely to attend weekly religious services and pray daily? Who is more likely to support the implementation of shari'a law? To answer these questions, we run three regression models, where the outcomes of interest are religious practice and religious orthodoxy.

The article proceeds as follows. First, we derive predictions from the extant literature on Islam in Central Asia and test these against data from the

9 We provide a definition "Muslim ethnic groups" in the results section.

2007 and 2012 surveys. Next, we briefly explain the research design behind the surveys and how we collected our data. We then document changes inreligious practice, religious beliefs, and support for shari'a in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan over the five-year period. After describing these changes we run a series of regressions that help adjudicate between competing explanations behind what is driving the revival in Islamic practice and Islamic orthodoxy. We conclude by raising questions for future research on the implications of the evolving religiosity for the political and social environments in these two societies.

Religiosity among Ethnic Muslims in Central Asia: The CurrentState of Knowledge

A growing body of research on Islam in Central Asia examines the delicate interplay between politics, nation-building, and identity formation, on the one hand, and the evolving practice of Islam, on the other.10 Some studies use participant observation, focus groups, and in-depth interviews to provide embedded accounts of everyday religious practices among post-Soviet Central Asians.11 Yet others focus on the threat of radical Islam in the region12 and the role of non-indigenous religious movements on Islamic practice.13 Based on prior empirical investigations, the following five statements represent what scholars have uncovered about modern-day religiosity among Central Asian Muslims:

---

10 E.g., Akiner, "The Politicisation of Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia"; Hann and Pelkmans, "Realigning Religion and Power in Central Asia"; Scott Spehr and Nargis Kassanova, "Kazakhstan: Constructing Identity in a Post-Soviet Society," *Asian Ethnicity*, 13,no. 2 (2012): 135–151; Yemelianova, "Islam, National Identity, and Politics in Contemporary Kazakhstan."

11 E.g. Montgomery, "Namaz, Wishing Trees, and Vodka"; Roberts, "Everyday Negotiations of Islam in Central Asia."

12 E.g., Karagiannis, "Political Islam and Social Movement Theory"; Vitaly Naumkin, *Radical Islam in Central Asia* (Lanham, md: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005); Mariya Y. Omelicheva, "The Ethnic Dimension of Religious Extremism and Terrorism in Central Asia," *International Political Science Review*, 31, no. 2 (2010): 167–186; Yemelianova, "Islam, National Identity, and Politics in Contemporary Kazakhstan"; Zanca, "Believing in God at Your Own Risk."

13 E.g., A. Muminov, "Fundamentalist Challenges to Local Islamic Traditions in Soviet and Post-Soviet Central Asia," in U. Tomohiko (ed.), *Empire, Islam, and Politics in Central Eurasia* (Sapporo, Japan: Slavic Research Center, 2007), 249–262.

1. Being Muslim is a key part of Central Asian identity, and Muslimness is expressed in a variety of ways and through diverse practices.14
2. Revival in Islamic practice is a localized response to ineffective government, in which the state is unable to fulfill its basic social and economic responsibilities to an impoverished citizenry.15 Islam serves as an important source of stability and survival.16
3. Over time there has been an increase in Central Asian religious ortho- doxy and Islamic militancy.17 This increase is driven by government control over and crackdown on religious practice.18 Alternatively, support for fundamentalism remains limited to a minority and is unlikely to grow precisely because government repression and control are strong.19
4. Support for Islamic orthodoxy is stronger among ethnic minorities than among titular ethnic groups (i.e., Kazakhs in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan). This dynamic is due to increased ethnic tensions or perceived discrimination against non-titulars20 and exclusionary policies.21 Alternatively, there is no difference in support for extremist ideologies between members of ethnic minorities and the titular ethnic group.22
5. Greater religiosity can be associated with lowered support for political tolerance, pluralism, and liberal democracy; in addition, individuals who are more religious are less likely to support secular forms of government and more likely to support the idea that Muslims should live in a

14 Jessa, "Aq Jol Soul Healers"; Heyat, "Re-Islamization in Kyrgyzstan"; Khalid, *Islam after Communism*; Omelicheva, "Islam in Kazakhstan"; Ro'i and Wainer, "Muslim Identity and Islamic Practice."

15 Heyat, "Re-Islamization in Kyrgyzstan"; McGlinchey, "Islamic Revivalism and State Failurein Kyrgyzstan."

16 Heyat, "Re-Islamization in Kyrgyzstan"; Jessa, "Aq Jol Soul Healers"; McGlinchey, "Islamic Revivalism and State Failure in Kyrgyzstan"; Montgomery, "Namaz, Wishing Trees, and Vodka"; Ro'i and Wainer, "Muslim Identity and Islamic Practice."

17 Omelicheva, "The Ethnic Dimension of Religious Extremism and Terrorism in Central Asia."

18 Omelicheva, "The Ethnic Dimension of Religious Extremism and Terrorism in Central Asia"; Zanca, "Believing in God at Your Own Risk."

19 Akiner, "The Politicisation of Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia."

20 Abashin, "The Logic of Islamic Practice."

21 Omelicheva, "The Ethnic Dimension of Religious Extremism and Terrorism in Central Asia."

22 Montgomery, "Namaz, Wishing Trees, and Vodka"; Roberts, "Everyday Negotiations of Islam in Central Asia."

caliphate.23 Alternatively, there is no clear or consistent relationship between religiosity and regime preference.24

At this point, we would like to offer some observations about the above statements. In the first four, religious identity and religious views are conceived of as the outcome of interest. That is, forms of religiosity are framed as out- comes to be unpacked and understood. Furthermore, statements 2, 3, and 4 offer specific causal arguments for Central Asian religious revival and support for orthodoxy, resulting from other economic, political, and societal factors. The fifth statement represents a shift in focus. Here, religiosity is viewed as an important factor that influences individual political preferences, including preferences about regime type. Religiosity affects or is bundled with other political values; the focus thus moves from understanding the determinants of (or causes behind) religiosity to interpreting its political implications.

One way of engaging with these statements is to view them not only as the outlines of what is known about religiosity among Central Asian Muslims, but to see them as a series of explanations for and expectations about how religiosity plays out. In some ways, explanations and expectations appear to coalesce, while in other ways they contradict one another. Our nationally representative, comparative public opinion data from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in 2007 and 2012 can help sift through these at times competing arguments. Where do our data support and enhance the findings and hypotheses drawn from prior studies? Just as important, where do they diverge or suggest a different interpretation? This is the task to which we now turn. Before comparing the results of our data analysis with previous findings, however, we first describe our re- search design and the collection of survey data.

Research Design and Data Collection

Despite a growing body of research and ongoing interest in the subject, our grasp of how Islam, religiosity, and their effect on political views have evolved among the general public is surprisingly limited. This study is unique in that it provides nationally representative data from two periods in time in two

23 Collins and Owen, "Islamic Religiosity and Regime Preferences"; Karagannis, "Political Islam and Social Movement Theory."

24 Collins and Owen, "Islamic Religiosity and Regime Preferences"; Khalid, "A Secular Islam"; Roberts, "Everyday Negotiations of Islam in Central Asia"; Montgomery, "Namaz, Wishing Trees, and Vodka"; Tazmini, "The Islamic Revival in Central Asia."

different countries. One of the very few survey-based studies of religiosity in Central Asia was carried out by Ro'i and Wainer in 2006.25 They conducted 697 structured interviews in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, and most participants were selected using the snowball method. Surveys conducted in Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan by Collins and Owens are also from 2006.26 Overall, the lack of more recent nationally representative public opinion data is striking.27

Our surveys were designed to produce an internationally comparative dataset. The questionnaire covers a broad range of socio-political and economic topics; in addition to our interest in religious practice, we incorporated other sets of questions that reflect theoretical and empirical debates in sociology, political science, and area studies. These include questions that tap into citizens' media consumption, political attitudes, perceptions of social and eco- nomic inequality, ideas about the role of government in the economy, trust in institutions, and inter-generational social mobility. All questions were drawn from well-established surveys, including the International Social Justice Project (isjp), the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), the World Values Survey, and Afrobarometer. The use of pre-tested and commonly used questions was an intentional component of the study's design, as it both helps ensure reliable and valid measurement and enables theoretically intriguing comparisons of data collected in Central Asia to that collected elsewhere.28 We recognize that surveys geared toward generalizability risk overlooking context-specific understandings and assume that respondents share interpretations of certain definitions and concepts that may in fact be quite different. Yet, we are confident that these risks are offset by the advantages of survey research, especially since our work takes place within a research context that is primarily qualitative, with numerous studies that do an excellent job of uncovering meaning at the individual and local levels.

In 2007, our research team completed 1,099 interviews in Kazakhstan and 1,000 in Kyrgyzstan. In 2012, additional funding permitted us to increase the sample size, and 1,500 interviews completed in each country. The 2007 response rates in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan were 94 percent and 76 percent,

25 Ro'i and Wainer, "Muslim Identity and Islamic Practice."

26 Collins and Owens, "Islamic Religiosity and Regime Preferences."

27 As cited in Ro'i and Wainer ("Muslim Identity and Islamic Practice"), in the early 1990s there were several studies of public opinion in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan that included questions dealing with religiosity.

28 Details of the research design and respondent selection are available from the authors upon request.

respectively; in 2012 the Kazakhstan portion of the study equaled 60.1 percent, while the response rate for the Kyrgyzstan portion was 89.6 percent. According to the research organizations that carried out the surveys, these response rates are typical. Lowered response rates in Kazakhstan are commonly attributed to growing weariness with survey researchers brought about by the recent proliferation of marketing studies. In Kyrgyzstan, fewer public opinion studies take place due to a weak economy and, as a consequence, people are "unspoiled" by attention from researchers. There was some difficulty in accessing wealthy households, but this problem is endemic to survey research, as it is nearly impossible to survey the most well off in any society.29

Results from the 2007 and 2012 Surveys

For the purposes of the present analysis, we restrict our data to include only responses from ethnic groups that are considered traditionally Muslim. Although our surveys were administered to people from various faiths and life experiences, including both Muslims and non-Muslims, here we exclude responses from non-Muslim ethnicities (e.g., Russian, Ukrainian, Korean, etc.). We use the term "ethnic Muslim" to describe members of ethnic groups that converted to Islam prior to Soviet rule and "where Islam [has] constituted a central component of the national culture."30 Among our survey respondents, Muslims include Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Tatars, Uyghurs, and other ethnicities, for a total of nearly 30 different groups.31 Note that the question of religious self-identification is separate from belonging to a Muslim ethnic group, as some respondents who are ethnically Muslim self-identify as Muslim while others do not. In our 2007 sample, there were 606 ethnic Muslims in Kazakhstan and 912 in Kyrgyzstan. The number of ethnic Muslims in the 2012 sample equaled 912 in Kazakhstan and 1,383 in Kyrgyzstan.

In this section, we report on indicators of religious practice based on data from both waves of surveys. We are interested in uncovering empirical similarities and differences between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and especially any trends or divergence that have occurred from 2007 to 2012. Wherever possible,

29 For an impressive exception to this rule in the us context, see Benjamin Page, Larry Bartels, and James Seawright, "Democracy and the Policy Preferences of Wealthy Americans," *Perspectives on Politics*, 11, no. 1 (2013): 51–73.

30 R'oi and Wainer, "Muslim Identity and Islamic Practice," 306.

31 A full list of the ethnic Muslim groups included among our respondents is available from the authors upon request.

we relate our findings to those derived from prior studies. Following our discussion of the trends in evidence, we make an effort at causal inference and run a series of regression analyses. We test whether the determinants of religious practice (measured by weekly attendance at religious services and daily prayer outside of religious services) as described in the existing literature hold true among the general population of ethnic Muslims in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Next, to get at the question of religious orthodoxy, we use regression analysis to uncover the factors impacting the level of support for shari'a law.

Muslim Identity and Religious Practice

As noted, prior studies highlight the growing importance of Islam in Central Asian identity; in fact, there is broad consensus that a revival in Islamic practice is currently taking place.32 Our data, presented in Table 1, generally bear these findings out. If we look at religious self-identification, for example, by 2012 nearly 95 percent of ethnic Muslims in both countries described them- selves as Muslim. This high rate clearly confirms the strong salience of Muslim self-identification across the two societies.

Table 1 *Trends in religiosity by country, 2007 and 2012*

Percentage of respondents who:	**KAZAKHSTAN**		**KYRGYZSTAN**	
	2007 (*n* = 606)	**2012 (*n* = 912)**	**2007 (*n* = 839)**	**2012 (*n* = 1383)**
Self identify as Muslim	79.87	93.53	97.50	94.79
Express belief in life after death	36.30	51.54	71.39	66.67
Express belief in hell	41.58	57.24	72.59	73.10
Express belief in heaven	43.73	60.64	72.94	78.45
Attend religious services at least once a week	15.51	12.72	15.38	32.61
Pray to God daily outside of religious services	22.94	18.20	35.76	57.99
Belief that it is very important that "good government should implement only shari'a law"	5.45	13.04	7.15	10.34

32 Omelicheva, "Islam in Kazakhstan"; Ro'i and Wainer, "Muslim Identity and Islamic Practice."

At the same time, the data reveal interesting cross-national variation. Just five years prior, in 2007, less than 80 percent of ethnic Muslim respondents in Kazakhstan identified themselves as Muslim. To compare, in Kyrgyzstan this number exceeded 97 percent. Our data suggest that the revival described in prior studies began sooner in Kyrgyzstan than in Kazakhstan. It may also be that the salience of Muslim identity was higher in Kyrgyzstan to begin with. In either case, by the early 2010s this gap was closed, and religious identification among Kazakhstani ethnic Muslims is now on par with their counterparts in Kyrgyzstan. It appears that self-identifying as Muslim is now the norm among the vast majority of both countries' ethnic Muslims.

Other differences emerge in the data. We can divide these into two broad categories: religious beliefs and religious practice. As an indicator of religious beliefs, we asked respondents if they believed in heaven, hell, and the afterlife.33 In 2007 those reporting belief in life after death, heaven, and hell were much lower in Kazakhstan than in Kyrgyzstan. By 2012, belief in the afterlife increased sharply in Kazakhstan, but still fell well short of the degree of belief observed in Kyrgyzstan. In Kyrgyzstan, those expressing belief in heaven, hell, and the after- life hovered between 67 and 78 percent, while only half to three-fifths of Kazakhstani respondents shared these beliefs. Although a religious revival in terms of self-identification with Islam is taking place in the two societies, other aspects—such as internalization of certain religious beliefs—are less clear-cut. By looking at beliefs, then, we are presented with a more nuanced comparative picture.

Further cross-national distinctions surface when we look at religious practice. In 2007 the two countries had essentially identical percentages of respondents who attended religious services on a weekly basis (around 15 per- cent). Yet, by 2012 they diverged sharply. Based on survey responses, weekly attendance more than doubled in Kyrgyzstan to 33 percent, and the percentage of people engaging in daily prayer outside of religious services grew sharply, from 36 to 56 percent. Interestingly, we observe no comparable increase in Kazakhstan. Although our data generally support previous studies that show that most Muslims in Kyrgyzstan, as well as in Kazakhstan, "do not attend mosque, even occasionally,"34 the data also suggest alternate—and perhaps

33 We used this question to be as applicable to as many respondents as possible. As noted, respondents represent a variety of religious faiths; thus we decided to use questions that would apply irrespective of their particular religion. In future iterations we intend to include additional questions that get at the beliefs that actually distinguish Muslims (in the eyes of Muslims) from believers of other faiths. We thank one of our anonymous reviewers for this suggestion.

34 C. Chotaeva, "The ethnic and religious situation in Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 33, no. 3 (2005): 70; as referenced by R'oi and Wainer, "Muslim Identity and Islamic Practice."

opposing—patterns. In Kyrgyzstan, the trend seems to be toward greater participation in religious practice over time. In Kazakhstan, on the other hand, the trend is either maintenance of low levels of participation or even a slight decline in participation.

These findings about religious beliefs and religious practices coincide for the most part with prior studies. Despite strong self-identification with Islam, within Central Asia religious beliefs and practices are indeed diverse.35 We show, moreover, that religious diversity *between* countries is as important to consider as that within a particular group or community. Although one-third of Kyrgyzstani Muslims state that they attend mosque weekly, and more than half report engaging in daily prayer, less than 20 percent of Kazakhstani Muslims state that they do so. Rather than greater religious participation over the years, it appears that Kazakhstani Muslims are less likely to participate as time passes. Finally, we asked a question about shari'a law, which has been used in prior studies as a proxy for religious orthodoxy.36 Support for shari'a can also serve as a measure of political preferences, and this is important because some studies show a link between religious values and political values.37 While a minority view, the opinion that "good government should implement only shari'a law" is on the rise. In Kazakhstan those who felt that it was "very important" for good government to adopt laws in line with shari'a more than doubled from 2007 (5.45 percent) to 2012 (13.04 percent). Kyrgyzstan has also seen an increase in this category. However, the increase, from seven to ten percent, was less dramatic.

Curiously, Kazakhstan, despite having lower levels of daily prayer and weekly religious service attendance, had surpassed Kyrgyzstan in the share of the strongest supporters of shari'a by 2012. One way to explain this difference is to refer back to insights from Omelicheva and Zanca, who argue that government repression and crackdowns on religious practice have generated greater support for what has been described as radical or fundamentalist Islam.38

---

35 Jessa, "Aq Jol Soul Healers"; Heyat, "Re-Islamization in Kyrgyzstan"; Khalid, *Islam after Communism*; Omelicheva, "Islam in Kazakhstan"; Ro'i and Wainer, "Muslim Identity and Islamic Practice."

36 Nancy J. Davis and Robert V. Robinson, "The Egalitarian Face of Islamic Orthodoxy: Support for Islamic Law and Economic Justice in Seven Muslim-Majority Nations," *American Sociological Review*, 71, no. 2 (2006): 167–190; Azamat Junisbai, "Understanding Economic Justice Attitudes in Two Countries: Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan," *Social Forces* 88, no. 4 (2010): 1677–1702.

37 Collins and Owen, "Islamic Religiosity and Regime Preferences"; Davis and Robinson, "The Egalitarian Face of Islamic Orthodoxy."

38 Omelicheva, "The Ethnic Dimension of Religious Extremism and Terrorism in Central Asia"; Zanca, "Believing in God at Your Own Risk."

Comparatively, officials in Kazakhstan exert much greater control over religious expression than in Kyrgyzstan. It is worth asking if more rigorous efforts to control religious practice in Kazakhstan produced the unexpected surge in religious orthodoxy there. It could be that government control and monitoring of religious activity have dampened certain forms of religious practice, such as weekly mosque attendance and daily prayer, while encouraging alternative forms—or forms that challenge the political status quo. Indeed, if we follow the line of argument by Omelicheva and Zanca, Kazakhstani government policies toward Islam may be exacerbating, rather than curbing, religious orthodoxy—and this may be a societal and individual-level response to government efforts to clamp down on religion. We revisit and expand upon our political interpretation of support for shari'a in the next section.

Weekly Religious Services and Daily Prayer

We now consider what individual-level factors account for the variation we find in religious practice and religious orthodoxy in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyz- stan. To do so, in this and the next sub-section we engage with some of the causal arguments that have been offered about what accounts for the growing salience of Islam in Central Asia. To get at religious practice we first raise the question, What characteristics are associated with greater proclivity toward weekly mosque attendance and daily prayer? To get at orthodoxy we then ask, What distinguishes those who strongly support the implementation of shari'a law?

According to prior studies, the revival in Islamic praxis is associated with and affected by a number of factors. Poverty, minority (non-titular) ethnic status, and government ineffectiveness (or the government's inability to fulfill its social and economic obligations) have all been cited as causes.39 We test these explanations by running two separate logistic regression models in which the outcome of interest is religious practice in the form of (a) attending mosque weekly and (b) praying daily.

Before we report the results of the two regressions, we first briefly describe the variables that we included as potential explanatory factors (see Table 2). To account for poverty, we use household income.40 To account for perceptions of government ineffectiveness, we include two attitudinal measures: whether

39 Heyat, "Re-Islamization in Kyrgyzstan"; McGlinchey, "Islamic Revivalism and State Failure in Kyrgyzstan"; Omelicheva, "The Ethnic Dimension of Religious Extremism and Terror- ism in Central Asia."

40 There are alternative indicators of poverty, some of which ask respondents to include in- formal sources of income. Here, we followed standard practice in sociology and political

or not respondents perceive differences in income in their country to be too great and whether they perceive the current economic system to be fair. Third, to see if there are differences between the titular ethnicity and minority ethnic groups, we include respondents' self-reported ethnicity and categorize these as either minority or titular ethnicity. We also control for demographic factors like sex, age, rural versus urban residence, and educational attainment, given that such characteristics have been found to affect individual behaviors and attitudes more generally.

Table 2 *Explanatory factors/independent variables included in regression models*

Variables	**Definition**
Male	=1 if respondent is male; otherwise = 0
Age	= respondent's full years of age
Rural	=1 if respondent resides in a rural area; otherwise = 0
University	=1 if respondent has a Bachelor's degree or higher
Household income	= respondent's monthly household income, standardized
Opinion about income differences	= degree of agreement with the following statement: "Current differences in income in COUNTRY are too large"
Perceived fairness of economic system	= scale computed as mean value of respondents' degree of agreement with the following statements: (1) In COUNTRY people get rewarded for their intelligence and skill. (2) In COUNTRY people get rewarded for their effort. (3) In COUNTRY people get what they need. (4) In COUNTRY people have equal opportunities to get ahead. Answers ranged from strongly disagree (1) to stronglyagree (5) with a higher score corresponding with the view of society's economic system as legitimate.
Ethnic minority	=1 if respondent belongs to non-titular ethnic group; otherwise = 0
North Kazakhstan (south Kazakhstan = reference)	=1 if respondent resides in Akmola, Kostanai, Pavlodar or North Kazakhstan *oblasts*

science and include household income. In future iterations of our survey, we may include alternative measures.

Variables	Definition
East Kazakhstan	=1 if respondent resides in East Kazakhstan *oblast*
West Kazakhstan	=1 if respondent resides in Aktobe, Atyrau, Mangystau or West Kazakhstan *oblasts*
Central Kazakhstan	=1 if respondent resides in Karaganda *oblast*
Astana	=1, if respondent resides in the city of Astana; otherwise = 0
Almaty	=1, if respondent resides in the city of Almaty; otherwise = 0
North Kyrgyzstan (south Kyrgyzstan = reference)	=1 if respondent resides in Chui, Naryn, Issyk-Kul, or Talas *oblasts*
Bishkek	=1, if respondent resides in the city of Bishkek; otherwise = 0
Osh	=1, if respondent resides in the city of Osh; otherwise = 0

For ease of interpretation, we report only the direction of the relationship—no relationship, positive relationship, or negative relationship—rather than provide numerical output from the regression.41 The number 0 (zero) indicates that there is no statistically significant relationship between the listed variable and the particular form of religious practice. In other words, an individual exhibiting the characteristic in column 1 is no more likely than others to attend weekly religious services or pray daily. The + (plus) sign means that there is a positive relationship between that characteristic and religious practice. The – (minus) sign means that there is a negative or inverse relationship between a particular characteristic and religious practice.

Referring to the results in Tables 3 and 4, we find a number of commonalities between the countries in both years. Men are more likely than women to attend mosque on a weekly basis. Women, on the other hand, are more likely than men to pray daily outside of religious services. Like women, older individuals are more likely to engage in daily prayer. Yet, while older individuals were more likely to attend mosque weekly in 2007, they were no more likely than other age groups to do so in 2012.

We observe other non-differences between groups that are worth drawing attention to. One might hypothesize that those with university education are

41 Please contact the authors for the regression output.

Table 3 *Determinants of weekly religious services by country, 2007 and 2012*

	KAZAKHSTAN		KYRGYZSTAN	
	2007	**2012**	**2007**	**2012**
Demographic characteristics (control variables)				
Male vs female	+	+	+	+
Age	+	0	+	0
Rural vs urban	+	0	−	0
University degree	0	0	0	0
Poverty				
Household income	0	0	0	0
Perceived fairness of economic system				
Income differences in the country are too large	0	0	−	0
Perceived economic system legitimacy	0	+	0	0
Ethnic group differences				
Minority Muslim vs titular ethnicity	+	0	+	0

Table 4 *Determinants of daily prayer by country, 2007 and 2012*

	KAZAKHSTAN		KYRGYZSTAN	
	2007	**2012**	**2007**	**2012**
Demographic characteristics (control variables)				
Male vs female	−	−	−	−
Age	+	+	+	+
Rural vs urban	0	0	0	0
University degree	0	0	0	−
Poverty				
Household income	0	0	0	+
Perceived fairness of economic system				
Income differences in the country are too large	0	0	0	0
Economic system legitimacy	0	+	0	+
Ethnic group differences				
Minority Muslim vs titular ethnicity	0	+	+	+

less likely to engage in religious practice, as additional education is generally associated with greater secularism.42 One might also speculate that those living in rural areas are more likely to pray and attend mosque than city dwellers, given that urbanization is similarly associated with secularism. Alternatively, one might argue that certain populations of urban dwellers are more likely to exhibit religiosity; this could be due to alienation and less social embededness or due to greater access to religious education.43 In the case of both possibilities, the regression results reveal no group differences, either by educational attainment or rural residence. University graduates are no more or less likely than others to attend mosque in either country. Moreover, with the exception of Kyrgyzstan in 2012, those with higher education pray at similar levels as those with less education. Only in Kyrgyzstan during the second wave of surveys do we observe a statistically significant difference between the well educated and other groups, and the effect is in the direction predicted: Those with higher education are less likely to engage in daily prayer.

Turning to rural versus urban residency, the data show that those who live in villages are no more likely than others to pray daily. Again, this finding applies to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in both years. Nor are the two countries' rural residents consistently more likely to regularly visit the mosque. In 2007 villagers were more likely than others to attend weekly religious services in Kazakh- stan, but less likely to do so in Kyrgyzstan. By 2012 these differences were no longer observable. Those living in urban areas were just as likely as their rural counterparts to attend mosque once a week.

Non-differences extend to poverty, as well. Research suggests that poverty is associated with an increase in religious practice, as people and communities in need turn to Islam as a source of stability and survival.44 Our data tell a somewhat different story. Those living in poorer households are no more or less likely than other income groups to attend weekly religious services. This finding holds true in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and in both of the years that the surveys were administered. In Kazakhstan, furthermore, we find that those residing in families with lower incomes are no more likely to pray daily, just as the poor in Kazakhstan are no more likely than those from higher socioeconomic groups to attend mosque weekly. Interestingly, in Kyrgyzstan in 2012

42 Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

43 We would like to thank our peer reviewers for pointing this alternative out to us.

44 Heyat, "Re-Islamization in Kyrgyzstan"; Jessa, "Aq Jol Soul Healers"; McGlinchey, "Islamic Revivalism and State Failure in Kyrgyzstan"; Montgomery, "Namaz, Wishing Trees, and Vodka"; Ro'i and Wainer, "Muslim Identity and Islamic Practice."

those from wealthier families were *more* likely, rather than less likely, to pray daily. Collectively, these findings suggest that there is either no relationship between poverty and religious practice at the individual level or that the relationship is at times inconsistent with predictions drawn from the literature.

We now turn from poverty as a determinant of increased religious practice to perceptions of economic fairness. Some scholars connect the revival and increase in religious practice to government ineffectiveness.45 When the government cannot ensure a basic level of social support and promote conditions for the economy to flourish, poverty spreads and individuals and communities turn to religious institutions and religious practice for support. Our results partially conform to expectations that government ineffectiveness is associated with an increase in religious practice.

As a proxy for government ineffectiveness, we include two variables: opinion about income differences in the country and an index of economic system fair-ness. We recognize that these are imperfect measures, but also argue that they represent a reasonable initial attempt at operationalizing how individuals perceive the degree to which government is carrying out its social and economic responsibilities. Studies linking government performance to religious practice at the individual level suggest that failure to address poverty and, relatedly, inequality indicates government ineffectiveness. In the same spirit, individual perceptions of how (un)equal society is and how (un)fair the economic system is both tap into the degree to which government is seen as effective or ineffective in fulfilling its role in promoting collective well-being.

Based on the regression results, for the most part individual perceptions of the economic system have no bearing on religious practice in either country. Those who feel that their country is characterized by too much income inequality are no more likely to pray than others, and this non-difference is found in Kazakhstan as well as in Kyrgyzstan during both waves of our survey. Those who believe that income differences in the country are too great are similarly no more likely to attend mosque weekly—with the exception of Kyrgyzstan in 2007.

The second variable measuring perceptions of system fairness, however, yields unexpected results. Those who believe that the economic system is fairer were more likely to pray daily in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in the 2012 sample. They were also are more likely to attend weekly religious services in Kazakhstan in 2012. Put otherwise, those who are vested in the current economic system and believe it to be legitimate appear to be more likely to

45 Heyat, "Re-Islamization in Kyrgyzstan"; McGlinchey, "Islamic Revivalism and State Failure in Kyrgyzstan."

engage in religious practice. This finding is in line with McGlinchey, who argues that participation in religious worship may enhance political and social stability, rather than represent challenges to it.46 On the other hand, the fact that those who are more critical of the status quo were less likely to pray and attend mosque in Kazakhstan in 2012 could be troubling for stability there. For example, lower levels of participation in weekly services by those who are dissatisfied with the current economic system may indicate disengagement from publicly acceptable and mainstream religious practice.

Finally, the data reveal that ethnic minorities in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are indeed different from members of the titular ethnicity in terms of religious practice. Non-titular Muslims are more likely to attend weekly services in both countries (in the 2007 data) and consistently more likely to pray daily (with the exception of Kazakhstan in 2007). While the question of religious practice differs from the question of support for orthodoxy, our results lean toward supporting Omelicheva's prediction that minorities in Central Asia are qualitatively different in their expression of religiosity than the dominant ethnic group.47 Yet, it is not clear if this means that minorities are more likely to hold views that might undermine social and political stability, as has been proposed in other studies. We return to the connection between ethnic minorities and religious orthodoxy below.

In these two regression models, we found only a few characteristics to be closely associated with heightened religious practice. These include differences by sex and ethnic group. Other often-cited factors at the individual level, such as poverty and rural residence, have no significant effect, signaling that engagement in religious praxis, as operationalized in our study, is evenly distributed across social groups. There is no defined individual or social profile that makes some more likely to engage in practices associated with greater religiosity or religious revival. At the same time, at least in Kazakhstan, more optimistic assessments of economic system fairness tend to be associated with religious participation. Our findings for Kazakhstan diverge from expectations that the rise in religious practice is driven by perceptions of government ineffectiveness; instead, we find that positive perceptions generate greater participation.

46 McGlinchey, "Islamic Revivalism and State Failure in Kyrgyzstan."

47 Omelicheva, "The Ethnic Dimension of Religious Extremism and Terrorism in Central Asia."

Support for Shari'a

We now turn to the final question animating our study: What characteristics are associated with greater support for Islamic orthodoxy? We raise this question to engage with research that reports a growth in what has been described as "fundamentalist" or "radical" views among Central Asian Muslims and/or greater support for groups espousing these views.48 Perceived importance of shari'a as the basis of law provides one measure of orthodoxy. We follow Davis and Robinson49 by asking respondents to assess the importance of shari'a for good governance. Those who feel that shari'a should be the basis of the country's legal foundation are considered to be more religiously orthodox.

Recall that in the latest wave of surveys 13 percent of respondents in Kazakh- stan and ten percent in Kyrgyzstan considered the implementation of Islamic law to be very important. If we look at the opposite end of the spectrum, to those who consider shari'a to be completely unimportant to good governance, we witness a concomitant decline. In 2007 around 21 percent of Kazakhstani ethnic Muslims and around 17 percent of Kyrgyzstani ethnic Muslims fell in this category. In 2012, however, these figures were 17 percent and 10 percent, respectively. The decline in Kyrgyzstan is especially striking, with a seven- percentage point drop. These trends—more of those who find shari'a to be very important and fewer of those who find to it be not important—align with extant scholarship that describes growth in religious orthodoxy in the region in recent years.

To determine what factors are associated with religious orthodoxy, we run an ordered logistic regression model. The results are summarized in Table 5.50 The variables listed in column 1 include the usual demographic controls (sex, age, and education), plus the factors that prior studies argue are causally important: poverty, perceptions of economic system fairness, and ethnic minority status. We augment this list with geographic or place-specific divisions within each country, hypothesizing that location and context matter in forming individual preferences. For example, we expect rural residents and those living in the South to be more religiously orthodox than others, whereas those living in capital cities should be more likely to subscribe to liberal or secular values. Again, the alternative could also be true—compared with rural

48 Abashin, "The Logic of Islamic Practice"; Omelicheva, "The Ethnic Dimension of Religious Extremism and Terrorism in Central Asia."

49 Davis and Robinson, "The Egalitarian Face of Islamic Orthodoxy."

50 The results presented in Table 5 can be read in the same manner as the output presented in Tables 3 and 4. The level of statistical significance for + and − is at the 0.05 level or higher.

Table 5 *Determinants of support for Shari'a law by country, 2007 and 2012*

	KAZAKHSTAN		KYRGYZSTAN	
	2007	**2012**	**2007**	**2012**
Demographic characteristics (control variables)				
Male vs female	0	0	0	0
Age	0	0	0	0
University degree	0	−	0	0
Poverty				
Household income	0	−	0	0
Perceived economic system fairness				
Income differences in country too large	0	0	+	+
Economic system legitimacy	0	+	0	0
Ethnic group differences				
Minority Muslim vs titular ethnicity	0	0	0	−
Contextual/place-based differences				
Rural v urban	+	0	+	0
North KZ	−	0	na	na
East KZ	−	−	na	na
West KZ	−	0	na	na
Central KZ	−	+	na	na
Astana	0	0	na	na
Almaty City	+	+	na	na
North kg (south = reference category)	na	na	−	−
Bishkek	na	na	0	0
Osh City	na	na	+	0

residents, urbanites could have access to religious education that might encourage greater orthodoxy.

Beginning with non-differences, we find a number of similar trends in the two countries. Individual support for shari'a is evenly distributed across society, irrespective of economic status, age, sex, or educational attainment. This suggests that the appeal of shari'a may be growing not only among more vulnerable populations, but felt broadly among diverse social groups. In other words, the tendency toward orthodoxy is not restricted to people from less

privileged socioeconomic backgrounds. Being part of the middle class, with access to higher education and higher household income, is not necessarily a deterrent against politically tinged views that Central Asian governments find threatening.

Neither are ethnic minorities generally more likely to support orthodoxy than members of the titular nationality. Only in 2007 in Kyrgyzstan do nontitulars hold significantly different views of the importance of shari'a. Crucially, they are less—not more—likely to express support for shari'a. This finding diverges from that of Omelicheva, who argues that ethnic minorities in Central Asia are more likely to support radicalism and radical religious groups.51 Although the question we posed is not identical to that posed by Omelicheva, we argue that both formulations tap into support for orthodoxy, albeit in different ways.

Juxtaposed against the above non-differences are the effects of a number of contextual or place-based factors. In both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan area of residence has a strong effect on individual tendencies to hold more orthodox views. Unsurprisingly, those who live in the South are far more likely to express support for shari'a law than those residing elsewhere. Yet, there are exceptions to this pattern in Kazakhstan. In 2012, there was no significant difference in orthodoxy between southern and western residents or between southern and northern residents. Both the West and the South are considered more conservative than other parts of the country, so the non-difference between them makes intuitive sense. The North and South, however, are usually considered very different, with greater Russian influence and russification in the North. It is therefore surprising that for one of the survey years there was no statistically significant difference in the probability of supporting shari'a in the South as compared to the North.

As is the case with residing in the South, living in the main southern cities, Almaty, Kazakhstan, (in 2007 and 2012) and Osh, Kyrgyzstan (in 2007), had a strong positive effect. Residents in these two cities were more likely than others to believe in the importance of shari'a in the formulation and implementation of laws. Today both cities are considered centers of southern culture and commerce, although Almaty (as the former capital of Kazakhstan and the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic before it) was highly russified during the Soviet period. To account for stronger preferences for orthodoxy in these two cities, we interpret support for shari'a through a political lens. As Davis and Robinson

51 Omelicheva, "The Ethnic Dimension of Religious Extremism and Terrorism in Central Asia."

argue, support for shari'a not only represents a set of religious values, but is also inherently political in nature.52

Building on this logic, we argue that greater support for shari'a in Almaty and Osh coincides with these two cities' status as historically sympathetic to opposition movements, parties, and politicians. Almaty is known as the city where the ruling presidential party consistently receives the lowest electoral support. Osh, similarly, is well known as a bastion of pro-opposition and anti- regime sentiment, and this was true especially during the Akaev presidency. Finally, both cities are known for having more developed civic institutions and greater civic and political activism as compared with other parts of the country.53 We thus interpret stronger support for Islamic law in both cities as an alternative vision of politics that stands in contradistinction to the political status quo.

In contrast to the broadly similar relationships between locale and support for shari'a in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, there is one notable way in which the countries' internal dynamics differ. In Kyrgyzstan, those who feel that income differences are too large are significantly more likely to espouse orthodox views, while in Kazakhstan there is no clear relationship between perceived fairness of the economic system and support for shari'a. The two countries' divergent economic trajectories following the collapse of the Soviet Union, in particular economic decline in Kyrgyzstan and a far smaller role there for government in providing basic social services and social safety net, may account for the dissimilar dynamics at play in each country.54

Conclusion

In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan the overwhelming majority of Muslims self-identity as such—nearly 100 percent among our 2012 sample and up from 80 percent in Kazakhstan in 2007. If we dig a bit deeper, however, we observe cross-national variation in religious beliefs and religious practice. Belief in the afterlife, heaven, and hell are more widespread among ethnic Muslims in Kyrgyzstan than in Kazakhstan, by 15 percentage points or more. Ethnic Muslims in Kyrgyzstan are also more likely to attend mosque weekly and to pray daily

52 Davis and Robinson, "The Egalitarian Face of Islamic Orthodoxy."

53 Kelly McMann, *Economic Autonomy and Democracy: Hybrid Regimes in Russia and Kyrgyzstan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

54 Azamat Junisbai, "The Determinants of Economic System Legitimacy in Kazakhstan," *Europe-Asia Studies,* 66, no. 8 (2014): 1234–52.

outside of religious services. From 2007 to 2012 those who reported attending mosque weekly grew more than two-fold and those who reported praying daily went up by 62 percent. During the same period, Kazakhstan experienced a drop in both forms of religious practice, with just under 13 percent of respondents indicating that they attend mosque weekly and 18 percent reporting that they pray daily. Contrasted against the backdrop of greater engagement in religious practice in Kyrgyzstan is a steep rise in expressions of religious orthodoxy in Kazakhstan. While both societies have experienced a growth among those who express strong support for shari'a, this group more than doubled in Kazakhstan (with a rise of 139 percent, as compared with 45 percent in Kyrgyzstan).

Drawing on two waves of public opinion surveys in the first decade and a half of the 2000s, we tested factors commonly cited as explanations for the increase in religiosity and orthodoxy in Central Asia. Based on our analysis, many of the "usual suspects"55 have either no significant effect or exhibit effects that are inconsistent with, or even contradict, expectations. These include poverty, minority status, and government failure to provide basic social benefits. Instead, we propose two alternative explanations. First, building on the work of Omelicheva and Zanca, we attribute the differences in belief, practice, and orthodoxy to differences in how the regime responds to religious ex- pression. Greater control over and repression of religiosity in Kazakhstan may be re-routing individuals toward more orthodox views there than in Kyrgyz- stan, where there is greater freedom—or at least less hindrance on the part of government—to worship.

Our second explanation similarly looks beyond individual-level factors or factors at the social-group level to institutional effects. By introducing regions into the analysis, we confirm that residing in the South has a strong and positive effect on the probability that someone will hold more orthodox views. We see region as providing a socializing context through a host of institutions, from religious and social to political. Those residing in the South tend to ex- press more orthodox views precisely because the context in which they are socialized promotes these.

At the outset we inferred five statements or hypotheses about Islam in Central Asia from the existing literature. Four of these were explanations for religious revival and descriptions of who is likely to engage in religious practice and why. The last statement, in contrast, explained the connection between religiosity and political preferences or values. Our analysis focused mainly on testing predictions about who is more likely to exhibit behaviors associated

55 Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer—and Turned Its Back on the Middle Class* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

with greater religiosity. Only in our analysis of shari'a do we touch upon the political, arguing that context—regime-level, as well as regional or place-based context—affects individual behavior and preferences.

In a future study we plan to shift focus to investigate the effects of religious praxis and orthodoxy, among other factors, on political preferences and values in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. How, if at all, do religiosity and secularism impact political values? For example, are the religiously orthodox more or less likely to view free expression and fair elections as essential? What effect, if any, does the divergence in the two societies' economic fortunes and religious praxis have on public support for democracy? Our data are uniquely suited to help shed light on these important questions.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by the National Science Foundation (NSF) under Grant 1226437 and by the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research (nceeer) under Grant 828-08g. We would like to extend our gratitude to Aimzhan Iztayeva for expert research assistance and to our anonymous reviewers for thoughtful critique.